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EVALUATION REPORT
THE EPIC LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT MODEL AND PILOT PROGRAMS

New Leaders

Acknowledgments

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- **District of Columbia Public Schools**
- **Friendship Public Charter Schools**
- **Memphis City Schools, Southeast Region**

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Executive Summary

New Leaders created the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) initiative in 2006 to learn from educators driving achievement gains in high-need urban schools. EPIC identifies school leaders and teachers whose students are making significant achievement gains and financially rewards these educators in exchange for sharing and documenting the practices that have contributed to the gains. Since 2006, New Leaders has awarded over $15.5 million to EPIC partner districts and charter schools and led them in a rigorous examination of their practices, culminating in the publication of video cases and practice profiles on the online EPIC Knowledge System.[1]

In 2009, New Leaders introduced the EPIC Leadership Development Model as a way to make these practices more widely available. Leveraging the rich resources of the Knowledge System, which now contains more than 200 case studies of effective practices from award-winning schools, the model offers school leaders within and beyond the EPIC consortium a job-embedded professional learning experience through which they use the examples of others to examine their own beliefs and practices and lead their faculty and staff in meaningful change.

During the 2010–11 school year, New Leaders contracted with Rockman et al, an independent research firm, to evaluate pilots of the EPIC Leadership Development Model in one charter management organization and two urban school districts: Friendship Public Charter Schools in Washington, DC (Friendship), Memphis City Schools (MCS), and District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Each pilot program featured the model's core components—in-person sessions led by highly skilled facilitators who guide participants through a curriculum built on Knowledge System content; action-planning and applied learning assignments that help participants put EPIC tools and strategies to work in their own schools; videotaping of participants' practice; and consulting calls that support learning between sessions. The pilots allowed EPIC to design and test a set of technology-enriched components, including personal practice videos and online forums and consultancies, which gave participants further opportunities to examine, share, and strengthen their leadership practices.

The EPIC Model tailors session content to local needs, defined through an initial needs assessment, ongoing dialogue, and alignment with each partner's human capital management strategies. The Friendship pilot targeted principals and their work with leadership teams and focused on norming definitions of effective practice and strengthening observation and evaluation systems. In MCS, the focus was on building assistant principals' strategies and practices for leading data teams. In DCPS, EPIC worked with assistant principals on building skills to lead a team through a midyear change initiative. Both the MCS and DCPS programs were designed for assistant principals identified by the districts as having potential for principalship.

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1   Funding comes from school partners, a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grant, and private philanthropies.

This report summarizes the findings from the evaluation, which examined the EPIC Model's effectiveness and evolution over three iterations based on emerging local needs, and its impact on leadership practice. Evaluators collaborated with EPIC to design uniform instruments for use across sites, including session feedback forms, self-assessment surveys, and postsession and site-visit interview protocols. As part of the formative study, evaluators gathered feedback from participants on the effectiveness of EPIC's core components and factors that affected implementation.

Key Research Questions

The evaluation team examined the knowledge and skills that participants gained and the programs' impact not only on personal leadership practice and decisions but also on teachers and classroom practice and school and district policies and systems. The research questions guiding the summative study include:

- Does the program help participants meet their personal and professional leadership goals? Do participants find the sessions relevant to both their personal goals and the needs of their schools?

- What effect does the program have on district or CMO goals for bringing consistency to observation and evaluation systems, improving data-team meetings, or leading a team through a change initiative?

- What observable changes in how principals and assistant principals work with their leadership teams and teachers result from the program?

- In what ways do the EPIC Knowledge System, personal practice videos, and other program components help participants examine their personal leadership skills and apply key concepts and strategies with their school leadership teams?

- To what extent does the program influence how principals and principal managers interact and how principals are evaluated and developed?

- How does the program help principals and assistant principals leverage structures already in place, including teacher trackers, evaluation ratings, and performance frameworks?

- What evidence suggests that the program has a positive effect on school efforts to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement?

Summary of Impact Across Pilots

Evaluation findings show that the EPIC Leadership Development Model, piloted in three very different settings, had a positive impact on leadership practice and set in motion changes related to improved teaching and learning. Participants gained new skills, strategies, and resources to strengthen their own leadership practice and the practice of their teams and teachers. In addition to valuable and often immediate opportunities to implement new practices, participants had the benefit of being able to reflect on their experiences with colleagues and program facilitators. This cycle of learning, doing, and reflecting helped participants refine skills and strategies that proved successful. By considering less well-suited strategies, they also learned more about their own skills and styles and those of their leadership teams.

Each implementation of the EPIC Leadership Development Model was tailored to meet local district and CMO requirements and the professional growth needs of participating principals and assistant principals. The evaluation team looked at data from the evaluations of three pilots and could state cross-program findings of the model's impact on:

- Participants' knowledge, skills, leadership decisions, and practices
- Principal managers' evaluation and support of school leaders
- Teachers and classroom practice
- School and district systems and policies

Impact on Participants and Leadership Practice

- Participating principals and assistant principals gained knowledge, skills, strategies, and practical resources to facilitate leadership efforts within their schools.
- The program strengthened how principals and assistant principals use data, how they work with their leadership teams and teachers—including the amount of time they spend with teams—and how they create a shared sense of responsibility.
- Principals and assistant principals gained confidence and improved their skills in analyzing their own behaviors and practices, and in building capacity and willingness in others to do the same.
- The program improved participants' skills in leading team meetings, analyzing data to diagnose student learning needs, and norming protocols to help ensure that school teams and teachers define effective practice in the same way.
- Participants gained insights into complex school issues related to the roles they and team members play in supporting and evaluating teachers and defining effective practice.
- Participants learned approaches for reflecting with colleagues to identify practices and strategies that proved successful and were a good fit for their staffs and their personal leadership styles.

Impact on Principal Managers

- The EPIC program raised principal managers' confidence in the skills of their school leaders.
- The program created a blueprint for providing effective districtwide leadership development, highlighting the need to align program content with both individual leaders' growth needs and system priorities.
- The program provided managers a leadership development model that offers school leaders just-in-time strategies and tools along with longer-term learning and application opportunities.

- The program prompted new ways of thinking about how to group school leaders for professional learning to maximize opportunities for shared reflection and ensure effective application.

- Personal practice videos gave managers examples and tools they could leverage to help stakeholders at various levels benchmark and improve practice.

Impact on Leadership Team Members, Teachers, and Instructional Practice

- The EPIC program was a catalyst for building capacity in and beyond team members, bringing clarity and consistency to the work of leadership teams and strengthening data-driven practice.

- The program improved communication, sharpening the focus on student achievement and deepening discussions in data meetings, postobservation conferences, and midyear evaluations.

- The EPIC program helped participants and their school teams develop a common language about what leads to positive results for students as well as shared responsibility and accountability.

- The application of tools and strategies from the sessions helped leaders, team members, and teachers see the value of engaging in activities that intentionally and directly affect instructional practice and student performance.

Impact on Systems and Processes

- The EPIC program supported districtwide efforts, helping principal managers identify ways to clarify performance management frameworks and rubrics and support their implementation.

- The program introduced assistant principals to data systems and ways to ensure that teachers are focused on districtwide expectations for student achievement.

- Conversations and investigations of practice during and between EPIC sessions revealed the need to norm definitions of effective instructional practice across as well as within schools.

- Participants were able to create environments that empowered teachers to use data to inform and ultimately improve instruction and student achievement, across and within their schools.

- Participants formed new relationships and networks, among themselves and with school and district stakeholders.

Conclusion

As ongoing evaluation continues to inform the evolution of the EPIC Leadership Development Model, research shows that the combination of its use of innovative technology and rich base of leadership knowledge leads to observable and meaningful improvements in participants' leadership practices.

Introduction

Studies of what makes schools successful time and again cite leadership as a key factor: Good schools have strong leaders with a vision of success for all students, a sense of responsibility, skill in using data to analyze students' learning needs—and skill in bringing those around them together to meet those needs. Research also suggests that in urban schools with high rates of children living in poverty, strong leaders are not just *a* key factor; they are *the* key driver in turning schools around and helping all students succeed.[2]

Attracting and preparing strong school leaders for high-need urban schools has been the mission of New Leaders since its founding in 2000, and, over the last decade, the organization has developed a corps of over 700 school leaders committed to driving breakthrough gains in student achievement. Through other initiatives, such as the Urban Excellence Framework, New Leaders has undertaken research to codify the practices of "highly effective principals" and the school structures necessary to drive dramatic gains in student achievement and take them to scale.[3]

In 2006, New Leaders launched the Effective Practice Incentive Community (EPIC) as a way to identify and reward high-need urban schools making significant gains in student achievement, and to make the practices driving those gains more widely available. In exchange for their awards, schools engage in an in-depth investigation of practice that results in a video case or practice profile documenting effective leadership decisions and actions. To date, EPIC has awarded over $15.5 million to district and charter schools around the country and published more than 200 case studies and profiles on the EPIC Knowledge System, an online repository that gives educators within and beyond the EPIC consortium access to this rich knowledge base of effective leadership practices.

The EPIC Leadership Development Model was created to leverage the Knowledge System's research-based content and create a field-based professional learning experience that is embedded in actual practice and allows school leaders to use the examples of others to

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2　See, for example, American Institutes for Research (2010). *A learning point: What experience from the field tells us about school leadership and turnaround.* [A school improvement thought paper]. Retrieved June 23, 2010 from http://www.learningpt.org/pdfs/leadership_turnaround_schools. pdf. See also Fullan, M. (2001). *Leading in a culture of change: Being effective in complex times.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass; Fullan, M. (2006). *Turnaround leadership.* San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

3　New Leaders (2008). *Key insights of the Urban Excellence Framework: Defining an urban principalship to drive dramatic achievement gains.* New York, NY: New Leaders.

examine their own beliefs and practices and lead their faculty and staff in meaningful change. The core components of the EPIC Model include:

- In-person sessions led by highly skilled facilitators who lead participants through a curriculum built on selected Knowledge System content and guide reflection, peer learning, and collaboration

- Action-planning and applied learning assignments that help participants link session work to school efforts to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement

- Consulting calls that extend and support learning between sessions

- Technology-enriched components, including personal practice videos, captured with handheld cameras, through which participants examine, share, and strengthen their leadership practices

This report shares the findings from an external evaluation conducted by the independent research firm Rockman et al. Pilot implementations of the model were studied during the 2010–11 school year, in one charter management organization and two urban school districts—Friendship Public Charter Schools in Washington, DC (Friendship), Memphis City Schools, (MCS), and District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). Each pilot program combined the core components of the EPIC Model with district-specific content, defined through an initial needs assessment and ongoing dialogue with partners. The Friendship program focused on norming definitions of effective practice and bringing more consistency to school observation and evaluation systems. The focus of the MCS pilot program was on the steps and strategies for effectively leading data teams. The DCPS program centered on building skills to improve teaching and learning by leading a team through a midyear change initiative.

As part of EPIC's efforts to align leadership development with partners' human capital management strategies, the needs assessment also defined the participant groups taking part in the sessions: The Friendship program targeted principals and their work with school leadership teams; The MCS and DCPS programs were designed for assistant principals identified by their districts as having potential for moving to the principalship.

The timeframe of the pilot programs allowed the EPIC team to test and evolve its model over three iterations: The concurrent Friendship and MCS pilots included six monthly sessions held from September 2010 through March 2011. The EPIC team modified the model based on feedback from these two programs, allowing the evaluation team to examine the revised model in the DCPS iteration, which began in February 2011 and concluded in May 2011. Over the course of the pilots, EPIC refined a set of technology-enriched components, including personal practice videos and, as part of the DCPS pilot, offered online forums and webinars for sharing videos and other ideas and practices. The DCPS pilot program also included a dedicated text, specific assignments related to a district change initiative, and a co-facilitator.

The variations in sites allowed an external evaluation team to examine the EPIC Model's implementation and its impact on leadership practice within and across contexts. To assist EPIC in further development of the model and future collaboration with district and CMO partners, the team examined how context and content affected the fidelity of implementation and how emerging client needs shaped the model while also confirming the viability and scalability of its core components.

