

# Principal Support Framework

## Introduction

Over the past several years, Partnership Sites to Empower Effective Teaching, supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and other school systems have designed and implemented new systems to measure and improve teaching effectiveness. This effort has raised important questions about the role of principals as the primary instructional leaders responsible for continuously improving teaching effectiveness and student learning. In *The School Principal as Leader: Guiding Schools to Better Teaching and Learning* (The Wallace Foundation, 2011), the authors describe effective leadership in the following ways:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students
- Creating a climate hospitable to education
- Cultivating leadership in others
- Improving instruction
- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

Leadership is, after all, second only to teaching among all school-based factors that contribute to student learning. This inquiry into instructional leadership has therefore highlighted the need for central offices to be intentional about developing principals as instructional leaders. Before beginning an assessment of a system's current approach to supporting principals as instructional leaders, however, it is extremely important to reflect upon the extent to which a central office has established a culture of service and coherence that will make it possible for principals to serve as instructional leaders. This culture is grounded in a set of shared beliefs that are reflected in the district's vision, mission, and theory of action and is typically characterized in the following ways:

- The system has a vision focused on student learning and instructional improvement that is reflected in concrete actions by the district or charter management organization.
- Central office creates a primary focus and sense of urgency on improving instruction.
- The district or charter management organization has a theory of action that is clearly articulated and well communicated throughout the system and community.
- There are routinized communications from central office to schools and from schools to central office making it possible for principals to understand and be able to articulate the connection of their work to the broader work of the system.
- Central office implements strong accountability systems and sets and monitors non-negotiable goals for student achievement.

- Central office maintains a culture of support that includes direction, a framework of best practice, resources and tools, professional learning, and an acknowledgement of the uniqueness of schools.

The framework that follows is designed to help central office leaders and principals:

- Create their own picture of what it means to support principals;
- Assess their school system's current approach to supporting principals as instructional leaders;
- Identify strengths to build on;
- Surface technical assistance needs; and
- Highlight areas for inquiry and next-stage policy development.

This framework has been refined using a synthesis of information from a survey of districts and charter management organizations, on-site visits, phone interviews, a practitioner review session, and a review of many school systems' documents and artifacts. It represents the best thinking of educators and other staff in participating districts and charter management organizations about the support that is essential to principals if they are indeed to serve as instructional leaders in their schools.

# Principal Support Framework

## ACTION AREA 1

## A Shared Vision of Principals as Instructional Leaders

The school system has defined, clearly and in detail, what it expects principals to do as the instructional leaders of their schools, and it selects and evaluates principals based primarily on whether they can successfully execute those practices.

### KEY IDEAS

#### 1. District leaders have a shared agreement on instructional leadership.

Principals and central office leaders have developed an agreed-upon understanding of the successful practices of instructional leaders, including the overall management of human capital in their schools.

#### POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- o Principals and central office leaders can consistently, easily, and clearly articulate the school system's agreed-upon understanding of the successful practices of instructional leaders.
- o When asked, principals and supervisors can state the successful practices for which the supervisors hold principals accountable.
- o In collaboration with principals, the school system has captured the successful practices in a written consensus document(s) (e.g., a written framework, an evaluation rubric, and/or theory of action).

#### 2. Leadership practice is evidence-based.

The agreed-upon understanding of successful instructional leadership practices is based on evidence of what improves teaching and learning, either through an analysis of the practices of successful principals in the school system and/or a review of the current research on instructional leadership.

- o The school system identifies schools where teaching effectiveness (among continuously employed teachers) is improving most rapidly and revises its framework of successful instructional leadership practices based on the practices of principals in those schools.

## **ACTION AREA 1, Continued**

### **3. A shared understanding of instructional leadership drives day-to-day work.**

This understanding of the successful practices of instructional leaders drives the day-to-day work of principals.

#### **POSSIBLE EVIDENCE**

- o Based on their calendars, principals spend at least 70% of their time on activities directly related to the school system's successful practices.

