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ACHIEVING MORE, TOGETHER

Improving School and Student Outcomes via Distributed Leadership

A Policy Primer

New Leaders
LEADERSHIP CHANGES EVERYTHING

ABOUT NEW LEADERS

To equip students with real choices in life and build schools that reflect our hopes and dreams for the future, we need determined, unwavering school leaders committed to the truth that every student can excel. New Leaders forges deep partnerships to equip school leaders at all levels to be powerful and positive forces for change. We provide best-in-class leadership training that ensures schools are set up to provide all students with challenging, engaging learning experiences in every classroom, every day, year after year. To date, we have developed 4,000 leaders who annually reach more than half a million students in communities across the country. To support even more students and communities, we champion evidence-based policies that reflect the transformative power of exceptional school leaders and that break down structural and institutional barriers to student achievement and educational equity. By transforming our schools, we'll transform our society.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

NOTE

INTRODUCTION | Background and Goals

Schools that support teachers and other community members in exercising leadership look and feel different from schools where decision-making is centralized. A growing body of research, backed by the experience of educators across the country, supports expanded – or "distributed" – leadership as a critical strategy for achieving real, sustained results for students and creating school environments where teachers love to work.

As the principalship has increased its focus on instructional leadership, the role has become vastly more complex and demanding. Principals, no matter how masterful, cannot— and should not— do it all alone. Instead, great principals cultivate leaders and leadership teams within their buildings to help shoulder leadership responsibilities.[1] And we have new evidence that officials can support these efforts—and improve schools— by building leadership pipelines at the system level.[2]

> **"Successful organizations don't rely on a single person. At the system level, for us to unlock the potential of our educators and build greater consistency and sustainability... we need to be much more deliberate about building our bench of leaders. Leadership... shouldn't depend on the role you're in. It should be based on how you advance the mission of the organization and inspire others to do the same."**
>
> —Matt Lyons, Chief Talent Officer, Chicago Public Schools

Growing leadership capacity within schools also addresses a critical problem: the historically "flat" nature of the teaching profession is not meeting the needs of today's workforce. Teachers want opportunities to grow in their careers and take on new challenges, even if they are not interested in pursuing an administrative role that takes them completely out of the classroom. As a result, shared, collaborative, collective, and teacher leadership initiatives are on the rise. For example, 36 states proposed investing in teacher leadership in their plans to implement school improvement provisions under federal law,[3] and 35 states now have teacher leadership policies on the books.[4]

As these initiatives flourish, questions arise about how they are related and whether they are effective. Distributed leadership is often used as an umbrella term for these approaches. But what defines distributed leadership? How do teacher-leader roles fit into the distributed leadership approach? And most crucially, what do we know about how distributed leadership approaches ultimately affect school and student outcomes?

Our goals for this policy primer—and the larger Distributed Leadership Toolkit—are to:

(1) Present a research- and practice-based definition of distributed leadership;

(2) Highlight school and student outcomes associated with effective distributed leadership approaches;

(3) Draw out the key components of distributed leadership;

(4) Understand the distributed leadership policy landscape; and

(5) Support policymakers in taking action to support distributed leadership and improve school and student outcomes.

[1] New Leaders. (2012). Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/research-policy/playmakers/.
[2] Gates, S., Baird, M., Master, B., and Chavez-Herrerias, E. (2019). Principal Pipelines: A Feasible, Affordable, and Effective Way for Districts to Improve Schools. The RAND Corporation. Retrieved from https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/principal-pipelines-a-feasible,-affordable,-and-effective-way-for-districts-to-improve-schools.aspx.
[3] New Leaders. (2018). Prioritizing Leadership: An Analysis of State ESSA Plans. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/2018.NL_.ESSA-State-Plan-Policy-Brief-2.20-CompressedUpdate.pdf
[4] Nittler, K., Ross, E., and Selig-Addiss, R. (2019). NCTQ Data Burst: Teacher Leadership Opportunities. National Council on Teacher Quality. Retrieved from https://www.nctq.org/publications/NCTQ-Databurst:-Teacher-Leadership-Opportunities.

FRAMING | Distributed Leadership Definition

The concept of "distributed leadership" crops up throughout the education sector. Through a review of state and district distributed leadership initiatives, it became clear that people who make or influence policies and practices at the system level need a greater understanding of the concept. On the basis of our literature review, as well as our decades of experience training school and system-level leaders, we have developed the following research- and practice-based definition of distributed leadership:

> **DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | A DEFINITION FOR POLICYMAKERS**
> Distributed leadership refers to a range of flexible approaches to school organization, management, and operations that expand traditional conceptions of leadership to include a wide range of both formal and informal leadership roles and activities.
>
> While the specifics may vary by context, all models include an effective principal who fosters a trusting culture, promotes collaboration, and organizes, taps, and marshals school resources (including through staffing, scheduling, and other structures and strategies) to help build the leadership and overall capacity of teachers, students, parents, and the school community as a whole.
>
> When these elements are in place, distributed leadership approaches can yield important improvements to school and student outcomes that may exceed the sum of individual contributions.

Additional detail can be found in **Resource A: Distributed Leadership | A Definition for Policymakers**.

> **"Everyone has certain expectations about what a leader is supposed to be. I'm in charge, that top-down sort of thing. Ultimately, being true to myself and what I know our community needs, I have been able to model and give an open invitation to teachers and students to chart their own course. We are doing things differently at our school because business as usual wasn't working for our students."**
>
> —Donnell Cannon, Principal, North Edgecombe High School in Tarboro, NC

LITERATURE REVIEW | Distributed Leadership Research Findings

To help policymakers at all levels more deeply understand distributed leadership and the variety of ways it may manifest at the school level, we conducted a comprehensive review of the research on distributed leadership. We initially examined more than 70 studies and articles on distributed leadership and related topics. Of those, 32 seminal works met our criteria for inclusion in the in-depth literature review and are listed at the end of **Resource B: Distributed Leadership | Literature Review Findings**.

The research suggests distributed leadership offers a powerful way to help schools achieve what they cannot under the leadership of a single principal or even a small group of administrators.[5] Distributed leadership models may enhance schools' capacity for organizational learning and for collective improvement by tapping un- or under-utilized leadership potential in a school.[6] As a result, distributed approaches may support more sustainable school improvement.[7, 8] Listed below are important school and student outcomes achieved through distributed leadership, as well as information on how those outcomes meet evidence requirements under federal law.[9]

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[5] Supovitz, J., D'Auria, J., & Spillane, J. (2019). Meaningful & Sustainable Improvement with Distributed Leadership. CPRE Reports. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/112.

[6] Spillane, J. P., Camburn, E. M., Pustejovsky, J., Pareja, A. S., & Lewis, G. (2009). Taking a distributed perspective in studying school leadership and management: The challenge of study operations. In K. Leithwood & A. Harris, (eds.). Distributed leadership: Different perspectives (pp. 47-80). Netherlands: Springer.

[7] DeFlaminis, J. A. (2009, April). The design and structure of the building distributed leadership in the Philadelphia School District Project. In Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

[8] Harris, A. & DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Distributed leadership in practice: Evidence, misconceptions and possibilities. Management in Education, 30(4), 141-146.

[9] See Section 8101(21)(A) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | SCHOOL AND STUDENT OUTCOMES
1) Promotes Collaboration—*Strong Evidence*
2) Fosters Teacher Leadership—*Strong Evidence*
3) Supports Instructional Improvement—*Moderate Evidence*
4) May Increase Teacher Job Satisfaction and Foster Stronger Organizational Commitment—*Promising Evidence*
5) May Contribute to Increased Student Achievement—*Promising Evidence*

The strongest evidence comes from two reports—one by Jonathan Supovitz and Namrata Tognatta, and another by Dr. Supovitz and Matthew Riggan—based on data gathered via an experimental study of the Philadelphia Distributed Leadership Initiative. These reports show that distributed leadership approaches led to increased collaboration among school staff and more opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership.[10, 11] A report by Eric Camburn and S.W. Han—supported by moderate evidence—assesses data from a quasi-experimental study of the America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program, which relies heavily on a distributed leadership approach to reorganizing schools, and offers empirical evidence that distributing leadership led to significant changes in instructional practices.[12] In addition, a number of correlational studies point to potential outcomes related to teachers' job satisfaction and commitment to their schools, suggesting distributed leadership approaches may support teacher retention efforts.[13, 14, 15] Finally, two correlational studies of collaborative and collective leadership approaches—one authored by Phillip Hallinger and Ronald Heck, another by Kenneth Leithwood and Blair Mascall—offer promising evidence that distributed leadership approaches can lead to measurable improvements in student achievement.[16, 17]

Additional detail on these outcomes, studies, and evidence tiers can be found in **Resource B: Distributed Leadership | Literature Review Findings**.

Although the research has not prescribed a pre-packaged distributed leadership program, through our literature review we also identified a set of six common characteristics of effective distributed leadership models.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | 6 KEY ELEMENTS
Key Element 1: An Effective Principal
Key Element 2: Collaborative Learning, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making
Key Element 3: Strategic Opportunities for Engagement
Key Element 4: Empowered Staff and Community Members, Especially Teacher Leaders
Key Element 5: A Culture of Trust
Key Element 6: A Focus on Capacity-Building

Additional detail on these elements can be found in **Resource B: Distributed Leadership | Literature Review Findings**.

Finally, when designing policies and strategies to advance distributed leadership initiatives and models, officials should consider a number of challenges and limitations with the research and with distributed leadership approaches more generally.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | RESEARCH AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS
Policymakers should prioritize outcomes over prescribed inputs when developing research-based, actionable strategies to foster effective distributed leadership models in states, districts, and school systems across the country. In particular, where empirical research is lacking, policymakers may need to invest in research, rely on data (including data gathered via stakeholder engagement), or design logic models that connect research to measurable outcomes. The overall goal is to ensure that the theories of action underpinning distributed leadership policies are sound.

We explain these issues in greater depth in **Resource C: Distributed Leadership | Research and Policy Considerations**.

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[10] Supovitz, J. A. & Tognatta, N. (2013). The impact of distributed leadership on collaborative team decision making. Leadership and Policy in Schools. 12(2), 101-121.

[11] Supovitz, J. A., & Riggan, M. (2012). Building a foundation for school leadership: An evaluation of the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project, 2006-2010.

[12] Camburn, E. M., & Han, S. W. (2009). Investigating connections between distributed leadership and instructional change. In Distributed Leadership (pp. 25-45). Netherlands: Springer.

[13] Torres, D. G. (2019). Distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and teachers' job satisfaction in U.S. schools. Teaching and Teacher Education, 79. 111-123.

[14] Mascall, B., Leithwood, K., Straus, T., & Sacks, R. (2008). The relationship between distributed leadership and teachers' academic optimism. Journal of Educational Administration, 46(2), 214-228.

[15] Hulpia, H., Devos, G., & Rosseel, Y. (2009). The relationship between the perception of distributed leadership in secondary schools and teachers' and teacher leaders' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 20(3), 291-317.

[16] Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (2010). Leadership for learning: Does collaborative leadership make a difference in school improvement? Educational Management Administration & Leadership, 38(6), 654-678.

[17] Leithwood, K., & Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. Educational administration quarterly, 44(4), 529-561.

After the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 was enacted, each state was required to develop and submit to the U.S. Department of Education a plan explaining how it will comply with and carry out the requirements of the new law.[18] States' plans to implement ESSA are an important resource for understanding the education policy landscape. Our initial analyses, carried out in 2017 and published in 2018,[19] looked at leadership strategies proposed across the leadership continuum, from the recruitment and preparation of aspiring leaders to evaluation, support, and retention of those leaders once on the job.

Given the growing interest in distributed leadership, we conducted a targeted review to better understand the role of distributed approaches in states' leadership agendas and overall goals for student achievement and school improvement.

