

# Developing District Instructional Leadership Capacity:

Creating the Conditions for Learning to Lead  
Instructional Improvement



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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

## Opportunities for learning

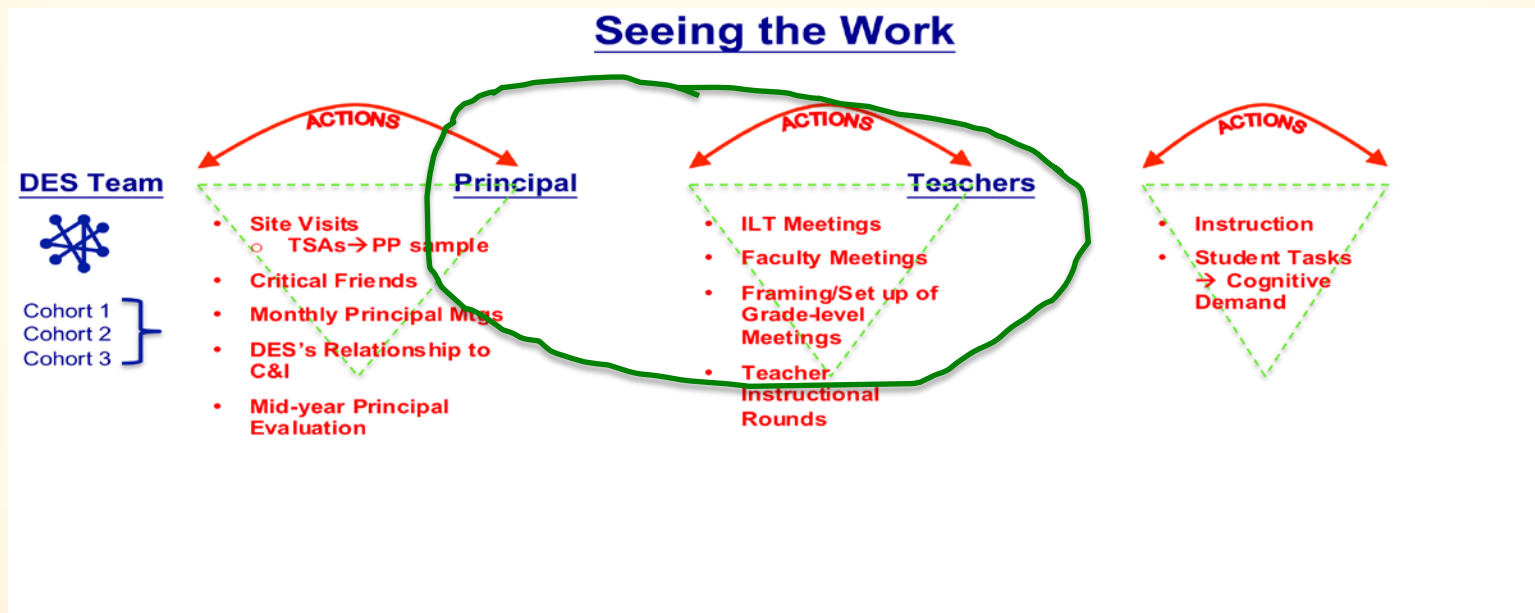
- Focus on leading instructional improvement
- Conversation structures facilitated learning
- Leadership practice(s) were made public

## Constraints on learning

- Learning purposes varied, not explicit, and/or contested
- Identified “problems” did not consistently center on instruction or principal’s role
- Artifacts of practice varied in relevance to the learning purpose

# 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