The specific features of each of the three EPIC partnership programs are outlined below:

Friendship Public Charter Schools, Washington DC

Participants: 13 principals, (6 Friendship; 4 DCPS; 3 BCPS) (3 New Leaders)

Content Focus: Observation, Evaluation, and Supervision

Partnership Goals: Building principals' capacity to create an aligned observation and evaluation system and equipping the network with the tools and strategies to norm practices across charter and district schools within different contexts.

Client Sponsor: Michael Cordell, Friendship Chief Academic Officer

Memphis City Schools

Participants: 18 assistant principals (3 New Leaders) identified by the district as high-potential candidates for the principalship

Content Focus: Leading Data Teams

Partnership Goals: Improving assistant principals' readiness for the work of a principal in building and leading effective data teams. The program makes explicit connections between leadership, instructional practice, and student achievement, equipping participants with the tools needed to make informed decisions based on formative student-achievement data.

Client Sponsor: Dr. Terrence Brown, Regional Superintendent, Southeast Region

District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington DC

Participants: 9 assistant principals identified as high-potential candidates for the principalship

Content Focus: Leading Effective Teams

Partnership Goals: Building assistant principals' skills to improve teaching and learning by leading a team through a midyear change initiative focused on one of three projects: Identifying Teacher Support Needs, Increasing Student Engagement in Learning, and Implementing Short-Cycle Assessments.

Client Sponsors: Dr. Nataki Reynolds, Director, DCPS Leadership Development, and Hilary Darilek, Director, Principal Effectiveness

The Pilot Program Evaluation Plan

New Leaders contracted with Rockman et al to lead the external evaluation of the pilot programs. The team used a mixed-methods approach to examine how the EPIC professional learning experiences affected participants' knowledge, skills, and leadership behaviors, and, in turn, how those changes affected teachers, school practices, and organizational structures. The evaluation team was involved in a full range of program activities, attending needs-assessment meetings and in-person and online leadership development sessions, and interviewing participants during and after the programs.

The formative phase of the evaluation documented participants' responses to program components, their application of EPIC tools and strategies, and changes in the EPIC Model to accommodate clients' needs. Summative activities examined the sustained impact of the six- and four-month programs on:

- Participants' knowledge, skills, and leadership decisions and practices
- Principal managers' evaluation and support of school leaders
- Teachers and classroom practice
- School and district systems and policies

Data Sources and Instruments

To ensure consistency and comparability across sites, the evaluation team employed the same plan for all three pilot programs. The uniform instruments and data collection activities, developed in collaboration with the EPIC team, included:

- **Session Attendance.** Evaluators attended a sample of sessions in each of the three pilot sites, talking informally with school leaders and sponsors, reviewing session content, and debriefing with the EPIC team.

- **Session Feedback Forms.** In each site, the EPIC team collaborated with site sponsors and the evaluators to create forms to elicit feedback on individual sessions. In MCS and Friendship, the teams initially added items to existing district feedback forms. To gather more EPIC-specific data, the teams revised forms over the course of the sessions and created a new template, which was used for DCPS.

- **Postsession Telephone Interviews.** Over the course of the six Friendship and MCS sessions, evaluators conducted three rounds of postsession telephone interviews with participants. Two sets of interviews were conducted over the course of the four DCPS sessions, and a third set was conducted following the final session. During interviews, evaluators discussed participants' reactions to session components, and their efforts to put plans and strategies to work in their own schools. In successive interviews, evaluators asked participants about incremental changes in practice related to the EPIC sessions, and evidence of impact on leadership practice, teacher effectiveness, and student outcomes.

- **Self-Assessment Surveys.** Evaluators administered online self-assessment surveys to Friendship (pre- and post-) and to Memphis and DCPS (post- only) participants. Survey items asked participants to rate their level of agreement with

statements about their current observation and evaluation systems (Friendship) or team meetings (Memphis, DCPS), and the impact of the EPIC programs on various aspects of those systems and meetings.

- **Case Studies with Onsite Observations.** In Friendship and Memphis sites, the evaluation team conducted case studies to examine, in more depth, how school leaders applied new strategies in their own schools. Evaluators conducted three half-day site visits to three Friendship sites and two half-day visits to four Memphis sites. During the visits, evaluators interviewed principals or assistant principals taking part in the EPIC sessions, and key personnel involved in school application of session strategies and ideas. During visits, evaluators also viewed pertinent artifacts, such as teacher evaluation rubrics and personal practice videos.

Data Analysis

Analyzing the pilot program data was largely an iterative process. After each round of interviews and site visits, evaluators, in collaboration with the EPIC team, reviewed interview transcripts to look for recurrent themes and emerging changes in how components, including sessions and between-session work, helped participants improve their skills and knowledge and develop solutions to challenges in their leadership practice. For the survey data analysis, evaluators used basic frequencies and descriptives, again looking for trends across respondents or schools and trends across programs.

In examining evidence of impact of the program, evaluators also looked at fidelity to action plans, contextual factors affecting participants' use of EPIC tools and strategies, and indicators that the application of those tools or strategies had helped leaders identify areas of improvement and lay the groundwork for change. Evaluators also reviewed tracking data, including session attendance and survey completion figures, to understand how levels of participation affected application and impact.

Design, Implementation, and Evolution of the EPIC Leadership Development Model

The EPIC Leadership Development Model draws on the EPIC Knowledge System content, which is rooted in actual practice, and the rigorous self-study and action research that go into crafting case studies of successful practices in schools that are driving significant student-achievement gains. The model is also based on a growing body of research on effective leadership practices and leadership development, and on adult learning theory. That research informs the underlying tenets of the EPIC program and planning with district partners, as well as the model's components and execution model. Both are reviewed in this section, which also describes the evolution of the core components—including technology-rich program innovations—and shares formative findings about their effect on practice.

Core Tenets of the EPIC Leadership Development Model

Focus on Student Achievement

The overarching goal of the EPIC Model and the partnerships formed with school districts is to strengthen leadership practices that drive gains in student achievement. Though the content differed from site to site, each pilot program was designed with this sense of priority and urgency in mind.

The National Staff Development Council (NSDC) standards, as well as research studies naming essential characteristics of effective leaders, call for a clear focus on student learning —what NSDC (now known as Learning Forward) leaders Hirsch and Killion call "big goals."[4] Each of the NSDC standards for leadership development begins with the phrase, *"Staff development that improves the learning of all students…"* [5]

Principal managers, principals, and assistant principals in all three pilots agreed that the program provided tools and insights to help them and their teams sharpen their focus on student achievement. In each site, regardless of the content, the session activities and goals reflected the district's focus on leadership practices that would help them achieve "positive outcomes for students." The timeframe of the EPIC pilot programs was too short to fully assess student impact, but ongoing feedback indicated that the programs helped school leaders target and

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4   Fullan, M., Bertani, A. & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for districtwide reform. *Educational Leadership 61(7)*, 42-46. Retrieved November 17, 2009 from http://www.michaelfullan.ca/Articles_04/04_04.pdf; Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2009). When educators learn, students learn: Eight principles of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7): 464-469.

5   In 2002, NSDC released "What Works," a series of reports on assessing effective professional development programs, which found that effective programs are "research-based, have curricular coherence," and exhibit the "features of professional development programs most frequently identified in the literature as being essential to the development of effective school leaders." Killion, J. (2002). *What works in the elementary school results-based staff development*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

strengthen practices that lead to positive results for students, and helped principal managers further systemwide efforts to improve achievement. When asked what differentiated the EPIC Leadership Development Model from other programs, participants described how EPIC shifted their perspective and renewed their commitment to student achievement.

> *When I first started this project…I was just looking at it [like this]: All of these students fail and we can't have that. But the more that I met with our group and our sessions, it started to drive my thinking a little more: We just don't want to increase the numbers because we want our numbers to look good, but we want to reach children; we literally are in the business of educating the children. So what is it that we need to do?   What more can we give? It forced me to say, now that we have given it our all, we have to give it another 100%. [DCPS assistant principal]*

Capacity-Building and Shared Responsibility

While the research often identifies leadership as the single most important factor in creating effective schools, it also acknowledges that leadership rarely resides with a single individual and emphasizes that leadership development should give participants the tools to share leadership and build capacity among faculty and staff, create "internal expertise," and ensure that "whole schools" are "high-functioning" and committed to "student-learning goals."[6] Michael Fullan and colleagues state that effective leadership, and effective leadership development, focuses on collective purpose accompanied by a shared "responsibility for change."[7] "If vision articulates the end," argue DuFour and Berkey, "shared values represent the means that are necessary to move the school toward that target."[8]

Feedback from each site confirmed that participants employed techniques and tools from the EPIC sessions to build capacity in their school teams. On successive feedback forms from all sites, 100% of the participants said they planned to apply the information and skills they learned or resources they received. Postsession self-assessment survey data also pointed to capacity-building. Friendship survey results, for example, showed increases in the numbers of coaches and department chairs engaged in planning each other's observations. Interviews confirmed improvements in instructional and data-team meetings and a sense of common goals and a common language.

> *This norming process has really given us an opportunity to speak one language. I would say there is a big difference between the beginning of the school year and where we are now…because we have normed the process, it is now seamless. We are all speaking the same language. It doesn't feel like they [teachers] hear one thing from a coach and then hear something different from an administrator. [Friendship principal]*

6 New Leaders (2003). *Principal effectiveness*. New York, NY: New Leaders; See also Marzano, R. J. (2003). *What works in schools*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

7 Fullan, M., Bertani, A. & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for districtwide reform. *Educational Leadership 61(7)*, 42-46. Retrieved November 17, 2009 from http://www.michaelfullan.ca/Articles_04/04_04.pdf; see also Berman P. & McLaughlin, M. (1977). *Federal programs supporting educational change. Vol. 8: Implementing and sustaining innovations*. Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation; see also Easton, L. B. (Ed.). (2004). *Powerful designs for professional learning*. Oxford, OH: National Staff Development Council.

8 McGuire, K. (2001). Do you have what it takes to be an effective school leader? Interview with Kevin McGuire. *Curriculum Review, 41(4)*, 14-16; DuFour, R. & Berkey, T. (1995). The principal as staff developer. *Journal of Staff Development, 16(4)*, 2-6. Retrieved from http://www.learningforward.org/news/jsd/dufour164.cfm.

Alignment with and Support of Systems' Human Capital Strategies

The EPIC Model extends capacity building to the broader notion of "human capital management,"[9] viewing leadership development as an investment, a means of equipping current and future principals with the skills and knowledge to be effective leaders and build those competencies in others.

Much of the discourse and research on raising achievement levels in urban schools emphasizes the importance of preparing principals to be "human capital managers" who understand performance management, and of building both individual and organizational capacity to institute and sustain change.[10]

The EPIC program helped participants develop the skills to assume new roles and the insights to rethink and redefine traditional roles. The MCS and DCPS pilot programs focused on equipping assistant principals with a specific skill set, to ensure that those in the pipeline toward becoming principals had the requisite skills. The Friendship program invited principals to analyze their systems for coaching and evaluating teachers to ensure school- and districtwide continuity and alignment.

> *I've learned how to look at data, study the data, and allow data to drive classroom instruction. Before this, I had no idea the strengths and weaknesses of the students. Now I know what to look for, and the next time we have a formative assessment, I'll know which areas to look for, and see if our weaknesses have strengthened, or if some of our strengths have weakened. Now I know how to look at data and adjust accordingly. [MCS assistant principal]*

> *The norming piece has definitely built capacity because we have people on our leadership team who might not always be in classrooms to see what is actually taking place on a consistent basis. I would say it [pilot program] has definitely built the capacity. It has put us on one common page about what it looks like and has helped us communicate effectively to teachers. [Friendship principal]*

Building Scalable Systems

The EPIC Model emphasizes the importance of sustained, scalable professional development—an investment in leadership as opposed to a single session or a packaged program or a one-time certification or credential. The EPIC Model requires a series of sessions so that the programs can establish a skill set among initial cohorts, extend skills through school application, and replicate the leadership development with successive cohorts—creating a critical mass of effective leaders, all focused on learning.

