

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF AN INFRASTRUCTURE FOR A MODEL OF COACHING PRINCIPALS\*

Cheryl James-Ward

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## Abstract

This descriptive study investigates the development of a district leadership coaching program. Specifically, the study examines the creation of a coaching program for elementary principals, the first six months of monthly meetings between the coaches and district leaders, and the perceived utility of the meetings by the district coaches. Qualitative methods were used to examine: (a) the development of a leadership coaching program for principals, (b) the communication and interaction between coaches and district leadership, and (c) the perceived effectiveness of the infrastructure. The findings indicate that when there is a cluster of leadership coaches, as well as regularly scheduled meetings between district leadership and coaches, there may be advantages to the district, the coached principals, and the coaches.

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## 2 Sumario en español

Este estudio descriptivo investiga el desarrollo de un liderazgo de distrito que entrena programa. Específicamente, el estudio revisa la creación de un programa que entrena para directores elementales, los primeros seis meses de reuniones mensuales entre los líderes de entrenadores y distrito, y la utilidad percibido de las reuniones por los entrenadores de distrito. Los métodos cualitativos fueron utilizados para revisar: (A) el desarrollo de un liderazgo que entrena programa para directores, (B) la comunicación y la interacción entre liderazgo de entrenadores y distrito, y (C) la eficacia percibido de la infraestructura. Las conclusiones indican que cuando hay un grupo de entrenadores de liderazgo, así como reuniones regularmente planificadas entre liderazgo de distrito y entrenadores, es posible que haya ventajas al distrito, a los directores entrenados, y a los entrenadores.

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## 3 Introduction

In failing schools and schools with novice principals, the need for on-the-job principal training and support has never been more important than today. The research and literature on school leadership has revealed that leadership is second only to teaching among school-related factors in its impact upon student learning (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004; Lynn, Uline, Johnson, Ward, & Basom, 2011). Because good teaching occurs in isolation when strong leadership is absent (Carter, 2000), it might then be hypothesized that leadership is the most important factor in school success. More specifically, principal leadership is essential to substantive and sustainable instructional progress (Schmoker, 1996). Fullan (1993), Carter (2000), and Cotton (2003) noted that effective schools have effective principals.

Today, the job of the principal has changed from one of site manager to that of an all-encompassing school leader. Principals are expected to exhibit leadership and have knowledge of curriculum design and instructional strategies. They are expected to evaluate and refine curricular practices to ensure effective execution of programs, models, and pedagogy. They are expected to develop and nurture professional learning communities (Cotton, 2003; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; McGough, 2003). Twenty-first century principals must possess knowledge of human resources management and legal issues impacting school operations (Walker, 2009). They are required to facilitate and engage in activities to ensure that collective bargaining agreements are effectively managed (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, & Orr, 2007). Additionally, principals are under considerable pressure to ensure that their schools continue to meet the demanding federal mandates of No Child Left Behind [NCLB] (2001) and the Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act [ESEA] (2010).

In this multifaceted, high-demand environment, leadership coaching can be utilized as a means to cultivate and equip both novice and veteran principals for the challenges they face. Coaching executives is fairly common in the corporate world. Coaching principals is now advancing as a professional training model for school leaders (Lubinsky, 2002). It can be used as means to accelerate learning for school leaders and as a just-in-time augmentation to professional development for principals immersed in complex jobs (Hopkins-Thompson, 2000). This descriptive study focused on (a) the development of a principal coaching program for a medium-sized district, (b) the interaction and communication between the coaches and district leaders, (c) the interaction and communication between the leadership coaches themselves, and (d) the perceived usefulness of the coaching infrastructure. Provided is a context of the district in which the study occurred, a brief description of leadership coaching, a description of the study, the methodology, and the findings and recommendations.