Eighteen states proposed distributed leadership approaches in their ESSA plans.
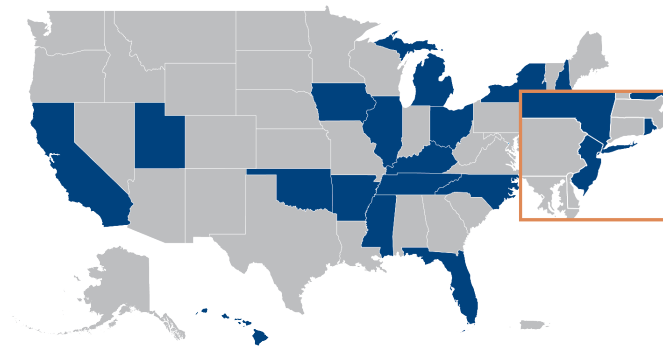
In most cases, the strategies outlined in states' ESSA plans do not rely on a clear definition of distributed leadership. A notable exception is in **Michigan**. In its plan, officials define distributed leadership as "a model of management within a school wherein the principal shares the traditional set of school leadership tasks with other staff in a manner that is coordinated and led by the principal. There is no singular model of distributed leadership; however, to be effective and sustainable, specific roles for teacher leaders within the model must be tied to specific identified priorities and then the teacher leaders must be afforded the time, support, and resources to make the role effective."[20]

> **"I'm not a top-down leader. I'm a collective leader. Our teachers have the expertise, and it's my job to ignite their passion and to provide them with the support and conditions they need to come up with solutions to meet our students' needs. When I do things right, they are really leading a lot of the decisions we make as a school."**
>
> —Hugo Saucedo, Principal, Benjamin Franklin Elementary in San Antonio, TX

In **Arkansas**, officials are proposing to create a distributed leadership credential. In addition, shared leadership is included as a key component of the state's vision of effective leadership: "An effective leader promotes the success and well-being of every student by… [e]ngaging all stakeholders in shared leadership to accomplish the vision."[21]

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[18] Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114-95, 20 U.S.C. 78 (2015).
[19] New Leaders, 2018.
[20] Michigan Department of Education. (2017). Michigan's Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act.
[21] Arkansas Department of Education. (2017). Every Student Succeeds Act: Arkansas State Plan.

Other states' plans highlight the role of distributed approaches and values within existing leadership initiatives. Officials in **Hawaii** recognize "the importance of shared and effective leadership at all levels," a value built into "the shared leadership model" promoted by the Hawaii Department of Education's Leadership Institute.[22] Understanding "the importance of shared leadership within schools and districts" across the state, officials in **Illinois** plan to continue supporting the educator leader network (ELN), coordinating state and federal dollars for school leader support within and across districts.[23] And officials in **Tennessee** intend to continue the Principal Peer Partnership (P3) initiative "to provide a system of collaboration and support for instructional leaders and to engage administrators… [in] actionable ideas to develop shared leadership capacity."[24]

Some states—including **California, Iowa, Kentucky, Michigan, New Jersey, Rhode Island,** and **Utah**—plan to invest in new professional development for school leaders focused on building their knowledge and skills related to distributed or shared leadership. Officials in Michigan highlight the importance of federal Title II-A dollars to support their plans, which also include developing guidance on staffing structures and differentiated compensation strategies for teacher leaders. In addition, Rhode Island officials plan to use the new Title II leadership set-aside to support school leadership professional development, along with toolkits to support districts in enacting and sustaining shared leadership structures.

Several other states have proposed supporting distributed approaches in schools identified for improvement under the state accountability system. In **Florida**, regional field teams support districts across the state that have schools identified for comprehensive or targeted support and improvement. These field teams serve as liaisons between districts and the state, and they provide strategic problem-solving and capacity-building in a number of areas, including shared leadership. In **New Hampshire**, the plans for schools identified for improvement may include shared leadership structures. **North Carolina**'s plan calls for relevant school and system leaders in districts where more than half of schools have been identified for improvement to receive coaching in collaborative leadership. And in **Oklahoma**, staff at schools that fail to exit improvement status after three years may be required to engage in professional development in priority areas that include collaborative leadership.

Citing research on the importance of working conditions and career paths, officials in **Mississippi** and **New York** have positioned shared leadership structures and systems, at both the school and system levels, as strategies to address teacher and leader turnover and retention.

> **"As part of our approach to distributed leadership, about half of Envision teachers serve in leadership roles…. This is both a strategic and a practical matter. Strategically, we know teachers want to grow and make a difference outside of their classrooms, and leadership offers a way for us to meet that need and keep them fulfilled over time. Practically speaking, there is just that much work that has to get done in order for us to do right by students. To make the work sustainable, we have to carefully and thoughtfully share the load."**
>
> —Laura Robell, Chief Schools Officer, Envision Education

In **Ohio**, shared leadership is one of five critical components the state has identified to support its Early Literacy Plan and Pilot Program.

Finally, in **Kentucky**, officials highlight their ongoing commitment to supporting Local School-Based Decision-Making Councils (SBDM), structures through which parents, teachers, and school leaders share leadership and work together to "set school policy and make decisions outlined in statute" in order to "provide an environment to enhance student achievement."[25]

Clearly, sizable interest exists and real work is happening at the state level pertaining to expanding leadership. Further, our analyses point to a wide range of strategies—and related terminology—proposed by state officials that all fall under the umbrella of distributed leadership. While our analyses focused on how distributed leadership approaches are present in ESSA state plans, we know these concepts are taking hold in other states as well. **Indiana**, for example, named teacher leadership as a priority in its ESSA state plan and subsequently passed legislation establishing a Career Ladders Grant program that includes an option for districts to pursue a distributed leadership approach.[26] These initiatives and activities highlight the complex, flexible nature of distributed leadership approaches.

[22] State of Hawaii Department of Education. (2017). Hawaii Consolidated State Plan: The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended by the Every Student Succeeds Act.
[23] Illinois State Board of Education. (2017). Illinois State Board of Education State Template for the Consolidated State Plan Under the Every Student Succeeds Act.
[24] Tennessee Department of Education. (2017). Every Student Succeeds Act: Building on Success in Tennessee.
[25] Kentucky Department of Education. (2017). Commonwealth of Kentucky Revised Consolidated State Plan Under The Every Student Succeeds Act.
[26] Indiana Department of Education. (2019). HEA 1008 Career Ladders Grant Application. Retrieved from https://www.doe.in.gov/effectiveness/hea-1008-career-ladders-grant-application.

Federal leaders and staff can bolster state and local efforts to support principals in enacting distributed leadership approaches in their schools. Actions include providing adequate funding for educational investments and directing federal dollars toward evidence-based leadership strategies that could include distributed leadership approaches, providing technical assistance and convening state and local leaders to learn from one another and other experts, and continuing to invest in research to build the evidence base on distributed leadership.

Congressional Actions

Raise awareness and build knowledge of distributed leadership. The U.S. Congress, especially authorizing committees, can hold hearings on distributed leadership to raise awareness and build the knowledge of elected representatives, their staffs, and others. Officials can invite researchers, state and local policymakers, school leaders, parents, students, and other stakeholders to testify and offer their unique insights on what works and what doesn't when it comes to advancing distributed leadership at the local and school levels.

Invest in distributed leadership. As states ramp up efforts to prioritize smart investments in leadership, including distributed leadership, the U.S. Congress can appropriate funds for programs explicitly designed to support evidence-based leadership initiatives and partnerships. In particular, Congress can sufficiently fund competitive grant programs, such as the School Leader Recruitment and Support Program (SLRSP), the Supporting Effective Educator Development (SEED) program, the Teacher and School Leader (TSL) grants program, and the Education Innovation and Research (EIR) program. Congress also can use language in appropriations reports to encourage states and districts to use federal dollars to invest in evidence-based, locally tailored strategies to support distributed leadership using their existing Title I and Title II grants.

Administrative Actions

Provide technical assistance and resources on distributed leadership. The U.S. Department of Education, directly or by convening communities of practice led by expert organizations, can provide technical assistance and resources to states on how to create supportive conditions and take strategic actions to foster effective distributed leadership approaches in schools and systems within their states. The Department can also issue guidance on using Title I and Title II formula funds to invest in evidence-based, locally tailored distributed leadership approaches.

Direct federal funds toward projects focused on school leadership. Even where not required by statute, the U.S. Department of Education can use a grant priority[27] to direct federal dollars toward leadership programs and initiatives, including those focused on distributed leadership, as an evidence-based strategy for improving school and student outcomes. Such a priority could be particularly valuable for the SEED, TSL, and EIR programs—each of which has funded projects designed to improve leadership, teaching, and learning in high-need schools. The priority could also be used to direct funding toward leadership via other programs, such as the launch of new charter schools or the expansion of successful ones.

Invest in a school leadership research agenda, especially through grants and competitions administered by the Institute for Education Sciences (IES), which could support new, more rigorous distributed leadership research. Update the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) website to include resources specific to school leadership (e.g., by adding a searchable "Leadership Excellence" topic to complement the "Teacher Excellence" topic) and distributed leadership (e.g., by creating a Practice Guide for school leaders on distributing leadership).

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[27] Existing language of Priority 8 in the Secretary's Supplemental Priorities and Definitions for Discretionary Grant Programs could be used to direct federal competitive grant dollars toward projects focused on distributed leadership. In particular, the U.S. Department of Education could highlight the connection between the research on distributed leadership and strategies under subsection (a) "developing new career pathways for effective educators to assume leadership roles while maintaining instructional responsibilities," subsection (d) "promoting innovative strategies to increase the number of students who have access to effective principals or other school leaders," and subsection (e) "developing or implementing innovative staffing or compensation models to attract or retain effective educators."

> **State leaders and staff** can encourage district and charter network leaders to create more-supportive local conditions for principals to enact distributed leadership approaches in their schools. This effort should emphasize using data and strategic communications to raise awareness about the value of distributed leadership, providing technical assistance and sharing or connecting local leaders to successful models, and securing and directing financial resources to support evidence-based approaches.

Legislative Actions

Create and fund statewide distributed leadership initiatives. Promote innovation by working closely with colleagues at the relevant state and local agencies, as well as with other stakeholders, to develop—and provide funding for—new programs that are designed to advance distributed leadership approaches across the state in ways that meet local needs.

Governor and Chief State School Officer Actions

Raise awareness about the value of distributed leadership. Using public communications, message clearly and consistently the value of distributed leadership in supporting shared goals. Through strategic, thoughtful, nuanced messages, convey the importance of distributed approaches for advancing goals related to top education priorities and strategies, from school turnaround to teacher leadership, teacher retention, and meaningful family and community engagement.

Encourage other state leaders and stakeholders to invest themselves in a shared vision of distributed leadership. Build buy-in for distributed leadership by engaging with other state leaders, including legislators and professional education associations, in strategic, ongoing conversations grounded in the research, local data, and stakeholder insights. Use these conversations as the foundation from which to develop, garner support for, and pitch evidence-based distributed leadership initiatives.

Chief State School Officer and State Department of Education Actions

Invest in and encourage evidence-based distributed leadership approaches. Invest in evidence-based distributed leadership approaches, including by using the federal Title II leadership set-aside to support leadership programs and partnerships, with a strong focus on distributed leadership and a track record of success in achieving critical school and student outcomes. Ask districts—via their ESSA-required local plan—to explain how their strategies incorporate best practices in leadership development, including distributed leadership, and how those approaches meet the law's evidence requirements.

Use data collection to enhance and make the case for distributed leadership. Using existing or targeted new sources, collect and review key data to deeply understand the state's needs and readiness for distributed leadership initiatives. For example, review data on your principal pipeline (e.g., anticipated vacancies, expected enrollment in preparation programs, and geographic alignment between those data) and teacher corps (e.g., survey data on the quality of support they receive from principals and the availability of school-based leadership opportunities). Using that analysis, determine whether it is possible to build on strengths and address gaps via targeted measures (e.g., launching a statewide distributed leadership academy for leaders of rural schools) or if more comprehensive steps are necessary (e.g., updating program-approval processes). Moving forward, use data to inform the continuous improvement of distributed leadership initiatives.

Provide technical assistance, models, and other resources on distributed leadership. Develop guidance for districts regarding the leadership actions whereby principals, with adequate support from their supervisors, can focus their time and attention in order to maximize the effectiveness of distributed leadership in their buildings. For example, the Professional Standards for Education Leaders (PSEL) includes "Develop[ing] the capacity, opportunities, and support for teacher leadership and leadership from other members of the school community" under Standard 6(g). Provide district and school leaders with resources that are specific to discrete aspects of distributed models, such as sample teacher leader job descriptions in which the roles are clearly defined and flexible enough to address school needs. Highlight evidence-based programs designed to build the leadership capacity of entire instructional leadership teams in support of school improvement goals.

Promote balanced autonomy and remove regulatory hurdles that hinder distributed leadership. States can promote local autonomy by removing regulatory barriers that prevent schools from taking steps to foster distributed leadership approaches. For example, update licensure requirements that prevent non-administrators, such as teacher leaders, from conducting observations. Consider allowing educators who do not hold an administrative license to get approved to observe their peers by demonstrating requisite skills through high-quality training.