### **4. A shared understanding of instructional leadership drives the hiring process.**

Principal recruitment, screening, and selection, including written position descriptions, place primary emphasis on choosing principals who demonstrate the successful practices.

- o As part of the hiring process, principal candidates observe classroom practice, develop a written analysis of the observation, role-play a conversation with the teacher, and deliver a mock professional development session.

### **5. A shared understanding of instructional leadership drives evaluation.**

Principal coaching, mentoring, and evaluation are aligned with the skills expected of principals as instructional leaders.

- o The school system's principal evaluation places primary emphasis on instructional leadership and evaluates principals based on evidence of successful practice.

### **6. A shared understanding of instructional leadership drives professional development.**

Principals and their supervisors use evaluation rubrics to reflect on principals' practices and to develop professional growth goals.

- o There is a learning plan for each principal that is based on the successful instructional leadership practices included in the evaluation rubric.

### **7. District/charter management organization and school leaders focus on continuous improvement in their practice.**

The school system engages in continuous measurement, reflection, and improvement to evolve its understanding of successful instructional leadership practices over time.

- o Central office leaders have developed practices and processes for gathering data on instructional leadership practice and use these data to drive ongoing coaching and professional development at both individual and group levels.

# Principal Support Framework

## ACTION AREA 2

### System of Support for Developing Principals as Instructional Leaders

The school system has created a system of supports for principals, at the forefront of which are dedicated central office leaders—“Instructional Leadership Directors<sup>1</sup>” (ILDs)<sup>1</sup>—who are responsible for helping principals grow as instructional leaders.

#### KEY IDEAS

##### 1. The school system hires Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) with proven ability.

Instructional Leadership Director selection places primary emphasis on proven ability to help principals improve on the school system’s agreed-upon practices of instructional leaders through a coaching and teaching stance.

#### POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- o As a part of the hiring process, Instructional Leadership Director candidates demonstrate their ability to develop principals using principal case studies, developing and modeling the use of tools, and creating plans of support for principals.

##### 2. Instructional Leadership Directors focus on developing principals.

The day-to-day work of Instructional Leadership Directors is to provide support to principals.

- o Job descriptions of Instructional Leadership Directors focus primarily on the development of principals as instructional leaders and effective managers of human capital.
- o Instructional Leadership Directors’ calendars reflect that at least 80% of their time is spent planning, executing and reflecting on professional development and coaching for principals.

<sup>1</sup>Honig et al define ILDs as executive-level staff who spend as close as possible to 100% of their time helping principals grow as instructional leaders, by working with principals one-on-one and in principal networks. (Honig, M.I., Copland, M.A., Rainey, L., Lorton, J.A., & Newton, M. (2010, April). Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement. A report to the Wallace Foundation. Seattle, WA: The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.)

## ACTION AREA 2, Continued

### 3. Instructional Leadership Directors differentiate support for principals.

Instructional Leadership Directors provide differentiated support to principals based on principals' individual needs as well as the strengths and needs of the schools.

Additional coordinated supports are in place for novice and struggling principals.

#### POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- o Principals' professional growth plans reflect their unique needs based on their problems of practice (student, teacher and leadership.)
- o Central office provides a strong principal induction program for new principals as well as coaches and mentors to novice and struggling principals.

### 4. Central office leaders lead principal networks.

Instructional Leadership Directors lead networks for principal learning that provide principals with opportunities to learn from each other and to solve shared problems of practice collaboratively.

- o Principals state that some of their key learning comes from colleagues in their network.
- o The central office has invested in technology to support principals' learning networks, enabling them to communicate online and to share effective tools, strategies, and ideas digitally.

### 5. Instructional Leadership Directors collaborate with other central office departments on principal professional development.

All central office staff who provide professional development to principals do so in coordination with one another, based upon the Instructional Leadership Directors' and principals' articulation of principals' needs.

Principals have formal opportunities to provide input into planning professional learning that will help them improve as instructional leaders.

- o All staff involved in planning or leading principal professional development meet regularly to coordinate principals' professional development.
- o A committee, including principals and Instructional Leadership Directors, meets regularly to give input and help plan principal professional learning.