## 4 Study Context: A Description of the District

In 1993, the school district in this case study fell into state receivership for both financial and academic failure. Under state takeover, the district advanced from one of the worst in the state to the middle third as measured

by the California State Standardized Testing and Reporting [STAR] (2010) for student achievement. In 2003, the district fully emerged from state takeover with a surplus of funds, academic solvency, and a new leadership team. Five years later in 2008, there was a turnover in district leadership with a new superintendent and 7 of 11 new cabinet members. The new superintendent inherited a district in Program Improvement 3, that is, a district that failed to meet the state and federal targets for student academic progress for three consecutive years. The district was required by the state to have an instructional audit of all programs at all school levels. The superintendent conducted both fiscal and instructional audits. The findings from the audits revealed a myriad of compliance issues related to English language learners; instructional quality; standards-based instruction; and alignment of curriculum, instruction, and assessment. Moreover, principals new to the position within the last five years reported that they had not received professional development from the district.

The number of students enrolled in this unified school district is 26,000 and falling. All students are eligible for free lunch under the guidelines of the National School Lunch Program, and 55% are classified as English language learners (ELL). Of the ELL population, 99% list Spanish as their primary language. Hispanic students make up 75% of the population and African-Americans, 22% (District Report to the Community, 2010). The 2009 Academic Performance Index (API) for the district was 641 as compared to the state's API of 754. The API is a state monitoring formula that determines how well students are progressing on California's content standards tests (California Department of Education, 2010).

For district's not meeting the state's target for annual student academic growth on content standards tests, one of the recommendations from the California State Department of Education was that principals of such schools be supported with leadership coaches (Stickel, 2005). The new superintendent in the study district decided to make leadership coaching a priority and tasked the deputy superintendent with identifying and selecting leadership coaches for elementary principals new to the position within the last three years and principals of program improvement schools. The district hired eight coaches to coach sixteen principals.

## 5 Leadership Coaching

Coaching has roots in cognitive science, counseling, and psychotherapy; however, in this study, coaching is examined from the perspective of cognitive science. As such, coaching involves a professional relationship and a deliberate personalized process to provide leaders with valid, objective information with which to make choices based on that information (Reiss, 2007). For principals, this means there is a continuous learning process. The coaching process includes gaining information about the changes in their schools, the choices and decisions before them, and the types of commitments necessary for those choices or decisions (Ortiz, 2002). Coaching focuses on becoming clear about professional goals and the actions needed to achieve them. Its purpose is to help an individual change the organization's future (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2005; Killion, 2002).

Coaches assist principals in becoming their *next best selves*, that is, they provide opportunities for risk taking, reflecting, and improving knowledge and skills sets based on the coachees' zone of proximal development [ZPD] (Coffey, 2009). Coaching offers school leaders opportunities to learn and improve their craft by building a trusting relationship and using collaboration, instruction, facilitation, reflection, and transformational strategies. The ultimate goal of leadership coaching is to help principals and district leaders become thoughtful, courageous leaders capable of creating and sustaining systemic processes that lead to ever-increasing student achievement (Bloom, Castagna, Moir, & Warren, 2003; Killion, 2002; Reiss, 2007).

## 6 The Study

This study is part of a descriptive evaluation of a leadership coaching model currently being used as a professional development tool for principals in a school district in Southern California. The study's purpose was to describe the development of the district leadership coaching model and determine the perceived benefits of the monthly meetings between coaches and administrators from the perspective of district appointed coaches.

Three areas of the district principal coaching model were examined through observation, written documents, and one follow-up interview: (a) the initial development of a leadership coaching program for principals, (b) the interaction and communication between coaches and district leaders, and (c) the perceived benefits of the monthly meetings between coaches and district administrators. In order to expand principals' capacity, each principal was provided with a personal coach. The overall outcome was to improve teaching and learning and ultimately improve student achievement. Sixteen principals from Program Improvement sites or within their first three years of the position were provided with coaches. Each of the coaches in the study supported two principals. Coaches and principals met one or two times weekly for a period of six months.

The selection of coaches was extremely important. District leaders were asked to recommend former administrators with track records of significantly improving student achievement to coach principals. From that list, eight coaches were selected. All of the selected coaches were former principals. Five of the coaches selected had previously coached principals. Two had leadership coaching training through the New Teacher Center at the University of California, Santa Cruz, California (Bloom, et al., 2005). Additionally, some coaches had served in district level positions such as directors and assistant superintendents. Six of the eight coaches were retired school administrators, one was a full time consultant, and one was a university professor.