> **Local school system leaders and staff** can create conditions that support principals to enact distributed leadership approaches in their schools, including by building leadership pipelines and aligned, appropriately flexible strategies, systems, and supports for leaders at all levels of the system.

Superintendent or Charter Network Chief Executive Actions

Establish clear priorities for fostering distributed leadership, and galvanize your team to align systems to support your vision, including via the actions outlined below. Ensure that leadership initiatives align with your strategic plan. In addition, reinforce—via communications and especially improved systems, processes, and strategies—the connection between your top priorities (e.g., a specific partnership or initiative) and your shared goals for school and student success.

Continue to elevate and reinforce the importance of your leadership priorities. Message clearly and consistently the value of distributed leadership in supporting your vision. Directly connect with school leaders, teachers, students, parents, and community members to highlight priority leadership initiatives and strategies to reinforce your deep, personal commitment to building shared, sustained leadership models within and across schools in the system.

Additional District or Charter Network Official Actions

Model the type of leadership necessary to foster effective distributed leadership at the system level. Align words with actions by prioritizing deep, meaningful stakeholder engagement in decisions about system priorities and strategies. Identify and build the capacity of leaders at all levels of the system who can help inform decisions, are likely to influence colleagues and other stakeholders, and will play a critical role in successfully implementing school improvement strategies.

Prioritize building leadership pipelines, and invest in evidence-based leadership development for educators at all levels. Take steps to support principals as instructional leaders and talent developers by creating coherent, system-wide strategies for educators at all levels to build aligned leadership experiences and skills, tailored to their roles and career trajectories. Ensure that opportunities reflect system needs and are flexible enough to meet the distinct needs of schools and educators.

Ensure sustainable funding for your leadership pipeline. Directly invest in evidence-based, job-embedded teacher leader training, principal preparation and support, and instructional leadership team professional development options that have a proven track record of improving school and student outcomes. Use existing federal Title I and Title II dollars to pay for training or stipends for new leadership positions. Consider funding discrete initiatives by applying for funding through federal competitive grant programs, such as those listed in the Congressional and Administrative Actions sections above.

Provide principals with balanced autonomy to promote distributed leadership. Update policies and procedures to ensure that principals have authority to hire their teams, deploy their budgets, and create school schedules and structures that support the distributed leadership model that works best for their school communities. In a related action, remove local policy barriers that could prevent principals from hiring and strategically promoting and coaching educators into leadership positions.

Ensure that district calendars and schedules support school action regarding distributed leadership. In particular, consult with principals and other stakeholders to revisit the school year calendar and support the creation of daily school schedules (e.g., via models and exemplars) that are conducive to collaboration, professional learning, shared problem-solving and decision-making structures, and other systems that principals must put in place to support distributed leadership.

Invest in principal supervisors who can coach and model effective distributed leadership. Provide support and mentoring for principals specifically regarding distributed leadership, and consider extending that support to other leaders within the building, where appropriate. Ensure that job descriptions, recruitment, selection, and ongoing support for principal supervisors reflect their responsibility for supporting principals to distribute leadership; this action includes prioritizing the hiring of former school leaders who have successfully implemented distributed leadership approaches and who can model the strategic vulnerability necessary to build and sustain a foundational culture of trust with the principals and schools they oversee.

Encourage and support school leaders to strategically engage students, families, and community members in leadership. From hiring through support and performance management, reinforce the connection between thoughtful community engagement and school and student outcomes. Support principals in integrating students, families, and other community members into problem-solving and decision-making structures, with a specific eye toward building their leadership capacity.

VIGNETTES | Distributed Leadership in Action

To bring the research and policy actions to life, we have developed a series of vignettes that show how school and system leaders are distributing leadership and, together, improving results for schools and students. By capturing their learning and experiences, we aim to help illustrate what is possible when supportive, evidence-based practices and conditions are in place. In some cases, these stories also help fill in gaps in the research by showcasing locally tailored strategies that test elements that currently have a less robust (or missing) evidence base.

Leadership in Action | School Leader features Hugo Saucedo, Principal, Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas.

Leadership in Action | Charter Network Leader features Laura Robell, Chief of Schools, Envision Education in the San Francisco Bay Area, California.

Leadership in Action | Small Rural District features Donnell Cannon, Principal, North Edgecombe High School in Tarboro, North Carolina, and a partnership among Edgecombe County Public Schools, NC State University, and two nonprofits.

Leadership in Action | Large Metropolitan District features Dr. Allison Tingwall, Principal, Curie High School in Chicago, Illinois, along with officials who have engaged with Chicago Public Schools' Lead with CPS initiative.

Leadership in Action | Statewide Initiative features Colorado's School Leadership Pilot Program, made possible by close collaboration between the state's legislative and executive branches.

CONCLUSION | Making a Difference for Students Within and Across Schools and Systems

Distributed leadership approaches extend traditional conceptions of leadership and call on officials to think differently about how policies can strengthen school communities and students' educational experiences. By grounding policies in the six key elements outlined above, policymakers can support schools in fostering and sustaining the spirit of initiative, collaboration, and mutual support that is central to effective distributed leadership models. When well-designed and well-implemented, the results can be transformative for schools, communities, and, most crucially, America's children.

> **"We want the entire school community to be involved in planning and organizing their work. We want teachers to feel valued, included, and satisfied in their job. We want them to experience a real sense of efficacy and like their talents, individually and collectively, are making a difference. We want them to feel like leadership is truly distributive and they are growing and leading together. If we can master distributive leadership, we'll have the synergy to create optimal learning environments in all of our schools, helping all students learn at high levels."**
>
> —Colleen O'Neil, Associate Commissioner of the Educator Talent Division, Colorado Department of Education

Resource A:
Distributed Leadership
A Definition for Policymakers

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP RESOURCE A | A Definition for Policymakers

The term "distributed leadership" is used throughout the education sector, yet it is rarely defined. Further, many similar terms, such as shared leadership and collective leadership, are often used interchangeably with distributed leadership, potentially contributing to confusion among education researchers, policymakers, advocates, and other stakeholders. On the basis of our literature review, as well as our decades of experience training school and system-level leaders, we have developed the following research- and practice-based definition of distributed leadership:

> **DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | A DEFINITION FOR POLICYMAKERS**
> Distributed leadership refers to a range of flexible approaches to school organization, management, and operations that expand traditional conceptions of leadership to include a wide range of both formal and informal leadership roles and activities.
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> While the specifics may vary by context, all models include an effective principal who fosters a trusting culture, promotes collaboration, and organizes, taps, and marshals school resources (including through staffing, scheduling, and other structures and strategies) to help build the leadership and overall capacity of teachers, students, parents, and the school community as a whole.
>
> When these elements are in place, distributed leadership approaches can yield important improvements to school and student outcomes that may exceed the sum of individual contributions.

Distributed leadership is an approach to improving school and student outcomes that extends traditional conceptions of leadership in several crucial ways:

Distributed approaches expand our conception of who leads beyond formal leaders (e.g., the principal, assistant principals, and deans) to more members of the school community. It shifts the focus of school leadership from the principal as a lone, heroic leader to the broader school organization and its constituents, including teachers, other educators and support staff, students, parents, and even local community members. The distributed perspective also expands the focus from people in formal leadership roles (i.e., those who have positional leadership or authority) to a recognition of informal leadership that is executed by many individuals within the school community.[1] In other words, some individuals may serve in formal leadership roles while many—or even most—do not. The principal role in distributed approaches is crucial, as we'll explore further in the sections that follow. At the same time, while the positional authority of the principal and other formal leaders represents an important place to start understanding leadership within a school building, a deeper and more accurate conception of leadership will look at the many people within a school community who exercise leadership, in big ways and small.[2]

Distributed approaches broaden our understanding of how various members of the school community might exercise leadership. The distributed perspective encompasses both the formal, more structured "principal plus defined-role leaders" approach to school organization and the reality that leadership is a living practice that is highly influenced by the local context and emerging, even daily developments within school communities.[3] In other words, distributed approaches look beyond leadership via authority—an individual is "in charge" and, therefore, others must comply—to an expanded understanding of who leads and of the practices, functions, and activities that constitute leadership.[4] In particular, distributed approaches acknowledge that leadership occurs when individuals work together to make decisions, identify and solve problems, build and share expertise, and otherwise influence the way the school operates to meet shared goals. Through these processes, individuals can transfer, exchange, or create shared knowledge and strategies related to instructional practices, classroom management, and other crucial aspects of their work. For some, especially those accustomed to and perhaps more comfortable with traditional, hierarchical notions of authoritative leadership, this shift may feel like a radical re-envisioning of leadership.

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[1] Gronn, P. (2002). Distributed leadership as a unit of analysis. The Leadership Quarterly, 13(4), 423-451.
[2] Spillane, J. P., Camburn, E. M., Pustejovsky, J., Pareja, A. S., & Lewis, G. (2009). Taking a distributed perspective in studying school leadership and management: The challenge of study operations. In K. Leithwood & A. Harris, (eds.). Distributed leadership: Different perspectives (pp. 47-80). Netherlands: Springer.
[3] Spillane, J. P., Halverson, R., & Diamond, J. B. (2001). Investigating school leadership practice: A distributed perspective. Educational researcher, 30(3), 23-28.
[4] Gronn, 2002.

Distributed approaches showcase greater variety regarding when and where leadership is exercised. Often, we think of leadership taking place via formal processes (e.g., team meetings, parent-teacher associations, etc.)—and, indeed, such structured opportunities can support the aligned, sustained execution of leadership by more individuals who have a stake in the success of students and the school as a whole. At the same time, distributed approaches recognize the important ways individuals lead through influence.[1] Social interactions within schools create "influence relationships" by which individuals, even those who do not hold formal leadership titles but often have important experience or expertise to share, can serve as important leaders within the building.[2] Hence, the distributed approach acknowledges that leadership also occurs in the daily interactions among members of the school community (e.g., hallway conversations between teachers, interactions among parents outside of school, etc.) and that these interactions can substantially influence school culture, operations, and outcomes. In this way, the distributed perspective highlights the situational nature of leadership: how individuals respond to challenges that arise in their work and take initiative to proactively advance ideas, practices, and solutions that improve the teaching and learning environment in their schools.[3] In other words, leadership can occur whenever and wherever issues that need to be addressed arise.

Distributed approaches shift our perspective on why we should aim to expand leadership. It is not simply about restructuring the organization to share the workload of leadership, which has become unmanageable for a single principal to handle—though that is certainly part of it. In the distributed perspective, we are equally concerned with how individuals work as a collective to achieve more than the sum of their individual contributions[4, 5, 6, 7] and thereby strengthen a school's overall capacity for improvement.[8] Distributed leadership highlights how expanded leadership takes advantage of and multiplies previously untapped expertise—and how it promotes the effectiveness and sustainability of school improvement efforts that lead to measurable improvements in student achievement and other important outcomes. By recognizing leadership as both "designed" and "lived,"[9] the distributed perspective can help principals identify all sources of leadership in the building[10] and take advantage of untapped leadership potential.[11] In some cases, it can also help formal leaders address practices that may undermine shared school improvement efforts. Underlying the distributed perspective are notions of collective, collaborative, shared, and conjoined processes that allow all members of a school community to work together in pursuing common goals, organizational learning, and individual growth.[12] In this respect, distributed leadership is an approach for achieving better-informed decision-making, greater instructional effectiveness, and general school improvement[13, 14]—not merely lightening a principal's workload by asking other individuals to take on specific leadership duties.

Taken together, distributed approaches are inherently flexible. With an expanded understanding of who leads, how they exercise leadership, when and where leadership occurs, what leadership looks like in practice, and why distributed approaches to leadership are valuable, it becomes clear that many aspects of distributed models will look different from one school to the next. Given how much of the decisions related to distributed leadership are influenced by the school context—including its assets, needs, priorities, and preferences—variation is to be expected. Distributed approaches also are affected by local conditions, the resources and constraints within the system that ultimately shape what happens in classrooms and schools. For distributed leadership to address the unique needs of schools, it must look different from one school to the next and from one local context to another. The flexible nature of distributed leadership is, thus, by design. It is, in fact, an aspect of the distributed approach that makes it so valuable: it can be applied to any school, urban or rural, high-achieving or in-need-of-improvement, *anywhere*.