The literature on leadership development confirms the value of cohort learning in facilitating "deep and durable peer-support networks,"[11] and the importance of creating not just a cadre of like-minded leaders but also a cadre committed to continuous learning and an ongoing focus on student learning. This sustained effort is implicit in the NSDC context and process standards, and in their purpose statement, which reads: "Every educator engages in effective

9 New Leaders (2003). *Principal effectiveness*. New York, NY: New Leaders.

10 See, e.g., Wurtzel, J. & Curtis, R. (2008). *Human capital framework for K–12 urban education: Organizing for success.* Washington, DC: The Aspen Institute. Retrieved from http://www.aspeninstitute.org/sites/default/files/content/docs/education%20and%20society%20program/Framework-Combined_071708.pdf. For additional research see publications and newsletters from the Consortium for Policy Research in Education, including *Strategic management of human capital in public education*, available at http://www.cpre.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=118.

11 LaPointe, M. & Davis, S. (2006). Effective schools require effective principals. *Leadership, 36(1)*, 16-19, 34, 36-38. Retrieved from http://www.acsa.org/publications/pub_leadership.cfm.

professional learning every day so every student achieves."[12] Recent studies defining effective leadership practice also examine the exercise of leadership in relation to learning.[13]

By stressing the importance of consistency in defining and delivering effective instruction, and explicitly involving school teams in assignments, the EPIC program helped participants create a sense of accountability that is both shared and sustained. Feedback from participants in all three sites suggested that, as a result of the sessions, they were redefining and broadening how they engaged faculty and staff in data conversations, goal-setting conferences, and observations. As one Friendship principal observed, rather than "taking on this role by myself," participants learned strategies for making a steady focus on student achievement a schoolwide, year-long effort.

> *I have grown in the process of extending this opportunity outside of myself. There are definitely pieces I will take and utilize for next school year, even at the end of this school year because we have had those opportunities to reflect and look at what that conversation looks like on a video clip in regards to our midyear evaluations. There are definitely pieces that will take place at the end-of-the-year evaluations and will be more consistent next school year, from the beginning to the end. [Friendship principal]*

The EPIC program helped assistant principals build the skills, trust, and culture needed to make data both a driver of instruction and key a part of educators' growth. Under the guidance of EPIC program participants, DCPS data-team members began routinely using data to inform instruction, while MCS participants also reported a new, sustained, and pervasive focus on data, with an understanding that, "no matter what we do or how we do it, data is going to be involved."

> *As our principal has kept going forward with this and the data team starts talking about it, now their first question is "do you have any data for us to look at so we can know what to do?" It's not like: "Oh Lord, here comes the data." It's like "Okay, I need my data now so I can properly plan my classes." So the whole conversation has changed, because again, now, our teachers are saying "I need these data in order to be successful." [MCS assistant principal]*

Deep Understanding and Transformational Learning

The EPIC Model also aligns closely with the emphasis, in the research and NSDC standards, on professional learning that promotes "deep understanding" of a topic. "Such deeper understanding typically requires a number of opportunities to interact with the idea or procedure through active learning processes that promote reflection such as discussion and dialogue, writing, demonstrations, practice with feedback, and group problem-solving."[14] Fullan et al say that though conflict is inevitable when difficult change is attempted, the opportunity to explore differences can also be productive. In discussing the value of looking at personal beliefs, Hirsch and Killion say, "For deep change to occur and for transformational learning, the system must have open communication that allows all members to draw attention to inconsistencies in espoused beliefs and beliefs-in-actions."[15]

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12 For a list of NSDC standards, purpose, and strategic plan, see http://www.learningforward.org/about/index.cfm.

13 Portin, B., Allejano, C., Knap, M., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington, Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. This is the third in a series entitled Improving Leadership for Learning, sponsored by the Wallace Foundation.

14 Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2009). When educators learn, students learn: Eight principles of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7): 464-469.

15 Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2009). When educators learn, students learn: Eight principles of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 90(7): 464-469.

The EPIC program led to revisions in participants' routine leadership practices and impacted schoolwide processes and approaches. Feedback from DCPS and MCS participants indicated that data-team members were able to move beyond a culture of fear of assessment data being used for punitive purposes. Under the guidance of the EPIC Leadership Development Program, participants began to move toward strategies to effectively integrate data into iterative planning and review processes to ensure that students' needs are consistently met.

One of Friendship's goals is to "close the loop" between observations, coaching, and evaluations and include administrators and instructional coaches in all of these processes. For some coaches and principals, that would be a major departure from practice. They strongly believe that only administrators should evaluate teachers, that coaches have a special, supportive relationship with teachers—and that putting them in a position to evaluate teachers could fundamentally change that relationship. The EPIC sessions brought these disagreements to the surface and engaged participants in critical discussions about renegotiating roles.

> *I think it brings consistency into the process, even though we know we are still on different pages as we saw in the workshop. I think that how we are looking at teaching and how we are looking at how we support our teachers—we are really developing that, and it is coming together. We are not totally on the same page yet, but I think that we are closer to being on the same page than we were last year. [Friendship principal]*

Alignment with Adult Learning Theory

EPIC's work in identifying and documenting effective leadership practice has been informed by a litany of seminal adult learning theories. EPIC has also designed its Leadership Development Model according to key precepts of adult learning theories that tightly align with EPIC content and resources. Fundamentally, the EPIC Model is based on the premise that adult learners require opportunities to learn skills through:

- Observing a model of effective application[16]
- Practicing application[17]
- Receiving feedback from an expert[18]
- Presenting their own learning to experts and peers
- Guided application in a relevant environment

The EPIC Model provides participants with opportunities to observe models of leadership practices at different levels of mastery through:

- EPIC Knowledge System videos, which are carefully selected for proven leadership practices
- Peers' application of session learning captured in personal practice videos

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16 Tharp, R. & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

17 Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Tharp, R. & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

18 Lave, J. & Wenger, E. (1991). *Situated learning: legitimate peripheral participation.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press; Rogoff, B. (1990). *Apprenticeship in thinking: Cognitive development in social context.* New York, NY: Oxford University Press; Tharp, R. & Gallimore, R. (1988). *Rousing minds to life: Teaching, learning, and schooling in social context*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Participants practice the skills they have observed through:

- Detailed role-plays simulating relevant on-the-job situations
- Action-planning workshops

Both role-plays and workshops are led by expert facilitators who supply meaningful feedback. In addition, EPIC uses these activities to focus on the practical application of leadership skills, addressing everyday problems that participants face and the ways in which the skills they are learning can offer relevant solutions.

The EPIC Model is designed according to the belief that adult learners deepen their understanding by reflecting on their practice and providing feedback to peers. In particular, the EPIC Model fosters meaningful reflection on application through a range of collaborative session activities, including:

- Job-embedded assignments linked to student achievement
- Public display of personal practice videos and constructive peer feedback guided by evaluation rubrics
- Structured peer discussion in both small and large groups

The EPIC Model provides customized tools that guide participants' application of observed skills in their schools, including:

- Content-specific tools to assist in leadership domains from student data analysis to observations and evaluations
- Goal-setting and action-planning tools
- Tools for guiding teams through critical reflection and for building their capacity

The EPIC Program Execution Model

In order for EPIC leadership development programs to meet their objectives of impacting the practice of school leaders and the effectiveness of their teachers, the programs must be designed, developed, and delivered with fidelity to the theory of action and with rigorous execution of all program components. To that end, New Leaders and EPIC have created a program execution model that guides all stakeholders in their work. The execution model provides processes and tools for program management, communication, and decision-making. It also requires explicit agreements from all stakeholders on their responsibilities and commitments.

The core components of the execution model are organized into four "pillars":

- Client-centric planning
- Program design and delivery
- Program management, operations, and client support
- Program evaluation

Execution Model Pillar #1: Client-Centric Planning

Needs, Capacity, and Context Assessment

EPIC guides partners in designing a leadership development program that is rigorous, focused, and measurable, using data from multiple sources to inform the program design and identify goals that map to individual participants' needs and to the district's performance management system and human capital strategies. Both EPIC and district stakeholders have explicit roles in the partnership, clear approaches to management and decision-making, and mutual understanding of the value of the work. Key steps in this part of the process include:

- Establishing program objectives and outcomes based on system human capital strategies and participant leadership development needs

- Identifying cohorts of participants through review of pertinent data and reaching agreement with each participant on commitments and responsibilities

- Conducting an inventory of partners' capacity and commitments in key program domains

The literature endorses a close consideration of local context and the structures and tools in place in designing professional development content, and even cautions against pat application of professional learning strategies that simply may not apply. As Hirsch and Killion stress in their review of the application of professional development, "context matters" when school leaders transfer professional learning to their own schools. In his discussion of lessons about districtwide reform, Fullan says that effective leaders need "the right bus—the structures, roles, and role relationships that represent the best arrangement for improving all schools in the district."[19]

Formative feedback emphasized the critical importance of giving principals a voice in designing leadership development and aligning programs to participants' needs. Participants at all three sites agreed on the importance of their overall content focus but also suggested more closely aligning individual sessions with principals' needs. Feedback showed that the sessions participants considered most relevant, effective, and applicable were those that provided "just in time" tools and were linked to principals' "life cycle calendar."

> *I think that if the principals had more input into how that was going to look year-long, then it would have been helpful. You have to remember that some principals are a lot more receptive to changes. Some principals are very organized, "I know what I'm doing, this is my focus, this is where I need to be." With the massive number of outcomes that we have here in Friendship, anything that's added onto the hundred things we have to do, it becomes overwhelming. If the principals did have a say so, and it doesn't have to be all because all don't need to be at the table. You can have one or two leaders that meet with the principals and then come back and represent the principals in this focus, creating the focus for the year—that it would be received better by everyone. [Friendship principal]*

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19 Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2009). When educators learn, students learn: Eight principles of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90(7)*: 464-469; Fullan, M., Bertani, A. & Quinn, J. (2004). New lessons for districtwide reform. *Educational Leadership 61(7)*, 42-46. Retrieved November 17, 2009 from http://www.michaelfullan.ca/Articles_04/04_04.pdf; See also Hord, S. M. (1994). *Staff development and change process: Cut from the same cloth, Volume 4, Number 2.* Retrieved November 20, 2009 from http://www.sedl.org/pubs/catalog/items/cha06.html.

Execution Model Pillar #2: Program Design and Delivery

Content Alignment and Development

EPIC collaborates with the program sponsors to determine leadership development needs of the partners. Through a system of content reviews, EPIC develops and delivers content that meets participant and system needs. EPIC and appropriate partner stakeholders work in close consultation to:

- Ensure tight alignment between session content and partner program objectives
- Develop all session agendas, plans, tools, application assignments, handouts, and other resources, which all get published to a dedicated program website
- Create messaging for participants
- Debrief every session's content, delivery, and participants survey results
- Make changes to session content and delivery based on survey results and debriefs

Interactive Sessions Led by EPIC Facilitators

EPIC develops and leads in-person sessions that provide participants with whole-group, small-group, and peer-to-peer learning opportunities to examine and reflect on their own leadership practices and approaches. Session plans account for every minute of the 3- to 4-hour sessions. Critical inquiry and reflection is embedded throughout the EPIC Model. As members of a learning community, participants are encouraged to examine what is and isn't working in their schools and their own practice, always with an eye to the pivotal role leadership does or could play, beliefs and attitudes that may impede or support success, and ways to learn from practice. Adult learning theory also stresses the importance of giving adults opportunities to develop habits of critical inquiry and reflection, and the most recent research on and prescriptions for effective leadership development stress the value of inculcating "habits of reflection and critical analysis."[20]

Participants expressed satisfaction with the facilitation of the EPIC sessions, especially when facilitators provided more personal feedback. Specifically, some assistant principals attributed their ability to feel comfortable with the session material to the facilitators' support and personal attention. Two assistant principals also felt that the facilitation modeled effective team leadership strategies, and assistant principals used the session facilitation as a model for their own practice. Principals liked the personal connections made when facilitators join small-group discussions or ask for candid input, and the just-in-time learning provided by facilitators with "specific answers to pressing questions." Participants also valued facilitators' willingness to shift the parameters of the project and adapt the program to meet their needs.