The coaches met monthly with the deputy superintendent and the associate superintendents of elementary schools as a means of staying abreast of district initiatives, learning about district-provided support to principals, and other information regarding how coaches could support principals in the implementation of new district initiatives. During these meetings, coaches also shared in broad terms their work with principals and identified general concerns regarding implementation of district initiatives and programs. The eight coaches also met by themselves once a month to collaborate, share coaching strategies, discuss professional readings, and confidentially discuss issues related to their coaching experiences. A modified version of the Affinity protocol (Boudett, City, & Murnane, 2007) was used during the meetings to ensure the anonymity of principals.

## 7 Methodology

Structured according to a case study design, this study examined a district-supported leadership coaching model currently being used in a school district in southern California. A case study approach was chosen because it possesses phenomenological aspects in that it is concerned with human experiences, derived from detailed descriptions of people being studied (Cresswell, 1998). According to Cresswell (1998), a case study approach in general, allows for the exploration of an entity or phenomenon (the case) bounded by time and activity. This particular case study lives within the boundaries of one school district. Qualitative data were gathered from monthly minutes of coaches' and district administrator meetings, open-ended surveys completed by district coaches, and a follow-up interview with all district coaches.

For this study, the researcher was a participant observer serving as the lead coach in the study district. Participant observation, as a qualitative research method, assists the researcher in learning the perspectives held by the study participants (Stake, 1995). Stake (1995) described the participant observer as a researcher who makes first-hand observations, sometimes engaging personally in the activities. In this study, the researcher's understanding was enhanced by an increased awareness of the school district, its history, and the various stakeholders. Since the researcher was a coach in the study district, this methodology offered the researcher the advantage of engagement and active participation in the study environment. The researcher spent the first Monday of each week in the study district coaching principals assigned to her or participating in the monthly meetings between the administrators and the coaches. By being a participant observer, the researcher was able to obtain an inside and comprehensive view of the development of the coaching model.

## 7.1 Data collection

**Minutes.** Six monthly observations of three-hour long meetings between coaches and administrators were conducted. The six meetings were divided into two parts, one attended by district administrators and coaches and the other by coaches only. The participant observer facilitated the coaches' only portion of the meetings and recorded the minutes for the district-led meetings. The potential for researcher bias must be considered and safeguarded, considering the researcher's high degree of participation in the study district. To mitigate such bias, several safeguards were undertaken. After each meeting, minutes were emailed to district administrators and coaches for corrections. The final minutes were emailed prior to each ensuing meeting and reviewed at the beginning of each meeting. This was done not only as part of the meeting protocol, but also to ensure the content validity of the minutes. For the purpose of this study, the district granted the researcher permission to extract and use information from the minutes.

**Survey.** The researcher developed a survey (see Appendix A) based on a review of current research on the role of coaches and benefits of coaching and mentoring programs. The survey consisted of 14 open-ended questions clustered into the following categories: (a) coaches' perceived impact of the coaching experience on principals, (b) focus of coaching sessions, (c) the primary area of need for principal support, (d) the benefits of the monthly coaches meetings, and (e) ways to improve the coaches meetings.

The survey was pilot tested with several coaches from another district. The pilot participants were not only asked to answer the survey questions but to address issues concerning the content and format of the questions as they related to meeting program objectives. Revisions were made to the survey before sharing it with the study participants.

The purpose of the survey and its contents were reviewed at the end of the fifth meeting between coaches and district administrators. Coaches were asked to complete the survey and return it at the next meeting. Coaches were informed that completing the survey was voluntary and that respondents would remain anonymous. The survey was also emailed to all coaches with the same information and instructions. At the subsequent meeting, coaches were asked to return the completed surveys to a designated location. Respondents were anonymous and surveys were returned in such a manner as to maintain the anonymity of each respondent. Seven of the eight surveys were returned.

To underscore approaches to developing infrastructures for principal coaching models, this paper only focused on the benefits of the monthly coaches meetings and methods to improve the meetings. To ensure the trustworthiness of the responses and eliminate participant observer bias, data from the surveys were organized, coded, and classified using manual qualitative research techniques by an independent researcher. All eight coaches were invited back to the district for another year of coaching. To further ensure the validity of the survey findings, they were shared with the coaches at the first coaches only meeting the next school year. At that time, the participant observer reviewed the compiled answers for each survey question with the coaches to ensure that the findings accurately described their responses.