[1] Supovitz, J. A. and Riggan, M. (2012). Building a Foundation for School Leadership: An Evaluation of the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project, 2006-2010. CPRE Research Reports. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/67.
[2] Spillane, Halverson, & Diamond, 2001.
[3] Spillane, J. P. (2005, June). Distributed leadership. In The Educational Forum (Vol. 69, No. 2, pp. 143-150). Taylor & Francis Group.
[4] Copland, M. A. (2003). Leadership of inquiry: Building and sustaining capacity for school improvement. Educational evaluation and policy analysis 25, no. 4 (2003): 375-395.
[5] Fullan, M. and Hargreaves, A. (1996). What's Worth Fighting for in Your School? Revised Edition. Teachers College Press, 1234 Amsterdam Avenue, New York, NY.
[6] Harris, A. (2004). Distributed leadership and school improvement: leading or misleading?. Educational Management Administration & Leadership 32, no. 1 (2004): 11-24.
[7] Leithwood, K. and Blair Mascall. (2008) Collective leadership effects on student achievement. Educational administration quarterly 44, no. 4 (2008): 529-561.
[8] Dinham, S. (2005). Principal leadership for outstanding educational outcomes. Journal of Educational Administration, 43(4), 338-356.
[9] Spillane et al., 2009.
[10] Spillane et al., 2009.
[11] Valdez, M., Broin, A., and Carroll, K. (2014). Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/research-policy/untapped/.
[12] Harris, A. & DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Distributed leadership in practice: Evidence, misconceptions and possibilities. Management in Education, 30(4), 141-146.
[13] DeFlaminis, J. A. (2009, April). The design and structure of the building distributed leadership in the Philadelphia School District Project. In Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.
[14] Supovitz & Riggan, 2012.

Resource B:
Distributed Leadership
Literature Review Findings

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP RESOURCE B | Literature Review Findings

Many studies have been conducted on distributed leadership or similar approaches to school leadership, including shared leadership, collaborative leadership, collective leadership, and teacher leadership. For this literature review, we initially examined more than 70 studies and articles on distributed leadership and related topics. Of those, 32 seminal works met our criteria for inclusion in the in-depth literature review and are listed at the end of this resource.

The research we reviewed suggests that distributed leadership offers a powerful way of perceiving and understanding leadership as it exists in schools. It has the potential to help schools achieve what they cannot under the leadership of a single principal or even a small group of administrators.[1] Further, distributed leadership models may enhance schools' capacity for organizational learning and for collective improvement by tapping un- or under-utilized leadership potential in a school.[2] As a result, distributed approaches may support more-sustainable school improvement.[3, 4]

Below we highlight key outcomes of effective distributed leadership approaches and other takeaways from our literature review. We explain how those outcomes meet evidence requirements under federal law, and we describe six key elements common across distributed leadership models. Finally, we include research citations for the 32 seminal reports from which we have drawn our findings.

> **DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | SCHOOL AND STUDENT OUTCOMES**
> 1) Promotes Collaboration—*Strong Evidence*
> 2) Fosters Teacher Leadership—*Strong Evidence*
> 3) Supports Instructional Improvement—*Moderate Evidence*
> 4) May Increase Teacher Job Satisfaction and Foster Stronger Organizational Commitment—*Promising Evidence*
> 5) May Contribute to Increased Student Achievement—*Promising Evidence*

1) Distributed Leadership Promotes Collaboration
In schools where leadership is distributed effectively, there is greater collaboration among school staff members and more-collaborative team problem-solving and decision-making. These findings come from a report by Jonathan Supovitz and Namrata Tognatta, based on data gathered via an experimental study of the Philadelphia Distributed Leadership Initiative. The results were positive and statistically significant.[5]

TAKEAWAY: Distributed leadership approaches can be an effective strategy for building trusting, collaborative school cultures in which school leaders, teachers, and other community members work together toward a shared vision for student success.

2) Distributed Leadership Fosters Teacher Leadership
Distributed leadership models promote and strengthen teacher leadership, increasing educator voice in shaping school practices and providing exceptional teachers with more and better opportunities to expand their reach, positively influence instruction, and advance in their careers. These findings come from a report by Jonathan Supovitz and Matthew Riggan, based on data gathered via an experimental study of the Philadelphia Distributed Leadership Initiative. Once again, the results were positive and statistically significant.[6]

TAKEAWAY: Distributed leadership approaches can be an effective strategy for creating career ladders for teachers and supporting teachers to expand their reach to benefit more students.

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[1] Supovitz, J., D'Auria, J., and Spillane, J. (2019). Meaningful & Sustainable Improvement with Distributed Leadership. CPRE Reports Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/112.

[2] Spillane, J. P., Camburn, E. M., Pustejovsky, J., Pareja, A. S., and Lewis, G. (2009). Taking a distributed perspective in studying school leadership and management: The challenge of study operations. In K. Leithwood and A. Harris, (eds.). Distributed leadership: Different perspectives (pp. 47-80). Netherlands: Springer.

[3] DeFlaminis, J. A. (2009, April). The design and structure of the building distributed leadership in the Philadelphia School District Project. In Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, San Diego, CA.

[4] Harris, A. and DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Distributed leadership in practice: Evidence, misconceptions and possibilities. Management in Education, 30(4), 141-146.

[5] Supovitz, J. A., and Tognatta, N. (2013). The impact of distributed leadership on collaborative team decision making. Leadership and Policy in Schools. 12(2), 101-121.

[6] Supovitz, J. A. and Riggan, M. (2012). Building a Foundation for School Leadership: An Evaluation of the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project, 2006-2010. CPRE Research Reports. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/67.

3) Distributed Leadership Supports Instructional Improvement

In schools where leadership is distributed more widely, teachers engage in a number of important practices that support instructional improvement. Teachers are more likely to access teacher leaders and other formal instructional leaders as resources for their development,[7] rather than solely relying on advice from nearby colleagues who may or may not have the necessary expertise to support their instructional needs. In addition, in schools where teacher leaders are regularly tapped to lead team meetings—as opposed to schools in which administrators lead most meetings—more discussions about instructional change occur.[8] Notably, it is not just the existence of these opportunities that matters, but also how the meetings are run: when individuals who are already seen as informal leaders within the building are tapped for formal leadership positions, teams have more-candid conversations about how to improve instruction in the context of their schools and classrooms.[9] These findings come from a report by Eric Camburn and S.W. Han assessing data from a quasi-experimental study of the America's Choice Comprehensive School Reform (CSR) Program, which relies heavily on a distributed leadership approach to reorganizing schools. This study included many features of high-quality research, but it is missing the key ingredient of random assignment. The results were positive and statistically significant. [10]

TAKEAWAY: Distributed leadership approaches can be an effective strategy for improving instructional practices across a school, especially when school leaders tap the right expertise within the building for leadership opportunities.

4) Distributed Leadership May Increase Teacher Job Satisfaction and Foster Stronger Organizational Commitment

Teachers express greater job satisfaction when they work in schools where leadership is distributed.[11] This outcome appears to be strongly related to the quality and quantity of peer collaboration teachers engage in during their daily work. In addition, teachers in distributed leadership settings have greater academic optimism, efficacy, and trust, and they are more willing to work with their colleagues outside of their own classrooms and to make altruistic contributions as members of the organization.[12] This is particularly so when leadership roles and functions are distributed across an organization through careful and collective planning, with buy-in from the members of the organization, and where there is alignment among school departments.[13] Further, in schools where leadership is highly distributed and teams are more cohesive, teachers demonstrate stronger organizational commitment.[14] Organizational commitment refers to teachers' belief in shared goals and values and their willingness to take action to make a positive impact on the school community.

Of note, the research shows that the distribution of supportive leadership functions (e.g., setting and promoting a collective school vision and motivating staff and community members), rather than distribution of supervisory leadership functions (e.g., managing and holding staff accountable), predicts stronger organizational commitment of teachers.[15] Thus, school leaders should be supported in efforts to distribute specific leadership responsibilities, including those that enable teachers to work together to create shared values, establish a common sense of purpose, and develop shared goals.[16]

These positive, statistically significant findings come from three correlational studies, which look at the relationship between variables but cannot point to cause-and-effect, authored by Darlene García Torres; by Blair Mascall, Kenneth Leithwood, Tiiu Straus, and Robin Sacks; and by Hester Hulpia, Geert Devos, and Yves Rosseel.

TAKEAWAY: Distributed leadership approaches may be an effective strategy for addressing teacher retention issues.

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[7] Camburn, E. M., and Han, S. W. (2009). Investigating connections between distributed leadership and instructional change. In Distributed Leadership (pp. 25-45). Netherlands: Springer.
[8] Supovitz and Riggan, 2012.
[9] Supovitz and Riggan, 2012.
[10] Camburn and Han, 2009.
[11] Torres, D. G. (2019). Distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and teachers' job satisfaction in U.S. schools. Teaching and Teacher Education, 79. 111-123.
[12] Mascall, B., Leithwood, K., Straus, T., and Sacks, R. (2008). The relationship between distributed leadership and teachers' academic optimism. Journal of Educational Administration, 46(2), 214-228.
[13] Mascall, Leithwood, Straus, and Sacks, 2008.
[14] Hulpia, H., Devos, G., and Rosseel, Y. (2009). The relationship between the perception of distributed leadership in secondary schools and teachers' and teacher leaders' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. School Effectiveness and School Improvement, 20(3), 291-317.
[15] Hulpia, Devos, and Rosseel, 2009.
[16] Torres, D. G. (2019). Distributed leadership, professional collaboration, and teachers' job satisfaction in U.S. schools. Teaching and Teacher Education, 79. 111-123.

5) Distributed Leadership May Contribute to Increased Student Achievement

Studies connecting distributed leadership to student outcomes are limited. Identifying the unique effect of distributed leadership on student outcomes, like all leadership interventions, is inherently challenging,[17] as leaders' influence on students is often indirect, multifaceted, and difficult to disentangle from the other school factors. That said, two studies have begun to show how distributing leadership across multiple stakeholders could shape student outcomes.

In one study, teachers' perceptions of how well their principals promoted and enhanced leadership by other staff was positively related to school improvement capacity, and the level of school improvement capacity was then positively related to student growth in reading and math.[18] In another study, the strength of leadership across multiple school stakeholders was found to have an indirect, positive effect on student achievement; distributed leadership was found to improve teachers' motivation, performance, and work environments, which in turn correlated with stronger student achievement outcomes.[19] Of note, this study found especially strong correlations between greater student achievement and higher levels of influence by staff teams (though not individual teacher leaders), individual parents, parent advisory councils, and students.[20]

These findings come from two correlational studies of collaborative and collective leadership approaches conducted by Phillip Hallinger and Ronald Heck, and by Kenneth Leithwood and Blair Mascall. The results in both reports were positive and statistically significant; however, due to the studies' designs, they suggest a relationship but cannot point to cause-and-effect.

TAKEAWAY: Distributed leadership approaches are likely a strategy to improve student achievement, especially if they include a focus on instructional leadership teams and on strategically engaging and empowering parents and students.

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[17] Leithwood, K., and Mascall, B. (2008). Collective leadership effects on student achievement. Educational administration quarterly 44, no. 4 (2008): 529-561.
[18] Hallinger, P., and Heck, R. H. (2010). Collaborative leadership and school improvement: Understanding the impact on school capacity and student learning. School Leadership and Management, 30(2), 95-110.
[19] Leithwood and Mascall, 2008.
[20] Leithwood and Mascall, 2008.

While the research has not prescribed a pre-packaged distributed leadership program, through our literature review we identified a set of six common characteristics of effective distributed leadership models. In this section, we describe these key elements and, in doing so, offer a framework for conceptualizing the flexible notion of distributed leadership.

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DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | 6 KEY ELEMENTS
Key Element 1: An Effective Principal
Key Element 2: Collaborative Learning, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making
Key Element 3: Strategic Opportunities for Engagement
Key Element 4: Empowered Staff and Community Members, Especially Teacher Leaders
Key Element 5: A Culture of Trust
Key Element 6: A Focus on Capacity-Building

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Key Element 1: An Effective Principal. In successful, high-performing schools, formal leaders exercise leadership that empowers, encourages, and supports others to develop their own capacity to lead.[21, 22] In distributed approaches, a skilled principal is key—not a lone, heroic leader, but rather an individual with both positional and relational authority who is committed to fostering leadership across the school and who has the mindset, knowledge, skills, and supports necessary to bring a distributed leadership approach to life. As a practical matter, keeping the role of the principal at the forefront acknowledges the structure and organization of authority established by the district, which presumes the existence of a formal leader at the top of the school hierarchy. In addition to reflecting the reality of how most schools are structured today, distributed leadership models also acknowledge the reality that democratic or participatory decision-making processes can get stuck; a formal leader can exercise leadership differently depending on context,[23] sometimes engaging in truly collective, consensus-driven decision-making and, at other times, gathering input before making the ultimate call, thereby ensuring smooth, efficient operations.