> It's not just talking to us and giving us strategies or best practice, but whenever there's time to reflect, there's somebody from the EPIC staff that comes over and pushes our thinking, so its not just our whole group, but when it's time to have those personal conversations they're coming over to push us on what we just said and why we said it and what that means when we go back to our schools…they really push me to be reflective about my practice. [Friendship principal]

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20 Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *School leadership study: Developing successful principals* (Review of Research). Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

EPIC Videos and Case Studies

Facilitators use videos, school artifacts, and case studies from the EPIC Knowledge System to model the crafting of reflection questions and stimulate inquiry-based learning techniques. This modeling and training directly informs and supports participants' application of practices and strategies with their leadership teams and teachers. The EPIC sessions provide active involvement and the intellectual challenge that comes from inquiry and dialogue and the in-depth, iterative comparison of personal leadership beliefs and approaches with those portrayed in the Knowledge System cases.

The Knowledge System allows for flexible, self-directed learning. Specialized functionality on the EPIC Knowledge System allows participants and facilitators to view and comment on individual participants' personal practice videos. Each pilot program has a password-protected website that contains all program materials, selected EPIC resources, and participant videos. These online tools and resources offer multiple opportunities for peer learning, inquiry, and reflection, which extend and deepen the learning from the facilitated face-to-face sessions.

Participants, across sites, valued the rich program resources and the opportunity to collaborate in using them. Overall, participants felt that "the opportunity to collaborate" with colleagues and to reflect on each other's practice was the most valuable part of the program: In addition to valuable and often immediate opportunities to try out new skills, strategies, and resources, participants had the benefit of being able to reflect on their experiences and talk to fellow participants and program facilitators. These opportunities for reflection and discussion helped to reinforce skills and strategies that proved successful and move beyond those that were not a good fit for individual participants' staff or personal leadership styles. Participants felt that the "the wealth of knowledge that is shared and given during our meetings and conversations and webinar makes it worthwhile."

The EPIC Knowledge System provided school leaders with research-based content and resources that help them translate models of practice to their personal leadership approach.

I like that each session we can come away with resources, whether it be a document or whether it be a video that we watched during that session, that we can immediately use in our schools the next day. I like that some of the things that we are asked to do in the schools, we have actually gone through it ourselves, so that in going through the epiphanies or the mental process of how we digested something and come to terms with something, we can automatically predict how our teachers will do whenever we lead that same PD. [MCS assistant principal]

It gave me the tools that I need to actually take teachers through the standard-level and item-level analysis. To give them something to really work on so that they can kind of drill down to see what their next steps would be in the teaching and learning process. So prior to that, it was a discussion type thing but we didn't have specific things in place that we'd utilize to get teachers to drill down to that item-level analysis. [MCS assistant principal]

EPIC Knowledge System videos gave school leaders an opportunity to benchmark their leadership practices and approaches against those of principals leading high-performing schools.

That's the best part of all the training…It gives us a vision for everything we were talking about by showing us what the expectation for the vision is and showing our teachers where we need to be. So that is, I think, the strength of the entire training. [Friendship principal]

Talking to students, collecting observations and data, like a clinical approach that was modeled in the video. I've added to my more clinical process based on that. The very human factors of having that post conversation in the teacher's classroom, I've adopted the conversation in the [last EPIC] session around the comfort level of the teacher, how that's so important in getting them to do what they need to do. [Friendship principal]

The EPIC Knowledge System became a personal and school resource for planning. Several principals who added the Knowledge System to their personal toolkit and consulted it frequently on their own—often with suggestions from the EPIC facilitator— saw ways to use the videos "more strategically" as their instructional leadership teams grow.

I have gone through a lot more of the videos there than we have seen as a class. I go to it all the time and refer to it, as we are looking at some of the professional development. I would just encourage the continued building of it. [To include more high school cases.] I just met this morning with one of my instructional leads about using some of the EPIC resources for our next teacher PD. The EPIC website has been very useful for us. [Friendship principal]

We have had two other PDs this year where we have accessed resources from the EPIC website. We used it in our leadership meeting to watch videos. I think as our team grows next year and we have more people who are doing things like the midyears and we have coaches, we can plan for that more strategically than we did this year. I also feel like that might be how the sessions could help us. We could actually plan out our next leadership team PD. Not a meeting where we are identifying our responsibilities, but our next leadership PD using our new rigor form. What can I use from the EPIC website to make that real for the instructional team members? How can I make sure that we are all aligned in our ratings? That would be a nice time to focus on that because we have just learned it. [Friendship principal]

Action-Planning and Applied Learning Assignments

To support efforts to apply learning and engage leadership teams and teachers in inquiry, EPIC participants create individual action plans to apply new practices and personal leadership approaches. In between sessions, participants implement their action plans in their schools and videotape selected practices to share with their peers and the facilitator. The research is clear that leadership development should not only align with school needs and goals but also help school leaders clarify takeaways and potential applications. Fullan observes that administrators often apply lessons from professional development but that sometimes the "wrong thing is being replicated." The challenge may lie less in the takeaways from the professional development than in the identification of the need they are presumed to address.

EPIC collaborates with program sponsors to define appropriate applied learning assignments that are:

- Aligned with participants' leadership development needs and program content focus
- Tightly linked to student achievement
- Integrated with participants' ongoing work and are job-embedded
- Respectful of participants' time

- Results-oriented
- Producing evidence of participants' practice (videos and artifacts) that can be reviewed and critiqued by peers and facilitators

EPIC action-planning and applied learning assignments provided school leaders with opportunities for personal and team reflection that promote continuous inquiry and improvement.

With myself and the leadership team, we thought we were being clear with the teacher about the growth areas with what we were articulating and what we saw, but we weren't being clear and the videos showed us that…One of the biggest aha moments was we thought we were being clear about something but we found we were not being explicit about what we saw. We were not being clear about what needed to change when that teacher went back to their classroom." [Friendship principal]

Definitely, I see the value in the video…it helps me too when I look back at them to feel like I handled a situation well or also helped me to remember that if I did not really give a sufficient answer or maybe I did not have a resource at my disposal where I can follow up on that based on what I see in the video…I would very honestly admit that I believe that I would meet maybe even less frequently if I was not required to tape my meetings and if I did not want to have a good group of recordings if someone ever asked me for them. [MCS assistant principal]

Personal Practice Videos

As part of the EPIC program, participants videotape their leadership practices, with cameras and technology support provided by EPIC. Often the videotaping is part of a session assignment—e.g., a taping of a data or leadership team meeting—designed to engage participants in reflection on their own practice. Participants examine the video with school peers and with colleagues also taking part in the leadership development program.

A great deal of participants' growth stemmed from gathering and reflecting on videos of personal practice. Many participants independently came to the realization that they were monopolizing and steering the conversations in early data-team meetings. They were subsequently able to make conscientious efforts to facilitate more input and involvement from other data-team members in subsequent team meetings. Eighty-one % of postprogram survey respondents (13 out of 16) said that the EPIC program had had a "large" impact on their ability to guide teachers to prepare for meetings and accomplish the work between meetings that would ensure meeting success. Seventy-five % (12 out of 16) said the personal practice videos had a large impact on their reflection on leadership practices and helped identify steps to improve leadership practices.

It allows you to sit back and reflect, and be your own critic. You can do it when there isn't a distraction, in your own quiet time, in the confines of your own home and really think about the observations of what it is you're seeing…I think too in your leadership teams it really pushes you to be more reflective and questioning of practice. [Friendship principal]

Personal practice video assignments prompted self-reflection and valuable conversations among school team members and among peers attending sessions. There was uniform agreement among principals that the personal practice video assignments were an important part of the EPIC program, useful during and in-between sessions. Videos "allowed principals and

leadership team members to be their own critics," seeing habits, dispositions, and areas for growth that they might otherwise not have realized. In addition to "eye-opening" reviews of video in their schools, principals also saw value in sharing video during program sessions, which allowed peers to share constructive criticism. Principals indicated that the video assignments, like other session topics and assignments, were most valuable when they aligned with what principals were already doing.

The personal practice and EPIC Knowledge System videos worked in tandem to show principals a continuum of practice. Principals said they gained both practical tips and real insights from both the Knowledge System and personal practice videos. They liked having a forum and reference point from which to talk about aligning observation and evaluation practices, and looking "at our models" vis-à-vis "expert models." Some principals found their own or peers' videos "more authentic" than those in the Knowledge System. One program sponsor, who has used both kinds of videos, saw the two resources working in tandem to show "a continuum of practice": The Knowledge System shows a target for practice, but the personal videos portray "the nuances," "the works in progress," and by contrast help principals see "what is going wrong" and what is working well.

Participants leveraged personal practice videos to establish a common definition and understanding of effective instruction.

I've built a library since I received my camera and every time I go to observe, I take my camera with me. So my teachers have the opportunity to observe their practice so it's not just me saying what I observed, but rather we look at it together and pinpoint what we can do to really move student achievement, so the Flip has been great for us. [Friendship principal]

Over the time that we've been working with the EPIC program, I've had the opportunity to really see observational feedback delivered in different settings, especially through the [personal practice] videos. I've had the opportunity to work with colleagues in order to kind of get feedback on how they conduct observations and how diligent they are about that, as well as how candid they are about the feedback they give and most importantly, the relevance to our instructional goals. This has really influenced the way we approach giving observational feedback. [Friendship principal]

You really take a look at yourself. You really get to see yourself in action. It's like the man in the mirror. I can do that better, or perhaps my delivery, or I simply need to do that better. You can look at your strengths and weaknesses of how you present things and how you conduct a meeting. You can really learn from that. It's a really good thing…I see more value in it because it gives you the opportunity to play back what you are doing well and what you are not doing so well. [MCS assistant principal]

Video Sharing and Feedback

Video sharing was incorporated into the EPIC Model after evaluations of early iterations of the model identified small-group sharing of personal practice videos as a powerful source of reflection on personal leadership and examination of practice. In addition to recording and posting videos of their personal practice, participants also view peer videos and provide performance assessments on a program website dedicated to video sharing and feedback.

By requiring participants to publicly display recorded examples of their leadership, and post comments on each others' practices, the EPIC Model ensures:

- Participant accountability
- Facilitator and sponsor awareness of participant progress
- Supportive peer consultancy
- Participant exposure to their own leadership "blind spots" and challenge areas

Online Peer Consultancy

In order to offer a forum for peer consultancy on participants' personal practice videos, the EPIC Model includes a 90-minute, facilitator-led webinar for public sharing and critique of personal practice videos. In these highly structured online meetings, a crafted rubric enables facilitators and peers to provide guiding questions that lead to mastery of leadership skills. Throughout the program, participants meet online to present and review their personal practice videos with peers and the facilitator. The need for webinars in the EPIC learning cycle emerged when external evaluations of early iterations of the EPIC Model determined that extending whole-group opportunities to offer feedback on personal practice videos would increase participant learning through video sharing. Research suggests that although adults value self-directedness in learning opportunities, they also place high value on communication and collaborative learning environments where they can articulate, reflect on, and share experiences.[21]

Feedback from the DCPS program indicated that participants valued the rich program resources and the opportunity to collaborate in using them.

Targeted Consulting Calls

 In order to ensure participants' understanding of session content, and support their successful application of session strategies in their schools, EPIC facilitators consult with participants in 30-minute one-on-one phone calls. Occurring between each whole-group touch point, consultations help participants assess their progress through:

- Detailed reviews of strengths and weaknesses
- In-depth analyses of "roadblocks" in leadership practice
- Determinations of next steps in leadership skills development

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21 Billington, D. D. (1996). *Seven characteristics of highly effective adult learning programs*. Seattle, WA: New Horizons for Learning.

Targeted consulting calls were incorporated into the EPIC Model after early external evaluations yielded consistent participant feedback recommending more facilitator touch points to help guide their implementation of learned strategies and tools.