## 8 Monthly Coaches' and District Leaders' Meetings

One of the main purposes of the study was to determine the perceived benefits of the monthly coaches meetings. The deputy superintendent believed that the monthly meetings would lead to more focused support for principals and more effective implementation of district initiatives. During the first meeting with coaches, the deputy superintendent outlined the district's intent to prompt effective implementation of the district initiatives, and expressed her belief that providing principals with coaches would be a most effective way to do so. Before the coaching program and monthly meetings began, the lead coach and the deputy superintendent met to discuss professional readings for coaches. After reviewing several books, *Blended Coaching*, by Bloom, Castagna, Moir, and Warren (2005) was selected.

### 8.1 Getting Ready for Coaching: The First Meeting

In preparation for principal coaching, the deputy superintendent and elementary associate superintendents met with the coaches to describe the overall instructional state of the district, the support mechanisms,

instructional initiatives, topics of principals' meetings, types of principals' meetings, professional development foci of the district, and specific ways that coaches could support principals. The associate superintendents shared the work they had begun with principals and the creation of principal networks in which groups of four principals met monthly to collaborate on specific topics. The superintendent was present for a portion of this meeting and for the next three consecutive meetings. Each time, she emphasized the importance of the meetings, the discussions, and the work of the coaches.

At the initial meeting, coaches shared their professional backgrounds. District administrators then assigned coaches to principals based on what they deemed to be best matches. All coaches were assigned two principals. Most coaches began work with principals immediately; however, in two cases selected coaches were not available to meet with the principals until two months into the process.

## 8.2 The Second District Leaders and Coaches' Meeting

The second meeting of coaches and district administrators opened with the Director of Human Resources providing the coaches with a copy of the California Professional Standards for Leaders (WestEd, 2010), a district teacher evaluation form, and the program improvement status of every elementary school. The six coaches who had met with their principals then broadly shared initial experiences, being careful not to breach confidentiality. The deputy superintendent communicated that the goal of the district was to build principal capacity in all areas of leadership, to change beliefs about student outcomes, and ultimately to improve student achievement. The deputy provided each coach with a book, Bloom's (2005) *Blended Coaching*. The format of discussions was reviewed to ensure that confidentiality between principals and coaches was not breached. The associate superintendents explained quarterly assessments, pacing guides, and district-wide expectations. They described their work with principals on academic rigor, shared a rigor/relevance walkthrough model, and discussed how coaches could support principals in the use of the model.

During this meeting, coaches unanimously agreed to extend their meetings by one hour to meet alone as a professional learning community. Coaches stayed after the second general meeting ended to briefly discuss the format for their meetings, protocol for discussing confidential issues, and possible discussion topics. The goals of the coaches' only meetings were to share and improve coaching practices and build consistency in practices.

## 8.3 Protocol and Topics of Meetings Three through Six

Each of the successive meetings followed the same general format. The district-led topics for the meetings included discussions of the District Coherence Plan, so named and designed to address the recommendations from all the district audits in a coherent manner. Meetings included sharing information about programs for English language learners, kindergarten rigor, summer school plans, and quality instruction. Budget updates, board and union updates, and legal issues were also discussed. Associate superintendents introduced the process being used to develop district-wide professional learning communities. They shared plans to launch new district initiatives including curriculum models and training. They discussed plans for itinerant teachers such as resource, intervention, and curriculum specialists. The associate superintendents responded to concerns and questions that coaches broached regarding teacher evaluations, teacher improvement plans, and follow-up to those plans. The deputy superintendent discussed possible trainings on topics of evaluating teachers, teacher improvement plans, and support mechanisms to help principals better develop, support, and evaluate teachers.

