THE 4 DIMENSIONS OF SCHOOL LEADERSHIP™

RESEARCH SUMMARY

The Four Dimensions of School Leadership™ framework (4D™) reflects knowledge drawn from over 40 years of research on equitable and effective education leadership. This Research Summary outlines four fields of educational leadership research that contribute to the vision described in the 4D framework. The first section describes foundational research about instructional leadership practices in support of student learning. The second section outlines research that approaches school leadership with a focus on equity and justice, while the third highlights research specific to family and community leadership. The final section describes research about leadership that builds coherent systems. The practices outlined in the 4D framework integrate knowledge from each of these bodies of research into a holistic practice. In addition to literature specifically addressing leadership, the 4D builds on research knowledge related to the underlined science of learning and development and the role of underlined collective teacher efficacy in fostering student learning.

Instructional leadership practices in support of student learning.

For decades, researchers have explored how leadership supports student learning. A 2021 report by Drs. Jason Grissom, Anna Egalite, and Constance Lindsay found that strong leadership may impact student learning even more than we realized. After synthesizing 20 years of leadership studies, the researchers estimated that the impact of replacing a below-average elementary school principal with a strong principal would result in almost 3 months of additional math and reading growth each year for students across the entire school.

Studies suggest that leaders impact student learning by setting an instructional vision that positions students as sense-makers who learn by engaging with rigorous concepts in learning communities. Researchers Paul Cobb and Kara Jackson, with their Middle School Mathematics and

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the Institutional Setting of Teaching (MIST) team, investigated how leaders support wide-scale instructional improvement. They found that leaders ensure students have access to excellent instruction by starting with a clear vision for student learning and designing district-wide and school supports for teachers to learn together and implement high quality instructional practices. Within the CEL 4D framework, this body of research forms the basis for the Learning and Teaching Environment dimension. For instance, the sub-dimension of Improvement to Teaching Practice highlights how leaders use their instructional vision to craft teacher learning opportunities that center students' learning needs.

School leadership with a focus on equity and justice.

More recently, educators and researchers have come to realize that students' learning is tied to their social and political experiences. That means that marginalized students (such as those who identify as Black, Indigenous, linguistically diverse, as having a disability, or as transgender, among other identities categories) experience injustices that deny them opportunities to learn. In response, scholars in the related fields of social justice leadership, culturally responsive school leadership, and equity leadership focus on understanding how leaders transform schools so that marginalized students experience excellent learning opportunities

that lead to equitable outcomes. Within these fields of research, scholars explore how leaders support educators to develop new understandings of racism and other forms of injustice, and how they reorient their school communities to ground teaching and learning in students' assets

Interested in learning more about instructional leadership?

We suggest the following resources:

Grissom, J. A., Egalite, A. J., & Lindsay, C. A. (2021). *How principals affect students and schools*. Wallace Foundation. https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/How-Principals-Affect-Students-and-Schools.pdf

Cobb, P., Jackson, K., Henrick, E., & Smith, T. M. (2020). *Systems for instructional improvement: Creating coherence from the classroom to the district office*. Harvard Education Press.

Youngs, P., Kim, J., & Mavrogordato, M. (Eds.). (2020). *Exploring principal development and teacher outcomes: How principals can strengthen instruction, teacher retention, and student achievement*. Routledge.

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and experiences. For example, Dr. Muhammad Khalifa's scholarship describes Culturally Responsive School Leadership, which emphasizes deep cultural connections between schools and their communities. Culturally Responsive School Leaders engage in critical self-reflection, bring community and family voices to the forefront in decision-making, break down school structures that exclude and disadvantage some students, and support teachers to develop practices and curricula

"Leaders ensure students have access to excellent instruction by starting with a clear vision for student learning."

that affirm students' diverse cultural identities. This research informs each dimension of the 4D framework, including shaping ideas around personal development within the Collective Leadership dimension and focusing on social justice within the dimension of Learning and Teaching Environment. The influence of this research can be seen in the Equitable School Community dimension in the call for leaders to engage their communities in developing and realizing a vision aligned with the values of equity and inclusivity.

Interested in learning more about justice-focused leadership?

We suggest the following resources:

Khalifa, M. (2018). Culturally responsive school leadership. Harvard Education Press.

Theoharis, G. (2009). *The school leaders our children deserve: Seven keys to equity, social justice, and school reform*. Teachers College Press.

