Developing District Instructional Leadership Capacity:
Creating the Conditions for Learning to Lead Instructional Improvement

Ann Jaquith, Liam Aiello and Edit Khachatryan
with our District Partners
Context: Improving student learning is the district priority

Views of District Elementary Supervisors (DES)

• Principals must learn how to lead instructional change
• Principal meetings should support learning
  – Critical Friends Sessions
  – Instructional Site Visits
• DES involved principals in the re-design process
Key Questions

1. How do district leaders create conditions for principals to learn how to lead instructional improvement in their schools?

1. How, and in what ways, do district leaders learn how to support principals to lead instructional improvement?
Underlying Assumptions

Leading

• Embedded in action (e.g., Robinson, 2001)
• Involves problem identification and problem solving (e.g., Robinson, 2001; Leithwood & Stager, 1989)
• Distributed in nature (e.g., Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2004)

Teaching and Leading

• Inherently non-routine & complex activities
Methodology: Design-based Implementation Research

Sample

• 7 district leaders (DES), 60 principals, 3 schools

Data Sources

• **Field notes:** DES meetings, monthly Critical Friends sessions & Instructional Site Visits, January & June DES retreats; observations in 3 focal schools
• **Interviews with DES** (December and July)
• **Principal survey “small measure”**
## Critical Friends and Site Visits

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Opportunities for learning</th>
<th>Constraints on learning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Focus on leading</td>
<td>• Learning purposes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instructional improvement</td>
<td>varied, not explicit,</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Conversation structures</td>
<td>and/or contested</td>
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<tr>
<td>facilitated learning</td>
<td>• Identified “problems”</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Leadership practice(s)</td>
<td>did not consistently</td>
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<td>were made public</td>
<td>center on instruction</td>
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<td></td>
<td>or principal’s role</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• Artifacts of practice</td>
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<td>varied in relevance</td>
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<td>to the learning</td>
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<td>purpose</td>
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Making Leadership Work More Visible

- Documented and elaborated leaders’ work

- Raised questions: Purpose? Approach? Effects?
Ongoing Challenges

• Keeping the focus on instructional improvement and the principal’s role

• Cultivating a learning culture among principals

• Facilitating meaningful, evidence-based conversations
Issues in Design and Development

• Managing an iterative, collaborative design when district partners change
  – Re-establishing trust and re-negotiating the work
• Maintaining objectivity about the partnership
• Responding to various and competing needs of partners
• Developing valid and reliable measures of capacity to sustain change