The EPIC Leadership Development Program Participant Experience
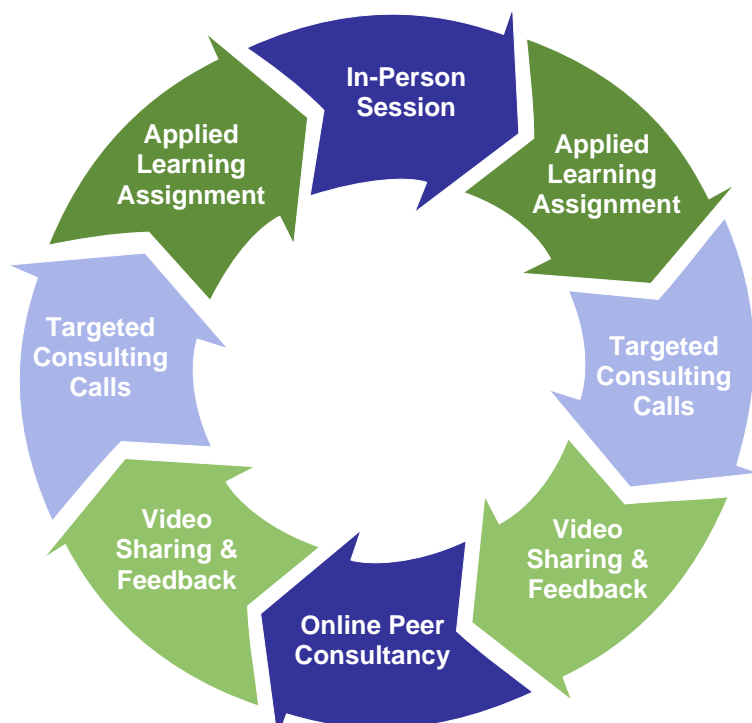
The EPIC Leadership Development Model comprises five core stages of participation that work as a cycle to progressively build participant learning:

- In-person sessions
- Applied learning assignments
- Targeted consulting calls
- Video sharing and feedback
- Online peer consulting

Refined through multiple iterations and a series of rigorous external evaluations, research has shown that the EPIC Model's repeating cycle of participant engagement leads to expansion of leadership roles and an accelerated mastery of leadership skills.

Execution Model Pillar #3:
Program Management, Operations, and Client Support

In providing Leadership Development programs that align to sponsors' human capital management strategies and performance management systems, EPIC sets clear responsibilities for all stakeholders and specific criteria for delivery.

At the inception of each Leadership Development program, the EPIC team collaborates with its partners to complete a detailed statement of the program's specifications, including all roles and responsibilities. The following program components and all related roles are described and made clear:

- Program objectives and outcomes
- Accountability
- Program management
- Participant selection
- Content alignment and development
- Applied learning assignments
- Learning sessions
- Technology
- Evaluation
- Program timeline, schedule, and logistics

Based on the program goals, EPIC designs an operational plan and puts measures in place in order to meet the goals and expectations of the program. Specifically, EPIC creates trackers based on program expectations, crafts plans for all sessions and follow-up activities, and assigns the staff needed to ensure program success.

Throughout each Leadership Development program, EPIC has actively engaged its clients in communication concerning progress, emerging learnings and concerns, and any recommended adjustments for implementing planned program activities. Where concerns about participants' progress did arise, sponsors described the EPIC team as "flexible" and responsive in meeting these emerging needs. In addition, sponsors attributed the success of the programs to the EPIC team's ongoing program management, noting that it was "very beneficial in making sure that everybody was on the same page and moving in the same direction."

Accountability

EPIC uses a set of tools, from a formal partnership agreement to implementation data trackers, to hold the EPIC team, the partners, and the program participants accountable on a wide range of metrics, including attendance, action-planning, application assignments, and evaluation activities. Key steps in building in and achieving accountability by all stakeholders includes:

- Establishing success metrics for the program and stakeholder responsibilities and commitments required to meet program goals
- Ratifying EPIC and partner "Responsibilities Agreement," including specific tasks each stakeholder group is accountable for
- Creating a master schedule of planning meetings, document reviews, and session debriefs and gaining agreement on protocols and tools to support these workstreams and meetings
- Creating tracking tools and plans for reviewing and responding to gaps in procedures for defining deliverables and fulfilling program requirements.

Writing specifically about evaluation but inferring that leadership development programs should include mechanisms for urging attendance and fidelity to goals, Hirsch observes that, "What gets measured gets done."[22]

Execution Model Pillar #4: Program Evaluation

EPIC promotes continuous use of implementation and impact data and progress reports based on qualitative and quantitative measures to inform critical insights on program effectiveness. In turn, these findings inform the program design and further implementation. The EPIC Model includes two levels of study:

- *Effectiveness study*. Effectiveness studies are designed to provide information on participants' level of engagement in and reactions to the program, and changes in their attitudes, beliefs, and knowledge.

- *Impact study*. Impact studies, the highest level of proof of a program's success, are designed to provide information on what knowledge and skills participants gain; how these affect their leadership beliefs, behaviors, and decisions; and how changes in leadership affect school culture and organizational structures.

The evaluations conducted for the pilot programs—and described in this report—generally follow the model proposed by Guskey, one that includes studies of both effectiveness and impact: how participants react to the training and the new knowledge or skills they gain; whether they acquire "the intended knowledge and skills;" what contextual factors affect application of skills and what level of organizational support is needed; how effectively participants apply the new knowledge and skills; and, finally, what impact their efforts have on students.[23]

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22 Guskey, T. R. (2000). *Evaluating professional development*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Cited in A conversation with Thomas R. Guskey. (Winter 2005-2006). *The Evaluation Exchange, XI(4)*, 12-14. Retrieved from http://www.hfrp.org/var/hfrp/storage/original/application/1ef9f773781dd 0b1e2d237f6c8af939e.pdf. Data collected in May and June, 2010 by The New Teacher Project.

23 Hirsch, S. & Killion, J. (2009). When educators learn, students learn: Eight principles of professional learning. *Phi Delta Kappan, 90(7)*: 464-469.

Individual Pilot Program Evaluation Reports

The evaluation plans for the EPIC pilot programs were designed to measure the growth over time of participants' leadership capacity and the effectiveness of each component of the EPIC Model in contributing to participants' leadership growth. In addition, pilot evaluators sought to identify the impacts that each EPIC program had on teachers' classroom practice, on schoolwide systems, and on district stakeholders. The research questions guiding each pilot research study include:

- Does the program help participants meet their personal and professional leadership goals? Do participants find the sessions relevant to both their personal goals and the needs of their schools?

- What effect does the program have on specific program goals of bringing consistency to observation and evaluation systems or improving data-team meetings?

- What observable changes in how principals work with their leadership teams and teachers result from the program?

- In what ways do the EPIC Knowledge System, personal practice videos, and other program components help participants examine their personal leadership skills and apply key concepts and strategies with their school leadership teams?

- To what extent does the program influence how principals and principal managers interact and how principals are evaluated and developed?

- How does the program help principals leverage the networkwide structures already in place, including teacher trackers, evaluation ratings, and performance frameworks?

- What evidence suggests that the program has a positive effect on school efforts to improve teacher effectiveness and student achievement?

The Friendship Charter Management Organization Pilot

Program Overview

The Friendship Public Charter School network's pilot of the EPIC Model was designed to help principals create more consistency and continuity in their observation and evaluation systems. According to Friendship's chief academic officer, two "data points" led to the partnership with New Leaders and the choice of this particular topic. First were inconsistencies and fluctuations in grading and test scores, which suggested that principals, coaches, and teachers within and across schools might be defining effective instruction—and thus evaluating classroom practice—in different ways. Independently gathered survey data also suggested that teachers felt a lack of clarity and transparency in how they were evaluated and how district and building-level administrators defined effective practice.[24] In addition to helping principals strengthen their own systems and align them with Friendship-wide goals and rubrics, the EPIC program supported other ongoing efforts to establish norms across the network, including the Performance Management Framework, a teacher evaluation and scoring mechanism introduced to network leaders and teachers during the 2009–10 school year.

The pilot included six face-to-face sessions, held from September 2010 through March 2011, in conjunction with principals' monthly meetings, and between-session assignments. Thirteen principals took part—seven from schools operated by the Friendship Charter Organization, and six from District of Columbia Public Schools and the Baltimore City Schools managed by the Friendship organization. Taking the policies and parameters of three different school districts into account when designing and engaging participants in session content presented challenges but also opportunities for stimulating discussions. The fact that the makeup of leadership teams charged with conducting observations and evaluations varied from school to school added more depth and dimension to the conversations.

Evaluation Activities and Data Sources

Evaluators attended four of the six in-person sessions, talking informally with principals, and, using structured interview protocols, conducted a total of 28 postsession interviews after Sessions 2, 4, and 6, either by phone or during visits to the three case-study sites. Visits also included a series of interviews with a total of nine instructional team members (assistant principals, instructional coaches, and teacher/peer coaches) and ten teachers from the three case-study sites; the same groups shared feedback during each visit. Ten participating principals (77%) completed the preself-assessment survey; nine participating principals (69%) completed the postsurvey. Feedback forms were introduced at Session 3, and collected for that and the following session, for a total of 17 responses; because Sessions 5 and 6 included both EPIC and Friendship activities, principals did not complete the EPIC forms.

Overview of Impact

Data from various sources indicate that the EPIC Leadership Development Pilot Program had a positive impact on Friendship principals' efforts to strengthen their observation, coaching, and feedback systems. Feedback forms (from the third and fourth sessions only) showed

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24 Data collected in May and June, 2010 by The New Teacher Project.

that an average of 85% of the participating principals agreed that the sessions—on norming expectations for observations—were relevant, and 100% said they planned to use the ideas, strategies, or resources provided in the sessions. Reflecting on the tools or session takeaways with the most immediate *and* lasting utility, principals also named the norming protocols and strategies, and agreed that engaging their instructional teams in norming activities led to real changes in classroom observations and coaching.

Videotaping these activities also revealed inconsistencies—in some cases "eye-opening"—in team members' views on effective instruction and principals' perceptions of their own practice. In postself-assessment survey comments, principals shared plans to continue activities during the summer and the 2011–12 school year. As one principal noted, norming is an ongoing process that will only become "second nature" with "continued practice."

Impact on Principals

The EPIC sessions helped principals establish more consistency in their observation and coaching activities and common definitions of effective practice. Almost all principals (89%) completing postself-assessment surveys said the EPIC program had a moderate to significant impact on the consistency in what observers looked for during classroom visits *and* in the feedback they gave to teachers. One principal noted an important shift, as norming conversations continued, from "achieving consistency" to "defining best practices," which she believed was a valuable transition for team members and the school as a whole.

> *So what has changed is, more so than at the beginning, when we went into classrooms we all kind of had a different lens…now we can successfully say when we go in to look for a literacy strategy we're all coming out with the same feedback. That helps us to really pinpoint where our staff needs to have professional development and how we rate those members.*

> *I think probably the most useful thing that we took away is the one [norming exercise] we had to do with the rest of the group…the leadership team—my coaches and my assistant principal. In terms of our norming, we watched a video and filled out the form that both coaches and administrators use for teacher feedback—it's actually the page you give to the teachers—and then we talked about what we each had written down after watching the exact same thing…. I don't know that it would have ever dawned on me to do that exercise where we're all looking at the same thing and try to norm about our feedback.*

Reflections on practice helped principals identify gaps in their observation and evaluation systems and areas of growth for teachers. Principals agreed that examining practices, which they did during EPIC sessions and assignments, brought progressively more focus to their efforts. In addition to helping them "look at their practices and identify growth areas" at the school or system level, the EPIC program also helped them customize feedback for teachers. One principal noted that, "As a benefit of the EPIC sessions, I was very clear about what was a problem for every single teacher that I had in my office. This is a 2, this is a 1, and this is going to cause you to get fired…. We were also very firm about not giving misconceptions."