Gooden, M. A. (2012). What Does Racism Have to Do with Leadership? Countering the Idea of Color-Blind Leadership: A Reflection on Race and the Growing Pressures of the Urban Principalship. *Educational Foundations*, 26(1), 67-84.

Long, S., Souto-Manning, M., & Vasquez, V. (Eds.). (2016). *Courageous leadership in early childhood education: Taking a stand for social justice*. Teachers College Press.

Arar, K., Brooks, J. S., & Bogotch, I. (2019). *Education, immigration and migration: Policy, leadership and praxis for a changing world*. Emerald Publishing Limited.

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Family and community leadership.

Scholars emphasize that leading equitable schools where every student learns and thrives requires building new relationships with families and communities. Instead of traditional "one-way" forms of family engagement where schools tell families how to support learning at home, scholars explore how leaders foster authentic partnerships with families. Researchers like Dr. Ann Ishimaru and her colleagues

document how families from marginalized communities support school improvement by setting priorities for learning and acting as equal participants in decision-making. Dr. Ishimaru's work suggests that school leaders can work towards more equitable outcomes for students by creating

"Leaders should bring diverse community voices to the forefront to build a more just school culture."

systematic opportunities for family leadership and for teachers and families to collaborate. Other studies describe how school leaders support teachers to draw on families' cultural knowledge and community strengths to design effective and culturally sustaining instruction. Within the 4D framework, building authentic partnerships with families and communities is central to the Equitable School Community and Collective Leadership dimensions. For instance, within the sub-dimension describing Culture and Climate, the framework emphasizes that leaders should bring diverse community voices to the forefront to build a more just school culture.

Interested in learning more about family and community leadership?

We suggest the following resources:

Ishimaru, A. (2019). *Just Schools: Building Equitable Collaborations with Families and Communities.* Teachers College Press.

Family Leadership Design Collaborative: https://familydesigncollab.org

Green, T. L. (2018). Enriching Educational Leadership Through Community Equity Literacy: A Conceptual Foundation. *Leadership and Policy in Schools*, 17(4), 487-515.

Maier, A., Daniel, J., Oakes, J., & Lam, L. (2017). *Community Schools as an Effective School Improvement Strategy: A Review of the Evidence.* Learning Policy Institute. https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED606765.pdf

Building coherent systems.

To improve instruction and student experiences, leaders must also pay attention to how their schools function as organizations. Another body of literature explores how leaders transform the school

system, from classrooms to central offices. Studies suggest that leaders spur system-wide change by communicating their guiding beliefs and ensuring value alignment within formal policies, processes for teacher learning and collaboration, and informal rules and practices influencing educators' interactions with students and families. In their recent book, Drs. Sarah Diem and Anjalé Welton argue that leaders' decisions about resources and policies can support or hinder efforts to create more equitable learning opportunities, so leaders must be clear about their beliefs and purposeful in their actions and choices. Dr.

Welton and her colleagues also developed a framework to guide leaders in reorienting their schools and districts toward racial justice at both the interpersonal and systems level by taking stock of local conditions, defining the organizational practice they aim to change, and leading cycles of continuous improvement. The Resource Management dimension of the 4D Framework captures knowledge from this body of research in its description of leadership that uses diverse data sources to assess progress and builds strategically on community strengths to catalyze system-wide change.

Interested in learning more about systems leadership?

We suggest the following resources:

Diem, S., & Welton, A. D. (2020). *Anti-racist educational leadership and policy: Addressing racism in public education*. Routledge.

Welton, A. D., Owens, D. R., & Zamani-Gallaher, E. M. (2018). Anti-racist change: A conceptual framework for educational institutions to take systemic action. *Teachers College Record*, *120*(14).

Irby, D. J., Meyers, C. V., & Salisbury, J. D. (2020). Improving schools by strategically connecting equity leadership and organizational improvement perspectives: Introduction to special issue. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, *25*(2), 101-106.

Ishimaru, A. M., & Galloway, M. K. (2014). Beyond individual effectiveness: Conceptualizing organizational leadership for equity. Leadership and Policy in Schools, 13(1), 93–146.

Skrla, L., Scheurich, J. J., Garcia, J., & Nolly, G. (2004). Equity Audits: A Practical Leadership Tool for Developing Equitable and Excellent Schools. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 40*(1), 133-161.

Bryk, A. S., Gomez, L. M., Grunow, A., & LeMahieu, P. G. (2015). *Learning to improve: How America's schools can get better at getting better*. Harvard Education Press.

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