Below we elaborate on the **importance of the principal's role** by highlighting the ways in which research has found principals to be especially crucial for bringing each of these key elements of distributed leadership approaches to life.

Key Element 2: Collaborative Learning, Problem-Solving, and Decision-Making. In schools where leadership is effectively distributed, all school actors, including those who do not hold formal leadership positions, help to establish a shared understanding of their school's particular needs, deliberating on solutions and establishing shared goals.[24] A single authority figure does not dictate individual practices or plans for action. Rather, individual practices are planned, executed, and improved based on collaborative processes and the collective learning that occurs through those processes.[25] Mutual influence is the norm: teachers' practice is affected by school leaders, for example, but teachers also engage with and actively influence the problem-solving and decision-making that leads to instructional changes or other shifts in classroom practice.

To Foster Collaborative Learning and Decision-Making, Principals Must Lead Differently. For principals, distributing leadership requires that they figure out alternative expressions of their leadership.[26] They may have to adjust how they exercise their authority, and the extent to which they exert it; in the process, they take on new acts of leadership as someone who fosters and develops leadership in others.[27] Rather than by serving as the sole decision-makers, they must exert influence by nurturing effective, skillful, and well-informed problem-solving and decision-making on the part of their staff and other members of their school communities. Further, they must understand that empowered staff will necessarily sometimes disagree with their decisions and that these divergences must be handled respectfully and in a way that optimizes team culture and decision-making.[28]

[21] Dinham, S. (2005). Principal leadership for outstanding educational outcomes. Journal of Educational Administration, 43(4), 338-356.
[22] New Leaders. (2012). Playmakers: How Great Principals Build and Lead Great Teams of Teachers. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/research-policy/playmakers/.
[23] Supovitz, J., D'Auria, J., & Spillane, J. (2019). Meaningful & Sustainable Improvement with Distributed Leadership. CPRE Reports. Retrieved from https://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/112.
[24] Harris, A. and DeFlaminis, J. (2016). Distributed leadership in practice: Evidence, misconceptions and possibilities. Management in Education, 30(4), 141-146.
[25] Supovitz, J. A. and Riggan, M. (2012). Building a Foundation for School Leadership: An Evaluation of the Annenberg Distributed Leadership Project, 2006-2010. CPRE Research Reports. Retrieved from http://repository.upenn.edu/cpre_researchreports/67.
[26] Supovitz and Riggin, 2012.
[27] New Leaders, 2012.
[28] Supovitz, J. (2019, August 21). Personal interview with New Leaders.

Key Element 3: Strategic Opportunities for Engagement. Creating and supporting leadership teams, professional learning communities (PLCs), councils, and other structured opportunities for teachers, students, parents, and other school community members is a key strategy for promoting the collaborative learning, problem-solving, decision-making, and capacity-building that are central to distributed leadership approaches. For example, by having regular, predictable opportunities to work together during the school day, teachers can exercise leadership by leading a grade-level or department meeting, observing a colleague's lesson, or facilitating a data-driven inquiry cycle. During these sessions, other teachers learn valuable information to help improve their practice, and they have opportunities to participate in problem-solving and decision-making, giving them a voice in the school's improvement strategies. Parent and student councils and community meetings provide similar opportunities for other school stakeholders to engage in leadership and shared decision-making. In this way, distributed leadership teams promote collaboration among teachers and staff, and support individual and collective efforts to improve instructional practice.[29]

With the Right Local Conditions, Principals Can Create Structured Opportunities for Engagement. Principals create school schedules and can provide regular time for teachers and community members to get together to share ideas, collaborate, problem-solve, improve their practice, and engage in conversations about how to best advance school goals. These opportunities could be formal (e.g., professional development sessions, department meetings, PTA meetings, etc.) or informal (e.g., scheduling common prep periods for all grade levels so teachers can informally connect to discuss problems of practice). Principals can also ensure staff tapped for formal leadership roles have time built into their days to learn, plan, and execute leadership responsibilities. All of these choices require principals to be thoughtful about how and when teachers and other community members are able to engage with one another, paying special attention to the expectations teachers have regarding their planning periods, practical concerns with parent schedules, and other considerations. Provided they have appropriate flexibility and are not limited by local constraints on the school schedule, principals can play a powerful role in creating structures to support distributed leadership.

Key Element 4: Empowered Staff and Community Members, Especially Teacher Leaders. An important element of a distributed approach is when staff and community members feel empowered to exercise leadership. Their empowerment comes from being aware that their knowledge and experiences are assets to the organization, being appreciated for what they have to offer, and having opportunities to make a real impact.[30] It can also be helpful for individuals to have opportunities to explore their own needs and interests, so that they may feel they are growing personally and professionally while advancing the goals of the broader organization.[31] The literature also emphasizes the importance of improving teachers' self-confidence to act as leaders in order to build their capacity to lead.[32]

Principals Grow Leaders to Meet Their Unique Needs. Principals have an important role to play in encouraging and supporting individuals, especially teachers, to take on new responsibilities and roles.[33] In terms of managing leadership structures, principals ensure formal leaders understand the expectations for their work as leaders, and they set the tone for a school climate that encourages everyone to take initiative and engage in acts of leadership, both large and small. Understanding the experience and expertise of teachers and other community members, including acknowledging informal leadership taking place in their schools, principals can strategically tap individuals for leadership positions—especially teacher leader roles[34]—and prioritize specific skills or backgrounds during hiring. While policymakers can support schools to implement and sustain new leadership roles—e.g., through investments in teacher leadership—it is crucial that principals and schools retain sufficient autonomy to use new positions, dollars, and other resources to meet their needs.[35] Optimally, principals, in collaboration with their school communities, will design a model of distributed leadership that works best for their context, and the specific roles and opportunities will vary from school to school.

[29] Chen, S. (2018). Influence of Functional and Relational Perspectives of Distributed Leadership on Instructional Change and School Climate. The Elementary School Journal, 119(2), 298-326.
[30] Harris, A. (2003). Teacher leadership as distributed leadership: heresy, fantasy or possibility? School Leadership & Management, 23(3), 313-324.
[31] Harris, 2003.
[32] Harris, 2003.
[33] Supovitz and Riggin, 2012.
[34] Valdez, M., Broin, A., and Carroll, K. (2014). Untapped: Transforming Teacher Leadership to Help Students Succeed. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/research-policy/untapped/.
[35] Ikemoto, G., Taliaferro, L., Fenton, B., and Davis, J. (2014). Great principals at scale: Creating district conditions that enable all principals to be effective. The Bush Institute and New Leaders. Retrieved from https://newleaders.org/research-policy/great-principals-at-scale/.

Key Element 5: A Culture of Trust. In the distributed approach, people who are not in traditional leadership roles have opportunities to provide feedback, engage in shared decision-making, and contribute to collective improvement efforts in an environment in which they can trust that their input and contributions will be respected and valued.[36] Trust among staff and teachers plays a crucial role in determining the effectiveness of a distributed approach to leadership.[37] High-functioning leadership teams tend to be preceded by strong trust between the team and the school principal.[38] While trust is essential in creating a culture of shared decision-making, fostering it can be one of the most challenging tasks, depending on the history of administrator-teacher, teacher-teacher, or other relationships within the school.[39] Given that a distributed approach expects teachers to exercise duties above and beyond their traditional roles and responsibilities, whether formally or informally, it is perhaps unsurprising that trust is so important. Engaging in collective learning, problem-solving, and shared decision-making, all geared toward achieving a common goal for the school organization, are aspects of the distributed approach that could be viewed as exciting or anxiety-producing for staff members, depending on the level of trust they have in school leaders as well as the level buy-in they feel for the vision.

Principals Play a Key Role in Building a Culture of Trust. It is crucial for the principal to ensure that this trust exists in a school, and research has found this is especially true in the context of distributed leadership models.[40] For distributed leadership models to be effective, it is particularly important that trusting relationships exist between administrators and teachers,[41] as well as between teachers and other members of the school community.

Key Element 6: A Focus on Capacity-Building and Sustainability
Distributing leadership helps members of the school community grow and improve in their individual practice and strengthens a school's overall capacity for improvement. In particular, effective teachers who take on instructional leadership responsibilities deepen their expertise by teaching and coaching their peers, going back into their own classrooms with stronger practice; in addition, they maximize instructional improvement schoolwide by affecting the practice of their colleagues in other classrooms.[42] By recognizing teachers' instructional expertise as a valued asset for the school[43] and tapping teachers to lead instructional programming—from selecting or recommending curricula, to leading student data analyses, and observing and providing feedback to colleagues on their practice—schools can achieve immediate improvements.[44] They are also better positioned to sustain those improvements over time.[45]

Principals Are Uniquely Positioned to Distribute Leadership to Build Capacity. As the leaders of the school's vision of excellence, equity, and improvement—and often the individuals responsible for implementing or, at minimum, overseeing staff evaluations and related professional development—principals are uniquely positioned to connect both individual and collective strengths to school priorities.

[36] Dinham, 2005.
[37] Bryk, A., and Schneider, B. (2002). Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement. Russell Sage Foundation; Smylie, M. A., Mayrowetz, D., Murphy, J., & Louis, K. S. (2007). Trust and the development of distributed leadership. Journal of School Leadership, 17(4), 469-503.
[38] Supovitz and Riggan, 2012.
[39] Supovitz and Riggin, 2012.
[40] Smylie, M. A., Mayrowetz, D., Murphy, J., & Louis, K. S. (2007). Trust and the development of distributed leadership. Journal of School Leadership, 17(4), 469-503.
[41] Smylie, Mayrowetz, Murphy, and Louis, 2007.
[42] Mayrowetz, D. (2008). Making sense of distributed leadership: Exploring the multiple usages of the concept in the field. Educational Administration Quarterly, 44(3), 424-435.
[43] Supovitz and Riggan, 2012.
[44] Hallinger, P., and Heck, R. H. (2009). Distributed leadership in schools: Does system policy make a difference? In Distributed Leadership (pp. 101-117). Netherlands: Springer.
[45] Hallinger and Heck, 2009.

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | LITERATURE REVIEW BACKGROUND
We focused our research on 32 seminal reports of distributed leadership, all of which were published post-2000. These works represent almost exclusively empirical studies of distributed leadership rather than other related or similar concepts. In addition, we home in on those works that base their conceptualization and operationalization of distributed leadership in the theories and literature that have defined it as a distinctive concept. We have included findings from select works that offer definitions of other similar concepts that resemble our definition of distributed leadership. With a few notable exceptions, the works featured in this review are studies of the United States school context.

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Resource C:
Distributed Leadership
Research and Policy Considerations

DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP | RESEARCH AND POLICY CONSIDERATIONS
Policymakers should prioritize outcomes over prescribed inputs when developing research-based, actionable strategies to foster effective distributed leadership models in states, districts, and school systems across the country. In particular, where empirical research is lacking, policymakers may need to invest in research, rely on data (including data gathered via stakeholder engagement), or design logic models that connect research to measurable outcomes. The overall goal is to ensure that the theories of action underpinning distributed leadership policies are sound.

We have learned a great deal about distributed leadership that policymakers can use to support their goals for school and student success. Nevertheless, the research base on distributed leadership approaches continues to be limited in several ways. In particular, future research could explore other shared elements of distributed models based on:

School level or size. For example, it may be that distributed approaches in elementary schools look very different from those enacted in high schools. School size generally may be more important than the grade levels of the students served.

School location. For example, distributed approaches in rural areas may share unique characteristics when compared with schools in more densely populated urban areas.

History of school performance. For example, a distributed model designed to transform a low-performing school may look very different from a model designed to move a school from good to great.

Staff experience or tenure. For example, distributed approaches in schools led by novice principals or those with a large percentage of new staff (such as a start-up) may differ in important ways from schools led by a veteran principal or those whose staffs have been relatively stable for a long period of time.

Student or community characteristics. For example, it may be that successful distributed leadership approaches for schools serving large populations of Latinx students share similar characteristics, whereas those serving students who come from lower- or higher-income households may differ. Or they may not—the empirical research does not shed light on these and similar questions.