At every meeting, each coach provided a brief general update. The primary theme of updates was classroom walkthroughs and teacher development. The goal was to assist principals with what to look for during walkthroughs, appropriate feedback, and teacher support strategies. Resonating next throughout the coaches' reports were ways to support principals with difficult teachers, the use of improvement plans, and the overall evaluation process. Coaches also commonly discussed supporting principals with the development of professional learning communities, teacher conversations about student work, and assessments and anecdotal data to improve teaching and learning. Issues with district assessments and clarity about district mandates

including teacher evaluations were also discussed during the meetings. Other topics commonly mentioned by coaches included collaborating with principals in planning for the following school year, differentiated teacher support, school site cleanliness, training for teachers and leadership teams provided by principal coaches, and coach/coachee relationships.

#### **8.4 Coaches' Only Meetings-Professional Learning Community**

Coaches met by themselves for sixty to ninety minutes each month. During these meetings, coaches discussed the various facilitative and instructional coaching strategies, namely collaborative, consultative, meditational, transformational and blended methods. Each month, the foci were on different components of leadership coaching supported by readings from the book, *Blended Coaching* (Bloom, et al., 2005), as well as articles on coaching and quality instruction. For the first four months, the lead coach facilitated the coaches' only monthly meetings including the professional book discussions. Other coaches volunteered to add to the topics from the book readings and discussions with relevant articles. The last two months of coaches' only meetings were led by other coaches who volunteered to facilitate.

During the meetings, coaches who had formal training in leadership coaching through the New Teacher Center at University of California, Santa Cruz modeled strategies for coaching including facilitative, instructional, meditational, and reflective components. All coaches had opportunities to practice the strategies after the modeling. Coaches shared insights from the modeling observations including areas in which they wanted to grow and have additional opportunities to practice. Each meeting ended with a discussion of individual coach's concerns, suggestions for addressing stated concerns, various ways to handle principal needs, and the sharing of replicable best practices that might lead to consistency in coaching.

### **9 Findings**

The study's purpose was to describe the development of the district leadership coaching model and determine the perceived benefits of monthly meetings between coaches and district administrators. Data from an analysis of minutes from monthly meetings between coaches and district leadership and the coaches' only meetings, survey responses, and a follow-up interview with coaches were used.

#### **9.1 The Interaction and Communication between the Coaches and District Leadership**

Analysis of the minutes from the monthly meetings, responses from the coaches' survey, and the follow-up interview all revealed that district leaders and coaches did not always perceive district communication about initiatives and mandates the same. For example, at one meeting district leaders stated that principals were clear about the reasons for eliminating positions and creating others when, in fact, they were not as noted by coaches reporting on feedback from principals. At another meeting, coaches revealed that principals did not seem to know why there was a need for so many changes and why there was such a rushed effort to implement several new initiatives. District officials were under the impression that principals were aware of and understood the district improvement plan, as well as the urgency to address the recommendations from state mandated audits.

During the fourth meeting, coaches voiced concerns regarding the teacher improvement plan process and principals' frustrations with the outcome of recommending poor teachers for possible dismissal. Several coaches noted that the improvement plan guidelines were incomplete, neither providing enough information for principals to develop effective improvement plans nor identifying next steps for teachers on improvement plans whose performance continued to be unsatisfactory. District officials quickly conceded that there were serious issues within the teacher evaluation process and that the human resources department was working to address them. At this meeting, discrepancies between the associate superintendents' actions regarding support for principals documenting poor teachers were also noted.

During the fifth meeting, coaches shared concerns about the administration of poorly- designed benchmarks which district officials stated had been "cleaned up." At another meeting, principals' frustration about the delivery of English language development and summer school was shared by coaches. Although school

leaders were aware of some concern in regards to these issues, they were unaware of the magnitude of frustration and dissatisfaction with the initiatives. The information was difficult for the deputy superintendent and associates to accept, but as the deputy noted during one meeting, “the information is painful, yet needed.” Overall, the district leaders, although at times visibly disheartened by information provided by coaches, was very appreciative of the candor and willingness of coaches to share principals’ concerns.