> *I do believe it has given us a more focused reflection…a more focused look at what conversations need to be held. It has made us more focused with our evaluations in regard to how we are presenting the information. What EPIC has done has really forced us to really analyze our practices and take a look at what produces results for teachers. I don't know if we would have had the time or have been as reflective if this would not have been implemented through our professional development sessions with EPIC.*

Applying EPIC strategies changed the way principals work with their instructional leadership teams, which led to better use of teams and important conversations about how their roles are defined. Eight out of nine postself-assessment survey respondents (89%) reported that, as a result of their participation in the EPIC program, they spent more time working with their leadership teams. As principals and team members engaged in norming exercises, they considered not only how to define effective teaching but also what role coaches should play in teacher evaluations. The Knowledge System videos provided examples of effective teamwork that principals in different settings could use to reconsider their own teams' practices.

> *The norming activities have really given me a focal point to revert back to when we may veer from the standards, so to speak. And I say that because with our current administration we're all new to this particular building. As well, we're all new to this pre-k through eighth-grade model, and what's important to us is that we've been able to solidify a protocol for our midyear evaluations…That simply came through my ability to work with the EPIC Pilot Program in order to kind of see how it's being done in other settings and create a formula that works best for us.*

Impact on Leadership Team Members and Teachers

The EPIC sessions helped increase the frequency of planned observations and the visibility of leadership team members and instructional staff in the classroom. All (100%) of the survey respondents (n=9) said the EPIC program prompted changes in the number of planned classroom walk-throughs, especially on the part of instructional coaches, peer coaches, and department chairs; 75% also reported increases in informal visits. More visibility in the classroom and more intentionality in visits led to "more data points and tangible evidence to share with teachers" during evaluations.

Establishing norms and expectations for classroom practice increased, improved, and deepened communication with teachers. Principals and instructional leadership team members reported that more consistency led to better communication. Two-thirds of the postsurvey respondents agreed that preobservation conferences, e-mails, and other communication tools gave teachers a better sense of observers' expectations. Over three-fourths (77%) agreed that teachers were more likely to receive feedback within one to two days after observations. An unanticipated outcome of the norming activities and prior planning was "improved time management," which gave coaches more time for reflection and postobservation conversations with teachers and more constructive coaching. When observers—administrators, coaches, department heads—were clear about what they were looking for, teachers had clearer expectations and got more actionable feedback.

> *It has definitely improved time management. The teachers have a clear understanding of the growth areas and the strengths. Because we have normed the process, it is now seamless. We are all speaking the same language. It doesn't feel like they hear one thing from a coach and then they hear something different from an administrator. If we had a situation with a teacher where they may have felt that we weren't speaking the same language or looking for the same things in classroom observations, we have taken steps to fix it. We had a big meeting with them and identified that it was a growth area for us. We were able to articulate very clearly what we wanted to see for the remainder of the school year.*

> *I think that what they [EPIC sessions] have allowed us to do is just to be on the same page, as we were planning. So the norming sessions have helped me and the academic deans to*

just sit down and talk about what we expect…what we are going to look for, and try to guide and align our questions in the pre and post observation conference so that any teacher who interacts whether with one of us, or all of us, will hear the same message….

The use of EPIC strategies led to more alignment between observation and evaluation systems and positive changes in midyear evaluations. Survey respondents agreed that, as a result of their use of EPIC strategies, observations were better aligned with evaluations and the midyear evaluation system had improved. Opinions were mixed on whether teachers saw evaluations as fairer and a more accurate reflection of their practice, but principals and coaches felt that the consistency and clarity encouraged by the EPIC sessions and facilitators and a "focus on the positive" changed the tenor of midyear evaluations and conferences. Principals noted that even if there was anxiety, there were "very few surprises" and that teachers who took an equal part in postevaluation conferences were more willing to accept lower than expected evaluations. Having observers and coaches take part in the conferences provided "another instructional lens" for discussions.

It really was a progressive development toward standing firm at the midyear conference, but those incremental steps of giving direct feedback to staff members during the course of the year up until now was supported and that came, of course, by way of our, each month, our EPIC pieces, that kind of pushed me towards being more focused in my delivery and my feedback to teachers.

Impact on Systems

The EPIC program helped principals clarify and implement network performance management guidelines within their schools. During interviews, Friendship principals, instructional team members, and teacher peer coaches observed that they had a better understanding of the network's performance management framework. EPIC activities and school efforts to implement the framework worked in concert, helping principals "make the observation process a more comprehensive and effective process for supporting our teachers and pushing them to the next level."

District leaders as well as principals leveraged personal practice videos to help define effective practice and norm expectations across the larger school community. Principals used or planned to use the Flip cameras to "make practice visible," expose flaws, and engage "coaches, dept. chairs, assistant principals, and teachers" in ongoing norming exercises. District-level leaders also used video examples in other forums and professional development settings, stressing again the importance of seeing practices in action, modeling the examination of practices, and ensuring consistent, districtwide definitions of effective instruction.

The EPIC sessions prompted valuable conversations about deeply held beliefs and the challenges involved in changing relationships and renegotiating roles. Establishing continuity between observations and evaluations was a more complex task than establishing consistency in observations and coaching, in part because of the ways teams were composed, leadership distributed, and roles defined, and in part because of the high stakes involved in evaluations. In most cases, instructional coaches had not previously been part of teacher evaluations, and including them meant rethinking the advocacy roles of coaches and the tenor and composition of evaluation conferences. According to principals and Friendship's chief academic officer, the EPIC sessions brought real differences of opinions to the surface and, within schools and between schools and the district, led to important discussions of roles and where authority for defining roles should reside.

The Memphis City Schools Pilot

Program Overview

The pilot of the EPIC Leadership Development Model in the Southeast region of Memphis, Tennessee, focused on data teams and steps and strategies for effectively leading them. This programmatic topic aligned with districtwide efforts to make greater use of data to inform instructional practices and decision-making—and to have assistant principals play more of an instructional leadership role in their schools.

The MCS pilot program featured six face-to-face meetings during the 2010–11 academic year—three in the fall semester (one per month, September through November) and three in the spring semester (one per month, January through March). Participants were also asked to complete assignments between sessions including videos of personal practice, staff questionnaires, data analysis activities, and strategic planning activities.

Seventeen middle and high school assistant principals completed the program. There was a great deal of variation in assistant principals' skill level and past experiences at the start of the program; some participants were serving their first year as an assistant principal, or had just made the move to a new school, while others had been at the same school or in the same position for multiple years. Likewise, some participants were fairly well-versed and generally comfortable working with data; others had very limited experiences with data prior to the pilot program.

Evaluation Activities and Data Sources

Evaluators attended a planning meeting with district program sponsors and three in-person sessions. Evaluation efforts also included three rounds of postsession interviews and an online postself-assessment survey with all participants. Four participants were selected to host two case-study site visits that included interviews with principals, teachers, and other data-team members and, where possible, observations of data-team meetings.

Overview of Impact

MCS assistant principals' responses to the pilot program were overwhelmingly positive in terms of both programmatic strategies and outcomes, and the cycle of learning, doing, and reflecting allowed them to make meaningful and noticeable improvements in their leadership practices. Participants especially appreciated the hands-on approach that the program took to foster and facilitate greater use of data. "This was the first data PD I've participated in that allowed me to go back and assist teachers in small increments. This was very valuable to me because it did allow me to see growth for myself and the team over a period of time," noted one participant. Another said, "This program allowed application with immediate feedback along with collaboration. This, in my opinion, is an effective model because of that." The EPIC Leadership Development Program also had a noticeable impact on teachers and other educators with whom the assistant principals worked. While the number and types of teachers and instructional aides on each data team varied, there were common themes and trends among these indirect program participants.

Impact on Assistant Principals

The EPIC Leadership Development Pilot Program increased participants' awareness and comfort in using data to drive instructional decisions. For participants who were less-versed in using data to guide instructional change at the onset of the program, the EPIC program provided an opportunity to gain experience with the districts' data-management tools and learn strategies for analyzing data and making data-based instructional decisions. The program also gave participants access to targeted resources to support data-driven decision-making.

> *It [EPIC program] has made me more aggressive in dissecting the data….I learned more about disaggregating the data—finding what the misconceptions were, figuring out if they have been taught the wrong way, asking if there is something the teacher could have done differently.*

> *So it's had a tremendous impact in helping me to just aggregate and analyze and figure out which data set to use at what particular time. The EPIC training allowed me to realize how much instruction can be focused on misconceptions when trying to identify what needs to be retaught as well as adjustments that may be needed to adjust teaching strategies.*

The program improved participants' ability to plan and lead data teams, including their ability to help data-team members take more ownership of the process. Despite a wide range of prior experiences and abilities, 81% of postprogram survey respondents (13 out of 16 respondents) indicated that the EPIC program had a "large" impact on their use of data to think differently about their role in making school decisions to drive student performance. Regardless of ability or experience level, participants indicated that they gained skills in facilitating data-team meetings and leading teachers and other instructional staff in the process of data analysis and data-based instructional decision-making. The EPIC program also offered more experienced participants a new set of skills to take their use of data to the next level and work more collaboratively with their peers to bring about positive changes within their schools.

> *The EPIC PD has helped me to phrase questions better and help teachers to stay on track with our meeting agenda. It's allowed me to be more of a listener and a guide. I listen and help guide what we are looking for.*

> *The EPIC team allowed me to grow in my organization skills and also how to plan a meeting the right way.*

> *It [EPIC program] helped me to be more deliberate in my decision-making in terms of making instructional decisions and using the data, using information, student data as well as teacher data to make instructional decisions. And it's helped to do more shared leadership. I'm working with the data team and kind of helping them…its more of a shared leadership experience.*

Personal practice videos offered participants a valuable opportunity to reflect on their personal leadership practices. A great deal of participants' growth stemmed from creating and reflecting on videos of their own practice. After analyzing their videos, many participants independently came to the realization that they were monopolizing and steering the conversations in early data-team meetings. They were subsequently able to make efforts to facilitate more input and involvement from other data- team members in subsequent team meetings. Eighty-one% of postprogram survey respondents (13 out of 16) said that the EPIC program had had a "large" impact on their ability to guide teachers to prepare for meetings and accomplish the work between meetings that would ensure meeting success. Seventy-five %

(12 out of 16) said the video cameras and personal practice videos had a large impact on their reflection on leadership practices and helped identify steps to improve leadership practices.

> *When I go back and watch, I am able to see. Number one, to reflect on my facilitation: Do I talk too much, should I have let them say a little bit more, or do I need to probe a little bit more? So it has helped me to reflect on how I facilitated the meeting. It has actually helped from the first two meetings where I saw that I talked too much and did not let the teachers talk. So now I probe a little bit and ask them some open-ended questions so…personally, as a leader it has shown me to use it as a tool of reflection; a tool to recapture maybe if something in the notes was not taken I can go back and make sure I captured everything we discussed in the meeting.*

Impact on Teachers

Data-team members came to be more knowledgeable and were empowered to use data more productively to steer instructional efforts. Members of participants' data teams had a range of data analysis skills and prior data-team experiences—ranging from no experience at all to extensive experience serving on data teams. Some who were less-experienced were initially fearful of working more extensively with data—in part because they viewed assessment data as a punitive rather than diagnostic tool used to inform instruction, and in part because they feared that data-related efforts would be time-consuming and yield little. Over the course of the year, assistant principals shared experiences about how their data-team members had come to be less fearful of assessments and more empowered to use data productively to bring about positive changes within their classroom. Sixty-nine % of assistant principals (11 out of 16) agreed to a "large extent" that teachers had a greater appreciation for the role that data can play in informing instructional practices and decisions; the remaining 31% (5 out of 16) agreed to a "moderate extent." One AP noted that, "The EPIC program has enabled teachers to understand that the proper use of data can truly help them develop the appropriate instructional teaching strategies." Data-team members truly came to embrace data and data analysis as a way to improve instruction and subsequent student performance.