There is also a **lack of attention to the larger context in which schools operate**—the extent to which policies and conditions work together to support or inhibit school-level approaches to distributed leadership. For example, it may be that certain types of governance structures (e.g., local school councils) tend to foster or inhibit distributed leadership models. We do not know whether traditional public schools, public charter schools, private or independent schools, innovation schools, or schools run by other entities (e.g., the Bureau of Indian Education) can offer additional lessons on how context affects the effectiveness of distributed approaches. The research has not sufficiently explored these and related questions.

In addition, **gaps in a number of other areas are of strategic importance.** For example, is there a difference in the magnitude of impact when leaders in emerging roles (e.g., teacher leaders, parent-teacher advisory council leaders, etc.) are compensated for their leadership responsibilities? What compensation structures or priorities (e.g., ensuring funding is available for substitute teachers, childcare during parent and community engagement sessions, etc.) lead to stronger school and student outcomes? Many school systems are also grappling with significant gaps in the diversity of their education workforce, which, if addressed, could promote stronger academic outcomes for students of color. Given that the principal ranks remain overwhelmingly white and male, yet research has found benefits for both students[1] and teachers[2] when principals share their racial/ethnic identity, how can distributed leadership support efforts to increase the diversity and effectiveness of the educator workforce as a whole?

Finally, **constraints inherent to the distributed leadership framework** make designing high-quality research challenging. Because of its flexible nature—and the fact that variation is not only expected, but actually part of its value—distributed leadership is, and will continue to be, a difficult concept to study and from which to draw universal conclusions.

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[1] Black and Hispanic students are better represented in gifted programs when they attend schools led by principals who share their racial/ethnic identity. Source: Grissom, J., Rodriguez, L., and Kern, E. (2017). Teacher and Principal Diversity and the Representation of Students of Color in Gifted Programs: Evidence from National Data. The Elementary School Journal, 117(3). Retrieved from https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/full/10.1086/690274.

[2] Teachers of color have higher levels of job satisfaction and lower turnover rates if their principal is also a person of color. Source: Grissom, J., and Keiser, L. (2011). A supervisor like me: Race, representation, and the satisfaction and turnover decisions of public sector employees. Journal of Policy Analysis and Management, 30(3), 557-580. Retrieved from https://www.jstor.org/stable/23018964.

Leadership in Action
School Leader

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION | Benjamin Franklin Elementary School, San Antonio, Texas

Hugo Saucedo sits across the table from a new teacher we'll call Sandra. It's the end of another long day at Benjamin Franklin Elementary School in San Antonio, Texas, and he has stopped by her classroom to check in with her—not as the school principal, but as a colleague and friend. Sandra is struggling with classroom management, and Principal Saucedo wants to see how today went. He can tell it was another tough one. He'll offer feedback and guidance during an upcoming classroom observation—running through a formal pre-visit protocol and formal debrief—but right now he is in pure listening mode.

In some ways, it's easy for Saucedo to step into the shoes of the teachers he supports: he's in year two of his principal career, the daily rhythm of the classroom, its incredible highs and heart-wrenching lows, still fresh in his memory. He knows what it's like to care so deeply about children, to be so focused on their success, and yet to find yourself on occasion battling to get through the day.

During the hour Saucedo sits with Sandra in her classroom, something remarkable happens. They are politely interrupted not once, not twice, but more than half a dozen times by colleagues who are popping into Sandra's classroom to offer to her their support. One, like Saucedo, is checking in. Another is dropping off a promised resource. Still another is making plans to visit Sandra's classroom later that week.

"I didn't ask them to do that," Saucedo later reflects. "That schoolwide support? That collective problem-solving and collaboration? That's just how we do things here." Saucedo is reluctant to take credit for the ways teachers at Benjamin Franklin work together, yet it also clear that the scene in Sandra's classroom fills him with pride and is one he believes represents the progress they've made as a school—and that he's made as a leader—during his tenure.

Between 2018 and 2019, Franklin has improved on a wide range of student and school outcomes measured under the Texas Accountability System: student achievement is up, with its scale score increasing by 5 points, and achievement gaps have narrowed significantly, with its scale score increasing by a dramatic 18 points. As a result, the school's academic progress score increased by 7 points and its overall performance score increased by 10 points.[1] Nearly all students at Franklin are Latinx, and 93 percent are considered economically disadvantaged. Saucedo is especially proud to be making a difference for children who have been systematically denied equitable access to the resources and opportunities they need to be successful, both in school and in life.

"I'm not a top-down leader," he shares. "I'm a collective leader. Our teachers have the expertise, and it's my job to ignite their passion and to provide them with the support and conditions they need to come up with solutions to meet our students' needs. When I do things right, they are really leading a lot of the decisions we make as a school."

Sometimes that means participating in teacher advisory councils overseen by Saucedo, reviewing school data and district requirements and determining, together, what's going to work for their community—as well as what Saucedo needs to bring up with district leaders for further discussion. ("I'm not afraid to speak with our assistant superintendent about anything that doesn't align with our school's needs," Saucedo shares. "We're fortunate. We have supportive district leaders, right up to Superintendent Martinez, who hear us out and are willing to let us work through things. The accountability is there, but so is the flexibility.")

Other times, teachers lead through their day-to-day work together. After the third-grade team reviewed math data, they identified a few crucial concepts they needed to reteach. They consulted with the second-grade team and realized there was an opportunity to strengthen their approach for this year's second graders before they entered third-grade classrooms the following year. The initiative would require some shared planning outside of their normal team meeting schedule. Saucedo learned about their idea to work together across grade-level teams during one of his daily classroom rounds and his immediate response was, "What do you need from me? What can I do to help?"

"What they did there? Identifying a problem and coming up with a solution? That's leadership. It's my job to model that approach, to provide the vision, and to support them to take initiative," Saucedo explains.

When things are going well, it can be easy to forget how different this kind of school culture is for many educators—not to mention students, parents, and other community members.

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[1] The 2018 report can be found here. The 2019 report can be found here.

"It sounds obvious to say 'I'm going to support this great idea,' but the truth is it has taken a lot of work to get staff to a place where they trust me and each other enough to engage in the conversations that lead to those great ideas," he shares. "Not everyone was on board, especially at first. And, to be honest, I'm not always convinced the proposals that come my way are great, at least at first. But it's so important to me that everyone feels their voice matters, their expertise matters. We can't do what we need to do for kids if everyone isn't offering their all. We work to light that flame within our students, and I'm committed to lighting and fanning that flame within our teachers."

"I give a lot of credit to my supervisor, Dr. Jonelda De Leon," Saucedo continues. "With all of her schools and principals, she really listens to us. What's your vision? What's your goal? She'll challenge us, of course, probing and asking us to think about other things. At the end of the day, she'll advocate for us with higher ups and the results are there: her schools are performing better than others."

"I still have a lot to learn and there are many places I need to grow as a leader, but I've got a really strong support and a model for how I want to do this work—today as a principal and, someday perhaps, as a district leader or superintendent myself."

In addition to ongoing district support, Saucedo credits the research-backed, job-embedded leadership training that San Antonio ISD and New Leaders have provided to aspiring leaders. "The feedback was brutal, honest, raw," he says. "And I loved it. New Leaders improved me in ways that I never would have otherwise. That personalized feedback and coaching built in me a certain amount of grit and a willingness to be vulnerable that I wouldn't have gotten anywhere else. It made me a better leader and a better person."

When asked about his career plans and how he manages the workload and stressors of challenging his school community to do things differently, Saucedo becomes emotional.

"This work is so personal. I am the son of immigrants and while growing up my family moved around a lot doing migrant work. I had been to 21 schools by the time I was a junior in high school, so as a student I have seen how much variation there is in our education system. Jefferson High School here in San Antonio was transformative for me."

Though Saucedo had previously been put into a special education program on account of his developing English skills, he was identified for the gifted and talented program at Jefferson. "Jefferson teachers and school leaders saw something special in me, and they wanted to cultivate it," he reflects. "That had never happened to me before—and, unfortunately, that's how too many students experience school."

When his parents were gearing up to move again for work, the principal came to his house to convince them Saucedo needed to continue his education at Jefferson. Although he didn't speak Spanish and Saucedo's parents didn't speak English, they figured out a way to communicate. Saucedo's family moved, but for the first time he stayed enrolled at his previous school. That's when he knew he wanted to become an educator.

"I want our school to be what Jefferson was for me for all of our kids," Saucedo shares. "We have a strong culture of caring and a love of learning, and to take our work to the next level we're building a culture of leadership, too. To do that, we've got to trust each other and be willing to be vulnerable."

"We in education tend to work in silos and schools tend to be these fortresses that for many can feel uninviting. Little by little that's changing. I've experienced resistance from some teachers and a few didn't like the message and they left. Even some parents had reservations. But generally speaking everyone has been receptive and excited, and we've been able to move the culture to be more inclusive and more challenging—disrupting notions of what school is and could be for our kids."

To achieve this shared vision of excellence and equity at Benjamin Franklin, Saucedo knows that deeply engaging and partnering with every member of his school community—recognizing and tapping the expertise, ideas, and initiative of teachers, students, and parents—is absolutely crucial. He knows in his heart and soul the difference this kind of leadership can make, and he is committed to providing each student with a meaningful, engaging educational experience that encourages them to dream big and that sets them up for success in whatever their future holds.

Leadership in Action
Charter Network Leader

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION | Envision Education, San Francisco Bay Area, California

Taking advantage of a rare moment to sit at her desk and catch up on a few emails, Laura Robell, Chief of Schools for Envision Education in Oakland, California, is interrupted by an incoming text message. She looks at her phone, visibly relaxes, and smiles.

"It's a student letting me know she just submitted her college application," Robell shares.

As a teacher, Robell never considered pursuing a school leadership position. It was her principal who first planted the seed, though Robell was less than enthusiastic.

"Absolutely not," she recalls saying. "I didn't want to be away from kids. And, to be honest, I didn't appreciate the power of the principalship. It's not that my principal wasn't good. I just didn't have a model in front of me that showed me what it could look like for me to have the kind of impact that was worth leaving my classroom."

Yet Robell knew in her heart that what she wanted was to make a difference, as big a difference as she could, for children furthest from opportunity. "I didn't have a very well-developed equity lens," she reflects, "but I knew that I wanted to spend my days making the world a better place." Eventually, this drive, combined with encouragement from her principal, led her to Aspiring Principals, the principal preparation program offered by New Leaders, whose mission and values spoke to her.

As a resident principal, Robell recalls being treated as a co-principal, a true partner to her mentor principal with real responsibilities and opportunities to exercise leadership. She understood how fortunate she was to have such an authentic learning experience and she was committed to carrying that model with her as a school and, now, system-level leader.

"This job is so hard and it can be so lonely," Robell shares. "As leaders, we are the ones who see and hold the needs and vision for the entire community. The work is so important and it is taxing. We have to rely on each other. We can't do it alone."

Sharing or distributing leadership as a principal over the course of seven years was a natural extension of her training. It was also a response to the environment she stepped into. The previous school leader was well-respected and committed to engaging the school community in shared decision-making through an immense set of structures and procedures. Despite the intent, teachers did not feel like their voices mattered.

"It's not just about systems, though those matter greatly," Robell shares. "The issue was that staff understood clearly that they were not in the driver's seat. They wanted to feel like their input and ideas were really making a difference and they needed to see that difference. I got that. I had been on both sides, feeling like I wasn't part of decision-making and having experienced a real sense of efficacy as a teacher and leader."

For Robell, the key to building a strong culture of leadership—at the school and system level—is having a clear, shared vision and strategic plan, and reinforcing both consistently and concretely with the school community.

"You have to start with the why," she shares. "Even if the reason for a certain initiative is compliance, there's still a why and it's important for everyone to understand that piece. And that why needs to be supported by a strong strategy that you're reinforcing in big ways and small on a daily basis. I talk about our top priorities again and again, to help keep everyone focused and energized about the work. This is especially important as you bring more people into leadership, helping them see their place, their leadership within the larger purpose or goal. It can be so easy for people to feel siloed in their work. You have to be really intentional about keeping everything and everyone connected."

"This idea of connection was also a big lesson for a principal resident I supported," Robell adds. "During one of our many, many planning conversations, she had this 'aha!' moment where she reflected on the fact that I had a strong relationship with everyone in our building. She didn't know how I did it, but she recognized how important it was. We talked together about how I spent my time. I wasn't in my office—I was in classrooms, I was in hallways. Honestly, it can be one of the reasons principals burn out, but being able to keep and maintain open lines of communication is so important for the work."