## 9.2 Perceived Benefits of Monthly Coaches’ Meetings

Information about the perceived benefits of the coaches’ monthly meetings was collected from the survey. Coaches unanimously reported that the monthly coaches’ meetings were valuable. One coach stated, “I love being with people I have watched and admired for so many years! I feel honored and privileged to be part of the group. I love listening to the ideas that are shared. I really like the time the district gives us with their updates and proposals...this is fantastic!” Coaches noted that having the opportunity to broach and discuss district issues that affect principals was paramount. Coaches stated that getting updates on the district’s plan and goals helped them to better support principals. They noted that the monthly meetings provided time for discussions about current issues affecting principal behaviors and beliefs, gave them an opportunity to provide feedback to district leaders without breaching confidentiality, and helped them glean information that could help principals more effectively lead their schools.

In the survey responses, coaches stated that coaches-only meetings provided them with a clearer understanding of their roles and expanded their repertoire of coaching strategies. One coach noted, “I tried the techniques that were modeled by [coach] from the first meeting I attended. I tried listening and summing up what I heard the principals saying, especially when they are frustrated and it worked really well in terms of getting them to get clear on what they wanted.” Coaches all agreed that the book, *Blended Coaching*, by Bloom et al. (2005) was a valuable resource in further developing their overall coaching skills. All coaches who responded to the survey reported that the monthly meetings positively impacted their ability to coach principals. Coaches stated that as a result of the meetings, they were able to clarify and discuss contentious topics with principals, share research and replicable best practices, and provide clarification about district plans. Coaches acknowledged that the expertise of coaches previously trained in coaching techniques, as well as the book, were beneficial. The monthly coaches’ only meetings helped all coaches to better address complex issues specific to the district and to be more effective in the use of instructional and facilitative coaching strategies. Last, the coaches acknowledged that the meetings also helped to keep them moving in a fairly unified manner.

When asked whether or not they would like to continue the monthly meetings, coaches unanimously responded in the affirmative. One coach stated, “It’s important to keep a pulse on what’s going on in the district by getting the information directly from district leaders.” Moreover, by being able to communicate directly with district leaders, coaches provided another voice for principals. Coaches also reported that they wanted to continue to meet separately as a professional learning community to improve their coaching skills and to discuss confidential issues. They acknowledged the importance of debriefing, collaborating, and improving their practices as principals continued to improve theirs. According to Bloom, et al. (2005), leadership coaching is a complex process in which coaches become more effective through ongoing practice and feedback from colleagues in the coaching process.

## 10 Conclusion and Recommendations

School districts, national principal organizations, and state departments of education recognize the importance of leadership coaching (Bloom et al., 2003; Fink & Resnik, 2001; Stickel, 2005). On the other hand, there is little or no evidence from the research about districts creating systems to regularly communicate with leadership coaches or on developing learning communities for their coaches. The district in this study went beyond most in developing an effective leadership coaching infrastructure. It ensured that coaches had regular opportunities to meet with the district leaders to share issues, receive district updates, and stay current on initiatives. The district provided time for coaches to meet alone as well as professional resources



for them to use in their development as a learning community.

From the findings, it was evident that coaches and school district administrators did not always perceive the state of the district or the implementation of mandates in the same manner. From the monthly meeting minutes, it was evident that the two groups did not always view district-wide communication outcomes similarly or have comparable perceptions about teachers' and principals' perspectives, temperament, and feelings regarding district changes. Associate superintendents stated that information from the district was being communicated clearly and fully. Coaches reported that communication between the district and school sites was spotty and tenuous. Additionally, from the findings it appeared as if district-wide instructional mandates were being implemented without input from principals and teachers and without their buy-in. During one of the monthly meetings, the deputy superintendent acknowledged that decisions were being made quickly due to the district's Program Improvement status. At the final meeting between coaches and district leaders, perhaps in response to some of the concerns voiced during earlier meetings, the associate superintendents shared that they were creating instructional councils to solicit feedback and ideas from principals and teachers regarding instructional initiatives. They also reported that they had begun work on a system which would provide regular two-way communication between school site instructional leaders and themselves.