## ACTION AREA 2, Continued

### 6. Central office provides support for Instructional Leadership Directors.

Instructional Leadership Directors receive consistent and systematic professional development to perform the functions of an Instructional Leadership Director.

Instructional Leadership Directors' job responsibilities and their span of control (number of principals per Instructional Leadership Director) allow them to meet the differentiated needs of principals.

#### POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- o Instructional Leadership Directors have a regular meeting time to discuss their problems of practice and to share new learning with one another.
- o Instructional Leadership Directors receive at least one day of professional development or coaching per month based upon their differentiated learning needs.

### 7. Central office evaluates Instructional Leadership Directors on principals' growth and performance.

The evaluation of Instructional Leadership Directors is chiefly based on the quality of support they provide to principals and on measured growth in principal performance.

Instructional Leadership directors are evaluated in part on growth in teacher effectiveness and student outcomes.

- o Central office has developed measures of success for leadership practices, which are used to evaluate both principals and Instructional Leadership Directors.
- o The evaluation instrument for Instructional Leadership Directors and principals includes rubrics for growth in student outcomes and growth in teaching effectiveness.

### 8. Central office leaders are held accountable for growth in principals' instructional leadership skills.

All central office staff who provide professional development to principals are held accountable for the improvement of principals' instructional leadership knowledge and skills.

- o Survey results show that principals believe they are getting the supports they need to improve their instructional leadership practice.

# Principal Support Framework

<b>ACTION AREA 3</b>	<b>Making it Possible for Principals to Be Instructional Leaders</b>
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The school system has made it possible for instructional leadership to be the primary job of principals.

### KEY IDEAS

#### 1. School staffing patterns and principals’ span of control facilitate the principals’ instructional work.

School staffing and principals’ span of control provide time and support for principals to focus on instructional leadership as their primary job function.

- POSSIBLE EVIDENCE**
- o The school system has lowered the student enrollment thresholds that signal the need to hire additional administrative staff in schools.
  - o Schools are assigned dedicated staff to support day-to-day operations, with clear job descriptions focused on enabling principals to dedicate more time to instructional leadership and human capital management.

#### 2. The system protects principals’ time.

Central office leaders limit requirements for principals to be away from their schools during the school day and during teacher professional development time.

- o Principals’ calendars indicate that they leave their school no more than one day per month for school system activities that are not related to instructional improvement and student learning.
- o Central office leaders continuously work with principals to help them identify things the principals can “let go of.”



## ACTION AREA 3, Continued

### 3. Central office functions as a service center for schools.

Central office staff members have clear expectations for providing strategic and timely support to principals in the areas of curriculum, human resources, budgeting, operations, and public relations.

#### POSSIBLE EVIDENCE

- o The school system has created a principal support team to help principals handle personnel issues efficiently.
- o Central office ensures that data systems and infrastructure are in place for ready access by schools.
- o Central office aligns, creates and coordinates a written curriculum aligned to standards.
- o Central office aligns all instructional initiatives to make implementation easier for principals and schools.

### 4. Central office provides customized support to schools.

Central office units are organized to provide customized support to clusters of schools to enable principals to address operational issues (sometimes called a “case management approach”) efficiently.

- o The school system’s research, data and evaluation unit supports principal/school reflections on school performance as it relates to improvement goals.
- o Departments, such as Human Resources, assign case managers to provide strategic support to individual schools.

### 5. Teacher leaders serve as partners with principals.

The school system invests in teacher leaders as partners for principals.

- o Teacher leaders have dedicated time to observe and provide feedback to colleagues.
- o Teacher leaders meet regularly, at least bi-weekly, with the principal and the principal’s assistant to align and calibrate teacher observations and feedback to teachers, and to plan professional development.
- o Central office leaders provide training structures for people in roles that can support the principal—assistant principals, administrative assistants, teacher leaders.
- o Central office forms strategic partnerships with staff for the recruitment, development, and retention of staff.