"In my current role, I take a similar approach," she says. "I never want a principal to not ask me something because of power dynamics or because they're worried about getting in trouble. I have to exercise strategic vulnerability, sharing crazy stories from my time as a school leader or from the other leaders I support so they can see how universal so many of their challenges are. And these strong relationships help me communicate my why and our strategic priorities over and over again in a safe, supportive space."

She says the need to establish and maintain lines of communication is especially important at the system level, where building

coherence is a top priority and can be especially challenging. Overseeing the principals of five schools and a team of three subject-matter directors, it would be easy for the work to feel siloed. But Robell regularly reinforces network priorities with school leaders, both formally and informally, to help them see how their slice fits into the whole. She is also working to increase consistency across schools to maximize the value of network support while balancing the need for each school to maintain the right amount of autonomy.

Because, as a practical matter, expanding leadership does require real resources—time, money, and support. And those things aren't always readily available.

"About half of Envision teachers serve in leadership roles and we see this model as crucial to our success," Robell notes. "Yet a real pain point for us is ensuring they have the necessary skills. Leading a group of adults is fundamentally different than leading kids in a classroom—it requires different strategies. As a principal, teachers came to me and said, 'We wanted more say, to be more involved, but how do we do all of this?' At the network level, we are continuously grappling with how to balance the need for more leadership training with the reality that many of our teachers are also still working on strengthening their instruction. There's only so much time in the day. We're still figuring out that balance."

Despite the challenges, one thing is clear to Robell: "The answer is not to scale back on distributed leadership. It is essential and absolutely worth it. At the end of the day, it's always, always, better to have stakeholders, especially teachers, at the table making decisions."

"We aren't going to get the results we need for our schools and students if we leave important expertise untapped."

Leadership in Action
Small Rural District

When Donnell Cannon first assumed the principalship of North Edgecombe High School in Tarboro, NC, he knew the transition from teacher to school leader would be big. He acknowledges it was an even bigger transition than he imagined.

"It was hard," Cannon reflects. "Everyone has certain expectations about what a leader is supposed to be. I'm in charge, that top-down sort of thing. In some ways, I tried to show up as not myself because I knew what was expected. At the same time, I don't wear a formal suit. That's just not me. For some, it can be a relief. For others, it's alarming because it's unexpected."

"I was young, too," he shares, "and I had to overcome some expectations about my experience. Ultimately, being true to myself and what I know our community needs, I have been able to model and give an open invitation to teachers and students to chart their own course. We are doing things differently at our school because business as usual wasn't working for our students."

North Edgecombe HS serves 220 students in northeastern North Carolina. Although it is a tight-knit community, being remotely located means some students travel up to 50 minutes on a bus to get to school each day, which can complicate school improvement and community-building efforts that might work in other contexts. Cannon acknowledges the differences between the rural poverty he sees now and the urban poverty he encountered growing up in Richmond, VA, but he spends little time talking about deficits.

"I work at the best school with the most amazing kids you will ever meet in this world," he states. "Each believes that something different can happen in their lifetime, for themselves and our world. They have been subjected to systems that were not designed for them, yet they have optimism things can change things. Our staff that believe the same thing. We can bring the possible into now. We have to blur some lines to go the distance for our kids. We are educators, yes, and we are also social workers, sitting at dinner tables, experiencing joy with our students and their families." Cannon notes that a large percentage of teachers at his school are fellow Teach For America alums, who, like Cannon, came to the region through their placement and have now made it home.

"We start with: what are the hopes and dreams of our parents and students?" Cannon explains. "And we build our work from there. We want to build something beautiful that really works for our kids."

This approach—coupled with a willingness to do things radically different—means North Edgecombe HS doesn't look like your typical school. Cannon has reorganized the staffing structure, bringing more staff into leadership positions and supporting them to truly drive and inform strategies and decision-making. In some ways, distributing leadership suits Cannon's default personal leadership style. At the same time, it's clearly strategic.

"I understand where my zone of genius is," he explains. "I'm certainly working to get really good at the things I'm not good at, but I know I can take us further, faster, by focusing on my strengths."

For Cannon, setting the vision and inspiring his team is a key skill and top priority for him. The leadership team—called the School Design Team—includes staff whose strengths complement his own. His assistant principal and a couple of key teacher leaders are really good at filling in the details of his vision and bringing essential nuance to his big, bold ideas. ("I would never be in charge of a testing plan," Cannon states. "There are so many important details. I'll rely on my team to design and lead those types of processes.") And while Cannon regularly engages in empathy interviews with teachers, students, and families as he's considering new initiatives, he acknowledges that his default is to move quickly and he can, at times, get ahead of his school community. The school climate and culture specialist is really in tune with the mood of the school and plays a crucial role in assessing the community's readiness for something new and designing effective rollout plans based on those insights.

At the same time, Cannon highlights how his leadership changes based on the situation. "I can and usually am a distributor," he explains. "Often, I lead from the middle or the back, supporting a member of the School Design Team to lead from out front. But I can also be someone who makes quick decisions from up top…. The context requires different leadership from me."

The results of Cannon's approach are impressive. During each year of his three-year tenure, North Edgecombe HS has exceeded academic growth expectations on the state accountability system, with growth rates accelerating from one year to the next.[1] Cannon credits much of the school's success to the support and flexibility he has received from the district and a number of crucial partnerships the district has facilitated. In particular, Cannon points to his and the district's work with NC State University's Educational Leadership Academy (NELA), Public Impact, and New Leaders.

"As a small, rural district our people are stretched thin," says Erin Swanson, Director of Innovation with Edgecombe County Public Schools. "It's a real challenge for us to have the in-house capacity to provide such high-level, job-embedded professional

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[1] The 2018-19 report card can be found here.

development." That's where the district partnerships come in.

A number of Edgecombe school leaders, including Cannon, were trained through NELA's nationally recognized principal preparation program, which provides aspiring leaders with a yearlong, job-embedded residency working and learning in a school. Cannon explains that NELA's model enabled him to learn and apply leadership strategies while continuing to make an immediate difference for the community: "I didn't have the luxury of being able to step out of the work to be a full-time learner," he says. "Our kids need amazing people showing up for them right now." The research backs up the effectiveness of this approach, and Cannon also highlights how important it was for him to be able to learn with and from leaders who deeply understood the unique context of the community of which he would become a leader.

Edgecombe has worked with NELA for many years, and a significant percentage of school leaders in the district are graduates of NELA. The partnerships with Public Impact and New Leaders are more recent, launching in 2017, and add important elements to the district's efforts to distribute leadership within and across schools while building a stronger, more coherent leadership pipeline.

Public Impact is now working with 11 of 14 district schools to implement its Opportunity Culture model, an approach to school organization through which exemplary teachers are supported to reach more students by serving as Multi-Classroom Leaders (MCLs), teachers who leads teams of colleagues, or Expanded Impact Teachers (EITs), educators who teach more students and have added instructional responsibilities. New Leaders provides MCLs with targeted leadership development training that equips them with the skills they need to be successful as they make the transition from effective teacher to effective teacher leader.

Public Impact works closely with both district officials and school principals to design systems and structures to support the success of teacher leaders. According to Shonaka Ellison, senior consultant with Public Impact, flexibility and creativity are crucial to this work. "In many cases, the Opportunity Culture model requires both schools and districts to make some big changes," she explains. "It's human nature to be resistant to change, to fear the unknown, to wonder if you can be successful doing things differently. Where we've been able to implement the model with fidelity and see real results, like in Edgecombe, it's because everyone, from school-based leaders to the district's HR, finance, and communications offices and, crucially, the superintendent, have a shared commitment to the vision and a willingness to try something new."

Hiring, in particular, represents an important part of the Opportunity Culture model where districts and schools may need to shift their practices. Public Impact, New Leaders, the district, and school leaders work together on the hiring process for MCLs, ensuring those selected for positions meet a stringent set of criteria aligned with the responsibilities and expectations of the position.

"The Opportunity Culture model requires that the MCLs maintain real role clarity," explains Hannah Irvin, program director with New Leaders. "To be successful and deliver results, MCLs must be focused on instructional leadership, and their time has to be protected to work with their assigned team of teachers. The New Leaders training is premised on the structure Public Impact gets in place and on the educators in MCL positions coming in with a certain mindset and skillset, especially a deep, fundamental belief in the potential of all children and a proven track record of success as a teacher."

At the same time, the process also provide principals with an important degree of autonomy, ensuring those selected for new leadership positions reflect the school's needs and priorities.

All partner organizations continue to provide ongoing support to district and school-based leaders, from site visits to training and thought partnership. And they have worked together to build a model through which leadership positions are not only consistent across the district, but also consistently funded—crucial for sustainability.

"We all want to honor teacher leaders by paying them more for their added responsibilities," says Chandler Rowland, a consultant with Public Impact. "Early in our process, we work with the district to conduct a stipend analysis to understand what compensation structures, combined with the new career pathways and ongoing professional development, would be competitive with neighboring systems, helping to attract outstanding educators and keep them in the district long-term." Partners also work together to advise school leaders on their budgets, among other areas of support, ensuring that their plans to implement the model are sustainable.

Cannon experiences daily the impact of having high-quality support that is so interconnected and aligned with his vision. And he is effusive when speaking about how the district has made this possible. "Erin will create the lane at the district level for us to have a runway to do this work," he explains. "She'll connect us with resources. She'll make sure we have support. And she'll make sure we have the freedom to run with our ideas, even our more unconventional ones, and prove that we can get results."

Together, Edgecombe County Public Schools and its partners are showing that over time, not overnight, investing in leadership at the school and system levels drives outcomes and real results for students.

Leadership in Action
Large Metropolitan District

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION | Chicago Public Schools, Illinois

In 2017, a team of researchers found that students in Chicago Public Schools (CPS) were achieving larger, faster academic gains than their peers in other large districts across the country. According to their analyses, in the five years between 3rd grade and 8th grade CPS students learned the equivalent of six years' worth of literacy and math content.[1] Many pointed to the district's focus on investing in school principals and providing them with sufficient autonomy as a crucial contributor to those results.[2,3]

Matt Lyons, Chief Talent Officer with CPS, acknowledges the centrality of leadership to the district's strategy. He is also quick to point out that CPS officials have focused on continuously improving their approach.

"We know successful organizations don't rely on a single person," he explains, "and we are committed to a district-wide leadership agenda. At the same time, we know we need to create more diversity in leadership across the district, and we need to be much more deliberate about building our bench of leaders." These efforts go hand-in-hand and can help address another interconnected need: equity of access to leadership opportunities.

"We've heard from employees across the district that it's unclear how to move up," Lyons adds. "Often, educators learn about new roles or opportunities exclusively via their relationships and networks. Those networks matter, but staff also want greater transparency. At the system level, for us to unlock the potential of our educators and build greater consistency and sustainability, we can't be dependent on word-of-mouth referrals."

In 2019, the district unveiled its strategic plan along with a new, aligned initiative—Lead with CPS—designed to build on its strong leadership investments and provide clearer career pathways. Lead with CPS includes a warehouse of opportunities and resources for Chicago educators who want to grow as leaders, both in their current roles as well as by considering new positions. Opportunities are based on a leadership competency framework that is consistent across all roles and at all levels of the system. It includes programs run by the district and a wide range of district-approved partners. Some, like the Chicago Leadership Collaborative, the district's signature principal preparation partnerships, have existed for years. Others, such as the Empowered Schools program, which supports principals and teams to design and implement distributed leadership models, are new.

Dr. Allison Tingwall, principal of Curie High School, is among the leaders able to take advantage of new programming offered through Lead with CPS. Along with one of her assistant principals, she is participating in the Leadership Bridge Program, currently in pilot stage, which builds the skills of assistant principals who have been identified as potential successors to principals. They are working together to strengthen instructional leadership across their school and are jointly thinking through transition planning.

Growing leaders is not new to Tingwall. When she became principal of Curie five years ago, she knew she would need to employ a distributed leadership approach to running the school. "With 190 teachers supporting 3,000 students over 180 school days, I could observe one teacher a day and still not get into every classroom in our building," Tingwall explains. "The idea that I—or even my core leadership team of five assistant principals—could deeply coach and support every teacher in our building was never going to work. The math didn't add up."

On top of that, she knew sharing leadership was the right thing to do for the school's culture. The year before she took the helm, there had been 105 student arrests on the school campus. Those arrests, she knew, were symptoms of deeper issues with the school's climate. (In the most recent school year, there were just five on-campus arrests—a dramatic shift Tingwall sees as representative of the many improvements she's fostered during her tenure.)