The monthly meetings provided an avenue for principals to indirectly voice concerns through feedback to coaches. They provided coaches with clear and direct information from those initiating district initiatives and mandates, thus making it easier for coaches to support principals in the implementation of those mandates. The monthly meetings also supplied coaches with the information needed to help principals develop educational goals and to find effective ways to meet them. As a result of the meetings, coaches in the study were provided with information to (a) better assist principals with goal setting and remaining focused on goals, (b) provide feedback to principals that addressed both individual principal's and the district goals, (c) help principals maneuver around inconsistent information regarding initiatives and mandates from the district, and (d) ultimately help principals stay focused on student achievement. According to the California Department of Education, Testing and Accountability (2009), 14 of the 16 schools supported by coaches in this study exceeded their growth targets; one of the two schools that did not declined by 1 point and the other school declined by 6 points.

The coaches' only meetings afforded a time for coaches to privately collaborate as well as to share replicable best practices being implemented at the various sites. According to coaches, the meetings kept them somewhat consistent in terms of how they supported principals and offered a vehicle for generating ideas to assist principals and school sites.

The district in this case study provided an avenue for leadership coaches to develop as a professional learning community. It presented opportunities for two-way communication between district leaders and coaches. It opened itself to constructive feedback from coaches who had a direct line to principals and teachers. The district leaders were amenable to recommendations and suggestions from coaches. They selected coaches who were previously principals with records of continuously improving student achievement and had, in most cases, held higher-level district positions.

Many school districts with leadership coaches have relied solely on retired administrators to coach. Bloom et al. (2005) stated that retirees are a remarkable resource, but that not all possess the interpersonal skills and professional knowledge to be good leadership coaches. The district in this study called upon not only retired school leaders, but also on academics in educational leadership, independent consultants, and administrators formally trained as principal coaches. Moreover, the district was careful and thoughtful in the matching of principals to coaches, making decisions only after reviewing and discussing the experiences and needs of each principal and school. Districts looking to provide support to their principals through leadership coaches might want to be cautious in matching coaches to principals. They may also want to consider recruiting coaches from varied backgrounds as well as at different stages in their careers to produce a repertoire of augmented coaching skills.

Districts with a cadre of leadership coaches might also benefit from providing frequent opportunities for coaches to meet with district leaders. In the study, this type of communication structure was found to be advantageous to both district leaders, coached principals, and the coaches. Districts with several

leadership coaches might also benefit from providing specific times for coaches to meet as a professional learning community. As reported in this study, such opportunities were not only a benefit to the coaches, but also to the principals and the sites they served.

Research is beginning to emerge on leadership coaching for principals, but little if any literature exists on the creation of coaching teams or infrastructures for coaching models. This study was a lens into the first 6 months of a medium-sized district's leadership coaching model. It may provide insight for other school districts interested in supporting their principals with leadership coaches and developing a means for district leaders and coaches to meet and work together.

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## 11.1 Appendix A

### [Study District] Leadership Coaches Open-Ended Post-Survey

This survey is a follow-up to the coaches' survey administered in January. The survey contains 14 questions which are all open-ended. All questions are related to your coaching experience over the last 5 months. Completing the survey should take about 30 minutes. Your responses will be anonymous, that is recorded without any identifying information that is linked to you. All surveys will be reviewed by an independent researcher. Data will be extrapolated to help us determine the impact of coaching on our principal team. Please be as succinct, thorough, and as brief as possible when responding.

Surveys will be collected on **May 21 at the coaches' meeting**. I will assure the anonymity of your survey. Thank you in advance for your time and participation.

1. How many principals do you coach?
2. How often do you meet with each principal?
3. Approximately, how long is each coaching meeting?
4. How often do you visit classrooms with principals?
5. In four or fewer sentences how would you describe the coaching experience in [Study District]?
  
6. What do you believe is your greatest impact on the principals you coached?
7. How would your principals describe their 6 month coaching experience with you?
8. What are some of the areas of your coaching that you would like to improve?

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<sup>2</sup><http://www.wested.org/cs/we/view/rs/867>

9. What do you spend most of your time doing at the school sites? Why is this important?
  
10. Do you find the monthly coaches focus meetings valuable? Why or why not?
11. How could we improve the monthly coaches meeting?
12. Has the monthly coaches' meetings impacted your coaching of principals in the district? If so, how?
13. Would you like to continue with the monthly coaches meetings next year? Why or why not?
14. What would you consider the primary challenge facing the principals that you have coached in [Study District]?