> *The checks or quizzes used to maybe be just once a week, but now the teachers do them continuously throughout the lesson to make sure things are on target. They see if things are being understood or if they need to go back and straighten out any misconceptions. It is exciting that they are attuned to what the students are understanding, and they want to know immediately how the students are performing.*

Data-team members acquired more skills and strategies for actively targeting students' misconceptions and challenge areas through modified and differentiated instructional practices. In addition to growing more comfortable and acquiring more skills in working with data to assess students' areas of weakness, data-team members also acquired more skills in actively targeting students' misconceptions and challenge areas through reteaching and the use of new or different instructional strategies. Having regular opportunities to converse with colleagues proved beneficial to data-team members who were then able to share information about best practices, alternative strategies, and personal outcomes for various teaching methods. By recognizing common trends in student performance across grade levels or subject areas, data teams came to realize the importance of collective, schoolwide ownership and responsibility for student performance. "Now teachers on the team realize that instruction/data is a 'we' process," explained one participant.

Data has impacted the communication between teams of teachers and how effectively they can make changes in teaching. Additionally when core teachers attend the meeting it becomes obvious that the student is having the same problem in language arts, social studies, and math.

Impact on Student Achievement

Participants saw evidence of impact on students, including achievement gains on interim assessments and improved test-taking skills, as indicated by a greater willingness to read longer passages and questions thoroughly. Participating assistant principals and teachers were optimistic about students' ability to perform well on standardized assessments based on preliminary improvements on interim assessments and evidence of strategies that can lead to better test performance, such as reading longer passages completely and test questions more carefully. Middle school teachers interviewed during the week that year-end standardized tests were administered reported that their students were underlining key terms and passages, eliminating answer options, and generally seemed to be taking more time and care to read and reflect on each question; this was something they had not seen in past years.

During the last formative assessment the majority of students improved…the EPIC program had a lot to do with that. It was a real big influence on the scores because we've been concentrating on data all year long.

My seventh-grade writing and research category has doubled from formative test A to formative test B. That is because of corrective instruction.

Students exhibited marked increases in awareness and ownership of achievement levels on a personal level and collectively within classrooms and schools. Teachers, teams, and schools made concerted efforts to make students more aware of their achievement levels. Motivated by examples in the EPIC Knowledge System and other examples shared in EPIC sessions, data boards were erected in classrooms and school hallways. Assistant principals and teachers reported palpable increases in students' desire to increase their performance on subsequent assessments. One participant felt that school efforts made students "more accountable for their learning," and another felt that it enabled students to "take charge of their academic success by knowing their strengths and addressing their weaknesses." Furthermore, a competitive spirit evolved between and within classes in many schools as students began to take more ownership of their achievement and seek out the steps necessary to make desired gains. Another participant stated that, "Students have now taken ownership of their data. When observing classes they are now more competitive…I see excitement in the classroom. They beckon teachers over to see their progress."

I have been told, in a big meeting today, that some of our students have become excited when they have seen formative assessment results from the practice test, etc. When they have seen the data through the use of the bar graphs etc., it has created some excitement. It has created a tremendous spirit of competition. It helps that they can see it. They are visual learners. They can look at those graphs and see those graphs and they know what the colors mean. They know that the red is the low basic, the gold is the basic, the green is proficient, and the blue is advanced. It's the spirit of competition. All of this is new, the [EPIC program] made a huge difference.

The kids self-reflect and say things like "If I would have gotten one more answer right I would have been…proficient."

Impact on Systems

The EPIC program helped participants strengthen communication networks within their schools and with other colleagues in their district. Through opportunities for small-group and whole-group discussions, the assistant principals became more aware that peers in other MCS schools face common challenges. Over 80% of participants agreed "to a large extent" that small- and whole-group discussions provided valuable opportunities for participants to learn from their colleagues. In addition to the networking that took place during the face-to-face sessions, there was also evidence of external communication and collaboration beyond the sessions after the program ended. During interviews, assistant principals often listed the names of other participants with whom they had made connections and noted appreciation for new or expanded professional networks they could reach out to for information or support.

The EPIC Leadership Development Program promoted and supported team-based efforts to facilitate collaboration within schools. Over the course of the year, some schools experienced a gradual shift from solo to more team-based efforts. This change was particularly prominent in one middle school where data-team members were paired to coteach challenging language arts content. Teachers were reluctant to cooperate at first but eventually came to see the value in communicating with partners as well as other educators at the school. As data teams began to function more effectively, teachers began to communicate and collaborate more with their peers (both within and across disciplines)—which led to a more holistic approach to student and school improvement.

> *Everybody in this building is understanding that no matter what we do or how we do it, data are going to be involved.*

Positive feedback and observable outcomes have supported school plans to expand the use of data teams modeled by the EPIC Leadership Development Program. According to several assistant principals and principals, efforts are underway to expand the use of data teams to other grade levels and subject areas, based on the success of the data teams that emerged from the EPIC program. Almost all (81%) of the assistant principals responding to the final survey indicated that their school had started the process of creating systemwide data teams. School principals are often leading the drive, but case study observations indicate that the success of data teams created and modeled in the EPIC program has also inspired grassroots efforts.

> *They [teachers] are able to communicate on where we need to go and where we need to be. And they're not only seeing that their scores may be low or high, but they see as a whole what the school looks like. And again, I think those are some of the things we didn't necessarily look at before.*

The District of Columbia Public Schools Pilot

Project Overview

The District of Columbia Public Schools and the EPIC Leadership Development Pilot Partnership was the result of a close collaboration between personnel from both organizations. The four-month leadership development program was tailored to meet the needs of DCPS, leveraging the resources of the EPIC Knowledge System and benefitting from the lessons learned from in-depth New Leaders pilot studies. After a short, but rigorous, screening process, nine assistant principals were chosen to participate in the pilot program. From February 2011 to May 2011, the cohort met biweekly either face-to-face (four sessions) or virtually (three webinars). The pilot program used the book *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (Lencioni, 2002) as a theoretical framework. The program also employed a project-based approach that asked participants to create and implement a team-based action plan from one of three projects created by district personnel. All sessions were cofacilitated by personnel from both organizations who collaborated regularly to plan sessions and monitor the progress of participants.

Evaluation Activities and Data Sources

Researchers used a mixed methodological approach to examine the ways in which different program components and the program overall contributed to participants' leadership development. During the four months of the program, researchers collected feedback surveys after each face-to-face session and conducted two rounds of interviews with 100% of the assistant principals who participated in the program (n=9). Researchers also collected postprogram survey data from seven assistant principals (77%) and twenty-four teachers who participated in site leadership teams (55% of the sites). To provide context for the interview and survey data, researchers observed 50% of the face-to-face sessions and 100% of the webinars. Data-collection activities also included interviews with principals associated with participants (n=2/9) and a third round of participant interviews (n=7/9).

Overview of Impact

All participants (n=9) felt the program contributed to their leadership development in specific and innovative ways. They valued those components of the program that prompted critical reflection on their own and others' leadership practice, and they were highly satisfied with the ways in which the facilitators adapted the program to meet their own needs and the needs of their site. Even though the program was only half a year, all participants felt they were part of a safe and supportive community that would continue beyond the program. All (100%) of the participants surveyed (n=7) felt that the program directly impacted teacher effectiveness and student achievement at their site to some extent; of these, 71% reported that the program contributed to teacher effectiveness "to a large extent," and over half (57%) felt that increases in student achievement were attributable to the program "to a large extent." Preliminary analyses show that the principals interviewed (n=2) and teachers surveyed (n=24) supported the perceptions of participants in the program.

Impact on Assistant Principals

Participants strengthened their skills in leading a team through a change initiative. Session feedback data show a steady rise in participants' preparedness to successfully implement a team-based change initiative. At the end of the first session, 50% of the participants felt only "somewhat prepared" to meet with their team and create an action plan, but by the third

session all participants felt "prepared" with 63% feeling "very well prepared" to lead their team through a change initiative.

- **Participants shifted their approach to leadership and project management.** In the first round of interviews, participants (n=9) noted that they had to "change my mindset" and "reshape my approach to leadership" because of the program: "I feel like just being two or three weeks in, I'm a much better leader because I can approach [the team] from a different standpoint."

- **Participants actively addressed dysfunctions within their team.** By the second round of interviews, participants (n=9) were more confident in their ability to build trust, engage in conflict, hold each other accountable, and use data to get buy-in from their leadership teams.

  At first I was afraid because everyone had different agendas, but then this pilot program has helped me work through those agendas where I now feel as though I can have difficult conversations with people and they still walk away knowing at the end of the day we are all here to educate children.

- **Participants used data to drive decision-making within their team.** Teachers engaged in site leadership teams (n=24) reported that 82% of the assistant principals in the program used data "regularly" to inform decisions, and 94% of the assistant principals "regularly" asked probing questions that fostered critical thinking.

Participants critically reflected on their own practice and the practice of others. Session feedback data show that participants consistently valued the experience of viewing, analyzing, and reflecting on both the personal practice and the EPIC Knowledge System videos as part of the sessions. For the first three sessions (the fourth did not use video) 100% of the participants "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the videos of practice (e.g., EPIC) and personal practice videos enhanced the sessions by providing real-world examples of leadership practices.

- **The personal practice videos served as a catalyst for critical reflection.** Although there was some initial discomfort, 100% of the survey respondents (n=7) felt the use of the video camera helped them to improve their leadership practice to a "large" and "very large" extent. Once the technological demands were mastered, the act of editing the video became a prompt for critical analysis of personal practice.

  When I am reviewing my own videos to identify the clips to share with people, that's been a really reflective process just to see my body language and also not just my own body language but the body language of other people around the table.

- **The EPIC Knowledge System videos provided examples of best practice.** Seventy-one% of the participants surveyed (n=7) felt that the models of leadership provided by the EPIC videos impacted their leadership practice to a "large" and "very large" extent. Several participants noted that they found new relevancy in the videos in light of their own experiences in teaming.

  I remember everyone tearing down the [principals in] the first video. And now that we have experienced applying these skills with our own team, I think many of us have been humbled.

- **The theoretical framework provided by the book served as a prompt for critical analysis.** Eighty-six % of the participants surveyed (n=7) found the theoretical framework contributed "to a large extent" to their leadership development.

Interview data strongly suggest that it is the theoretical framework provided by the book working in concert with the videos that ultimately adds value to the program.

I guess it would have to be three things…interacting together that are most helpful. I would say that the videotaping, using the book to dialogue, and our reflections on one another's practice, the interaction of those three things has helped move me forward the most.

The program was relevant and responsive to participants' needs. Session feedback data show that over the three face-to-face sessions (the fourth being a different format) 100% of participants (n=9) found the session content and activities relevant to their "daily work" with 75% "strongly agreeing" that the sessions provided "useful ideas, strategies, and resources." All (100%) of the participants surveyed (n=7) reported that the responsiveness of the facilitators contributed to their leadership development to a "large" and "very large" extent.

- *Participants valued the rich resources and relevant topics in the sessions.* Participants felt that the "wealth of knowledge that is shared and given during our meetings and…webinars makes it worthwhile." Most participants were internally motivated to succeed or motivated by their relationships within the cohort. Several participants noted that the affiliation with New Leaders added value to the program.

- *Participants valued the ongoing and responsive support of the facilitators.* Participants appreciated the "check in" calls from facilitators that were "always at the right time" and their availability "even on a weekend." Participants also valued the just-in-time learning provided by facilitators with "specific answers to pressing questions" and their willingness to shift the parameters of the project and adapt the program to meet their needs.

Participants developed safe and supportive communities of practice[25] that contributed to their leadership development. All (100%) of the participants surveyed (n=7) found the peer discussions during face-to-face sessions and webinars contributed "to a large extent" and to a "very large extent" to their leadership development. When asked which components of the program were most important to their leadership development, 90% of the responses cited "feedback from peers" and the "opportunity to connect with my peers on a regular basis."

- *Participants established trust and deepened relationships within the cohort.* Although participants were, "initially a little apprehensive because you don't want someone to take a comment the wrong way," they developed a sense of trust during the role-playing activities in the first session. By the third session, most participants were reaching out regularly to cohort members in between sessions: "I can always call them to ask for clarity or just to ask for assistance if I need it."

- *Participants felt part of a network that supported their leadership development.* When asked what differentiated this program from other professional development programs, participants highlighted the ways in which conversations, both within and between sessions, with the facilitators and their colleagues supported their leadership development.