During her first year on the job, she replaced all of the school's senior leaders, including assistant principals, deans, and the operations manager. Next, she worked to create new job descriptions for department chairs and the coordinators of the school's many specialized programs. She had coaching conversations during which staff members could self-select into—or out of—new expectations for their roles. She also established a new instructional leadership team (ILT).

Each academic department also has four to five course teams comprising half a dozen or so teachers per team; 34 teacher leaders serve as course leads across the school. (On the origins of the course teams, Tingwall explains: "There are 29 teachers in our English department. I have never been in a productive, engaging meeting that included 29 people. We needed smaller groups to foster real adult learning.") In Curie's model, the learning that takes place with the ILT filters to department chairs, who then coach course leads. Within three to four weeks, the initial work with the ILT has reached every teacher in the building. To make this possible, Tingwall took steps to provide department chairs with an extra, shared planning period to execute their leadership

[1] Reardon, S.F., & Hinze-Pifer, R. (2017). Test Score Growth Among Public School Students in Chicago, 2009-2014. Stanford Center for Education Policy Analysis. Retrieved from https://cepa.stanford.edu/content/test-score-growth-among-chicago-public-school-students-2009-2014.

[2] Kelleher, M. (2017, November 2). Chicago Isn't Atlanta—Our Student Learning Gains Are Real and Lead the Nation. Education Post. Retrieved from https://educationpost.org/chicago-isnt-atlanta-our-student-learning-gains-are-real-and-lead-the-nation/.

[3] Hinckley, S. (2018, March 5). Lessons from Chicago: Principals matter in school improvement. The Christian Science Monitor. Retrieved from https://www.csmonitor.com/EqualEd/2018/0305/Lessons-from-Chicago-Principals-matter-in-school-improvement.

responsibilities, providing common time for planning, data analysis, and collaboration.

"In a big school like this, the formal structures are really important," Tingwall adds. "But there is also a more informal side to distributed leadership. For a lot of our work, especially the day to day, we take an intentionally organic approach."

When making the transition to standards-based grading, for example, Tingwall and her leadership team recognized that they needed a different level of buy-in from teachers and the larger school community, especially parents. Tingwall and members of the ILT connected teachers with their peers who were passionate about the new approach and ahead of the curve implementing it in their classrooms. They tapped a wide range of teachers from across departments and grade levels, as well as a mix of veteran and new teachers, to help explain the value and impact of the initiative and to be open and transparent about their struggles. By being "intentionally organic," Tingwall was able to ensure the same messages were making their way to teachers, students, and parents via both formal channels and the diverse social networks that exist across the school community.

On her work with Leadership Bridge Program, Tingwall is effusive. "The program has helped me provide better support," she says. In addition to being blown away from the quality and depth of the Leadership Development Plan (LDP) her AP created with guidance from program staff, the explicit focus on transition planning has helped her identify new areas of focus for his development. She highlights the weekly newsletter she sends to staff, which includes an opening message that reinforces shared priorities. It's an important communication tool for leading such a large school community, but it's not something her AP has ever had to create himself. "He can absolutely master the skills needed to develop that kind of strategic resource," Tingwall explains. "But he needs practice and feedback. And now he's getting it."

Tingwall also reflects positively on the Lead with CPS initiative writ large, noting how valuable it is for her to be able to direct staff to leadership programs and opportunities that are sponsored by and have the backing of the district.

Beulah McLoyd, former principal of Walter H. Dyett High School for the Arts, shares Tingwall's enthusiasm for Lead with CPS. McLoyd sat on the principal advisory committee that helped shape the initiative; like Tingwall, a top priority for her was having access to resources that would enable her to effectively support teachers and other educators in her building to grow as leaders, supporting their individual career development and building the capacity of her leadership team.

"Teachers want to be challenged professionally and have a sense of upward mobility professionally within the district," she says. "But many don't want to go into administration. I used the Lead with CPS framework to inform individual goal-setting conversations. It was a way to help teachers think about their leadership trajectory in different ways. If you want to do more work with ILTs, which of these competencies do you need to build? If our school needs you to step into a new role, what skills do you need to feel confident with those new responsibilities? Often I could connect them directly with professional development featured on the initiative's resource and opportunity banks, most of which I wouldn't otherwise have known about."

Now supporting CPS principals and teacher leaders as an executive director with New Leaders, McLoyd recognizes that the success of the initiative will depend a great deal on how it is utilized at the school level, where efforts to distribute leadership across the system can either flourish or stall. "Teachers really appreciated the resources, so as principal there's real motivation to keep coming back to it," she explains. "At the same time, if the opportunity doesn't come with a stipend and I don't have the budget, that could get tricky. Funding is important."

So is this type of feedback. CPS continues to prioritize and set the tone for authentic, transparent, data-driven collaboration and decision-making. The district regularly engages school leaders, educators, and other stakeholders—including philanthropic, research, and community partners—around implementation of Lead with CPS. The Chicago Public Education Fund, in particular, has provided strategic support for the initiative and financial support for specific programming.

This deep collaboration enables the district to access the best data and resources to inform and implement their strategy, and it's also a deliberate effort to create a culture that promotes effective, sustainable learning environments for children and adults, alike.

"Trust and collaboration are really important," says Lyons. "We have a ton of research specifically on our work in Chicago showing this to be true in our schools, and we believe it's true at the system level as well. We've laid an important foundation, but you have to follow up consistently to show continuing commitment. We want to help teachers and school leaders go deeper on using the framework, develop new resources to support them, and showcase through highlights and stories what is possible for our schools and students when educators have access to the right leadership coaching, mentoring, and opportunities."

On the future of Lead with CPS, Lyons is hopeful the district and its partners will be able to continue responding to the strong appetite from teachers and school leaders for more and more varied leadership pathways. "Leadership at CPS shouldn't depend on the role you're in," he says. "It should be based on how you advance the mission of the organization and inspire others to do the same."

Leadership in Action
Statewide Initiative

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION | Colorado's School Leadership Pilot Program

Before Katy Anthes became Colorado's 65th Commissioner of Education, she served as Executive Director of Educator Effectiveness with the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and oversaw a project designed to capture information from education leaders regarding their professional learning needs. The data gleaned from that project was clear: there were significant gaps in the resources and support principals were receiving. This, coupled with her past work researching effective school leadership, catalyzed a desire to do more to support school principals in the state of Colorado

"We were so focused on teachers and superintendents, but were missing the crucial middle management layer," says Colleen O'Neil, Associate Commissioner of the Educator Talent Division. "Yet much of the pressure for school improvement lives on principals' shoulders."

As happens, the initial data collection and resulting action plan was shelved due to other priorities as well as leadership and staffing changes. Then Anthes was appointed Commissioner. The data collection and research was powerful, and she knew it pointed to an important opportunity for the CDE to make a real difference for educators and students in communities across the state.

She unearthed the initiative and tasked her team with understanding and refreshing the initial findings. In 2017, CDE staff members started talking to stakeholders—including teachers, principals, district officials, association representatives, and other community stakeholders—to more deeply understand their needs. These conversations reinforced and added additional color to the previous data: principals needed additional resources and support, and teachers wanted their principals to have more support, too. Further, teachers expressed a clear desire for more leadership opportunities connected to the work they were doing in their classrooms and school communities. From those conversations, state officials developed a theory of action regarding how they could develop a system of support—not management, not compliance—for school leaders that focused on building their capacity to grow, develop, and support instructional leaders in their buildings and on creating cultures and systems to bolster distributive leadership models.

A real turning point came when legislators began asking questions about Colorado's teacher shortages. The Commissioner had a trove of stakeholder data and past experience that provided important insights on what educators needed to feel energized and sustained in their work.[1] If addressed, those gaps could become opportunities to support the retention of great educators already working in schools and create environments that would make education a more attractive profession for others. The State Board and legislators, including state Representative Barbara McLachlan (D-59), were listening.

"Our Commissioner and Board really deserve credit for creating systems and processes for keeping in touch with and working with our legislative body," says O'Neil. "We are also really fortunate to have a Board and legislators who see us as an important resource. Breaking down silos is not easy, but it's important."

Although initial legislation regarding CDE's principal support priority didn't move forward, the Commissioner, Representative McLachlan, and other state leaders—including Representative James Wilson (R-60), making it a bipartisan process—kept in touch and continued sharing information and advocating with other decision-makers. The stakeholder data proved essential, providing early supporters of the initiative with real information on what the constituents of other Members of the General Assembly needed.

Finally, late in the 2019 legislative session, HB19-1002 passed with unanimous support and was eventually signed into law by Governor Jared Polis. The law created a pilot program through which school leaders could receive "embedded, experiential professional development to… empower them to exercise distributive and collaborative leadership" with an ultimate goal to "increase educator retention, improve school climate and culture, and improve student academic outcomes." The final legislative language represented a compromise, in some cases removing components (e.g., mandatory stipends for participating principals, which became grants to local entities based on funding availability), in other cases adding greater specificity (e.g., regarding how and when certain aspects of the program would be implemented), and still others becoming more flexible to support effective implementation across a wide range of local and school contexts. Crucially, legislators appropriated real dollars to make the pilot possible. ("Where did they find the money?" O'Neil asks, somewhat jokingly, reflecting on the challenge of securing financial support for new initiatives during tight fiscal times. "Legislators understood how deeply connected this program is to needs identified in their communities, and I really believe that's what made the difference.")

Thus far, stakeholder engagement proved essential and CDE officials were committed to continuing to bring in a diversity of perspectives to help them design the program. Again, the close collaboration between state leaders was important: though the bill

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[1] Of note, national surveys of teachers mirror the findings of Colorado's data collection. Teachers want to have a greater voice in decision-making within their schools and school systems and they want more career growth opportunities, especially as teacher leaders. Further, teachers reiterate the importance of strong principals who are equipped to support them and effectively lead their school communities: 97 percent of teachers list school leadership as essential or very important for their career choices—more than any other factor. Source: Scholastic Inc. and Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation (2012). Primary Sources: America's Teachers on America's Schools. Retrieved from http://www.scholastic.com/primarysources/.

passed in May 2019, CDE officials have almost an entire year to develop the program before they need to report back to legislators on the design of the program.

"It is very rare to have that kind of time for planning," O'Neil shares. "Representatives McLachlan and Wilson want us to get this right. With this time, we are able to conduct personal interviews and be really collaborative and thoughtful about the program design. I can't tell you how immensely helpful it is."

To help lead the initiative, CDE hired Robyn Hamasaki, an experienced school leader with deep expertise in the pilot program's focus areas. Hamasaki spends her days traveling across the state and connecting with district and school leaders. Using the Design Thinking model as a guide, these "empathy interviews" are structured to gather a wide range of information.

"We need information from a logistical standpoint that's going to help us create a program that meets statutory requirements," Hamasaki notes. "Equally important, we want the program to matter to participants and all stakeholders in their hearts and souls. We want to design a program that really makes a difference."

Through the stakeholder engagement process, Hamasaki is also creating a list of potential principal coaches. For this initial pilot, principal coaches will be invited to support principals who participate in the program rather than through an application process. She is using a combination of hard data from CDE and word-of-mouth recommendations to identify prospective candidates.

"We know how important it is for principals to have a coach at their side as they are transforming practice in their schools," she shares. "Yet we also know that being a strong principal does not automatically mean you are an effective coach to other principals. We are looking for people who are problem-solvers and systems-thinkers, who aren't satisfied with mediocrity and have a track record of driving results, and who can provide feedback to leaders that will help them think and act differently in ways that are based on best practices and also specific to their school communities."

Hamasaki also notes their mentor principals competencies are tightly aligned to the state's principal quality standards and turnaround leader competencies, supporting coherency and alignment with other initiatives and state requirements.

"Through the interviews, we're gathering important information and we're also building support and buy-in from people who are going to be part of implementation," Hamasaki adds. "This is exactly the type of professional development I would have wanted as a principal, and we want everyone to see that value from day one."

The team is in the process of building out specific metrics they'll use to measure success and track progress over the course of the pilot period, which runs through July 2022. The vision for the work is ambitious.

"We want the entire school community to be involved in planning and organizing their work," O'Neil explains. "We want teachers to feel valued, included, and satisfied in their job. We want them to experience a real sense of efficacy and like their talents, individually and collectively, are making a difference. We want them to feel like leadership is truly distributive and they are growing and leading together. If we can master distributive leadership, we'll have the synergy to create optimal learning environments in all of our schools, helping all students learn at high levels."