The difference is every week—every single week—I don't care if it is on the phone, through e-mail, webinars, or actual sessions, I have an opportunity to talk to somebody about some issues with the team that I never really knew how to deal with.

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25 Communities of practice share a common concern for something they do and learn how to do it better as they interact regularly. Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: learning, meaning, and identity.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Impact on Teachers on the Leadership Team

Teachers were productive members of a team-based change initiative. Teacher survey data show (n=24) that teachers who participated in their site leadership teams were "usually" passionate and unguarded in their discussion of issues (89%), willing to make sacrifices for the good of the team (83%) and ended discussions with clear and specific resolutions and action steps (61%). Teachers reported that the project-based teams were more organized and productive than other meetings they had attended. One DCPS teacher said:

> *The experience was practical and useful. It made you think about your teaching and how you engaged students; it made you more comfortable scrutinizing the work of others; and it brought cohesiveness to [the] team in problem-solving.*

Teachers applied the collaborative strategies used in the leadership team meetings to other settings.

Both within and beyond the team meetings, assistant principals observed members of the team holding each other accountable.

> *When [teachers] are planning together, they are able to implement some of what they see take place in our leadership meeting, holding each other accountable, and I have actually seen them [outside of meetings] hold each other accountable and having honest conversations as opposed to withholding from sharing their actual concerns about a situation.*

Impact on Student Achievement

Participants felt the program positively impacted student achievement. As noted earlier, over half of the participants (57%) reported that the program directly contributed to student achievement at their site. In addition, team members were pleased with the increased pass rates at certain sites: "It turned out extremely well: Our goal was to have 85% of our students successfully pass math and English in order to be successfully promoted to the ninth grade; we were right at 79.7% of our students." At the start of the program, about 40% of students were in danger of failing. The participant estimated that the pass rate would have been much lower without the project, "maybe 65%."

> *Of the thirty, twenty-three met the goal by showing 25% or greater growth in reading fluency…Teachers informed me that six of our students were well prepared to take a middle school entrance exam as a direct result of our project. All six were admitted to Howard Middle School.*

Impact on Systems at the Site Level

The program contributed to changes in the systems and processes at the site level. All (100%) of the participants who responded to the survey felt the program had changed the "way we look at teaming" at their site, and over half of these (57%) felt it had contributed to a "large extent" to systemic changes. Most assistant principals hope to continue the change initiatives begun during the program, and the principals interviewed (n=2) plan to expand the team-based approach into other areas.

The program generated a common language around teaming that was present at the site and classroom levels. Interview data with principals and assistant principals suggest that leadership team members began to develop a common language at the site level around the theories and concepts of the program. In at least one instance this language was present at the classroom level:

> *In one teacher's classroom I actually see where her students are holding each other accountable, and so obviously she is taking the language and implementing it as well as [defining] what is "accountable" and what "holding each other accountable" looks like.*

Conclusions and Considerations for Future Programs and Partnerships

Evaluation findings show that the EPIC Leadership Development Model, piloted in three very different settings, had a positive impact on leadership practice and set in motion changes related to improved teaching and learning. Participants gained new skills, strategies, and resources to strengthen their own leadership practice and the practice of their teams and teachers. In addition to valuable and often immediate opportunities to implement new practices, participants had the benefit of being able to reflect on their experiences with colleagues and program facilitators. This cycle of learning, doing, and reflecting helped participants refine skills and strategies that proved successful. By considering less well-suited strategies, they also learned more about their own skills and styles and those of their leadership teams.

The EPIC program also helped participants build trust among educators within their schools as they examined what could most reliably lead to improved student outcomes and create a collective sense of accountability for student success. Instructional leadership teams worked toward a common language and criteria for observing, coaching, and evaluating teachers. Data-team members, under the guidance of EPIC Leadership Development Program participants, allayed fears about the punitive uses of assessment data and moved toward strategies to effectively integrate data into planning. During the EPIC sessions, participants formed new relationships and networks across schools, and principal managers gained insights into professional learning needs.

The pilots hold lessons for the EPIC team as well as for school and district stakeholders as they consider future design, delivery, and impact of leadership development. The recommendations below address ways to expand the operational elements of the model to ensure that the signature elements have maximum benefits for leadership practice.

Needs Assessment and Planning

The involvement of participants in the needs-assessment stage of the partnership could help ensure that session content is connected to authentic work. Participants suggested different ways or points at which their involvement might be productive. Some suggested, for example, that they have an opportunity early in the process to help determine the broad outlines of the leadership development or the domain of the content. Others recommended more input in crafting specific session content to link it more directly to their own leadership practices, and "more conversations" about how upcoming session topics might be tailored to meet both school and district needs—and even serve as a forum to consider the interplay between them.

Participants also expressed a need for more practical support from the sessions. As adult learners and "on-the-ground practitioners," school leaders don't expect professional development providers to parachute in and give them simple, easy tips, but they do want ideas with both immediate use and longer-term applicability. Reflecting on the most useful EPIC sessions and tools, principals and principal managers concurred that just-in-time tools to solve their current problems—"things they are wrestling with, things that are keeping them up nights"—are best received and in the end most likely applied.

Aligning sessions with the school calendar and revisiting the alignment from time to time could also increase continuity and the cumulative impact of the sessions. While school leaders operate on the same general schedule as the district sponsors, their input may point, for example, to places in the school calendar where it would be profitable to revisit certain ideas or content—e.g., norming protocols could be introduced early in the year and revisited after midyear assessments; data talks could likewise be introduced in early sessions but reconsidered when actual data are available. It may also be useful to recalibrate from time to time to ensure that the fit is right, revisiting goals, experience, support, and advocacy.

District Presence at All Sessions

While the cofacilitation model used in the DCPS pilot program might not be sustainable, the presence of district personnel at all sessions adds value to the program. In particular, district personnel could play a valuable role in coaching participants during and between sessions, in assisting participants in norm-setting and course corrections during the sessions, and in conducting check-in calls between sessions.

Targeted Audiences for Professional Learning

The very evident success of the Memphis and DCPS pilots with assistant principals indicates that EPIC and partner school districts should continue to address the needs of this group. More and more districts are looking for ways to equip assistant principals to advance in the pipeline for principalships and become instructional leaders, but often their previous professional development has focused less on instruction and data than on management and discipline.

The experiences of the Friendship principals suggests not so much a separate EPIC program for assistant principals but a program—or particular session—that pairs principals and assistant principals or instructional coaches. Expanding the audience throughout a full complement of sessions would exceed the optimal number of participants, but pairing and repairing groups in alternating sessions could not only bring efficiencies to the process but also different viewpoints on complex issues. In rethinking the composition of cohort groups, it may also be useful to consider other pairings and affinities, such as by grade level or years of experience. The research suggests that different groupings can serve as a pedagogical tool to "teach teamwork, develop a sense of community as learners, facilitate deep and durable peer support networks, and model distributed leadership."[26]

There may also be a need for more differentiation in session grouping or content to accommodate the differences between large and small schools and take departmental differences and noncore teachers or nontested subjects into account.

26 LaPointe, M. & Davis, S. (2006). Effective schools require effective principals. *Leadership*, 36(1), 16-19, 34, 36-38.

Program Customization

Looking toward a sustainable model, the EPIC team should consider ways of standardizing 80% of the program, while allowing for 20% customization. Key to this customization is the role of facilitator as a coach within and between sessions, and the role of the district in aligning team projects to district goals. At the same time, standardization would allow New Leaders to develop new resources (e.g., core text or multimedia materials) and expand existing resources (e.g., EPIC Knowledge system) that more fully support the standardized program.

Facilitation

An important part of the EPIC Model is an emphasis on reflection and critical inquiry. When participants engage in conversations with peers, they can use that experience to examine, clarify, defend, and even begin to change their beliefs and approaches—and gain insights on how to establish norms of collegiality that tolerate and embrace productive conflict. When changes with big potential benefits but significant repercussions are considered, such as the role of coaches in teacher evaluations, it's important that principals express concerns, with each other and with district sponsors. In discussing the value of looking at personal beliefs, Hirsch and Killion say that, "For deep change to occur and for transformational learning, the system must have open communication that allows all members to draw attention to inconsistencies in espoused beliefs and beliefs-in-actions." Issues that play a critical role in carrying out session goals or individual action plans could be addressed in an open forum segment or a suggestion box where participants note thoughts or issues with bearing on session content or assignments.

Participants requested more time devoted to "learning about the context in which each of us is working." Principals' and assistant principals' roles and responsibilities can vary, and some participants suggested that a list of challenges related "to their unique role" followed by "a project that specifically addresses some of those challenges" could further tailor session content to individual needs and practices.

Action-Planning and Accountability

One principal suggested an online template and tracker for the action-planning, with simple, practical goals (e.g., "invite department chairs to norming session") as well as more substantive goals. Principals could update as needed, sharing thoughts on the success of their efforts, but, more important, facilitators could see how successful participants are in achieving their goals—and where extra support and resources, including additional tools or examples from the Knowledge System or peer practice, might be helpful, and where a revision of plans might be in order. Doing this would make the planning more of an organic, ongoing process that can be adjusted based on insights, new input, and successes and challenges involved in applying session takeaways. If principals have time, posting the rationale or actions that led to changes in plans would create a rich and different source of reflections.

It may also be helpful to engage participants in a discussion of how the transfer from session to school should work, early on and throughout the process, to get a better sense of how they view the pace of change and when it's acceptable or even advisable to set change in motion, and if fundamental, targeted changes are really what is needed. This could clarify expectations and strengthen buy-in.

Optimizing and Leveraging Resources

The DCPS pilot showed the value of a particular text in framing the sessions and session assignments. The service package that the EPIC team proposes as part of the partnership need not necessarily include a specific text, or specific approach, but selected readings—even some recommended by participants or district partners—could help frame assignments and discussions.

Feedback from all three sites suggests that EPIC should continue to use both personal practice and EPIC videos to prompt critical reflection. As noted throughout this report, these resources have not only led to participant learning on their own but also they have worked in tandem to provide examples of emerging and best practices.

In editing and posting personal practice videos, it may be good to include some longer examples that capture the full course of a norming session or data-team meeting. While creating and sharing short clips continues to be a very useful exercise, occasionally shifting to longer video segments could focus reflections on the multiple leadership actions involved in a complex challenge.

The technology-supported webinars and touch points added as part of the DCPS pilot proved successful. Suggestions from participants included building more time into the webinar sessions to respond as teams to their colleagues' video presentations, and to actually "do a response to the responses."

MetLife Foundation

MetLife Foundation supports education, health, civic, and cultural organizations. It seeks to increase opportunities for young people to succeed, encourage leadership development for teachers and principals, and connect schools, families, and communities. Its funding for education is informed by findings from the annual *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*. For more information, visit www.metlife.org.

New Leaders EPIC PROGRAM

New Leaders is a national nonprofit that identifies and develops transformational school leaders who drive results for students and promotes the system-level policies and practices that allow these leaders to succeed. New Leaders was founded in 2000 and operates today in 12 urban areas, including the Bay Area (CA), Baltimore, Charlotte, Chicago, Memphis, New Orleans, Jefferson Parrish (LA), Newark, New York City, Prince George's County (MD), and Washington, DC. Over the past 10 years, New Leaders has built a cadre of more than 700 school leaders who are raising student achievement in high-poverty schools across the country. Beyond its signature principal-training program, New Leaders conducts leadership development with teachers, assistant principals, sitting principals, and district administrators and provides policy and strategy development services to districts, charter management organizations, and states. For more information, visit www.newleaders.org.

The Effective Practice Incentive Community drives student performance by rewarding educators in schools making dramatic student-achievement gains for sharing effective practices with colleagues in their own district and with educators across the country. As of August 2011, EPIC has awarded over $15.5 million to more than 5,100 principals, assistant principals, teachers, and teaching assistants in more than 200 schools to recognize their success and for participating in a rigorous process to identify and document the effective practice that led to their student gains. Nearly 200 case studies and profiles of EPIC-awarded schools are available on the web-based EPIC Knowledge System. For more information, visit www.newleaders.org/epic.

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