

# **Critical Connections: District Leadership and Continuous Improvement**

Kentucky Association of School  
Superintendents

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The  
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Dr. Brian McNulty is Vice President, Leadership Development for The Leadership and Learning Center.

Brian brings 30 years of experience as a nationally recognized educator in leadership development to his current position at the Leadership and Learning Center. Prior to this he served as the Vice President for Field Services at the Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL). Before coming to McREL, he was an Assistant Superintendent for Adams County School District 14, and the Assistant Commissioner of Education, for the Colorado Department of Education.

Brian's work and writing have been featured in books, scholarly journals and periodicals throughout the world. An author of more than 40 publications, Brian's most recent books include, *Leaders Make It Happen* with Laura Besser (an AASA member book) and *School Leadership that Works: from Research to Results*, an ASCD best selling publication co-authored with Robert Marzano and Tim Waters.

Although Dr. McNulty is well known as a both a researcher and a keynote speaker, his primary work has focused on long-term intensive partnerships with schools, districts, state education agencies and educational service agencies in applying the current research to field based problems. His recent research has focused on developing continuous improvement frameworks based on data and inquiry.

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- Outcomes**
- Explore the challenges, issue, and practices associated with continuous improvement in schools and districts
  - Focus and deepen your current work
  - Make commitments for follow-through

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- Icebreaker Activity**
- At your tables, complete the the following two sentences:
- The greatest success I've achieved since August is...
  - The most important thing that I have learned during this time is...

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**Background for the Day**  
**Research Review**

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**1. What Matters Most in Terms of Student Achievement?**

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**THE  
TEACHER**

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**The greatest challenge that most students experience is the level of competence of the teacher.**

Hattie, 2009

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**The current educational climate in KY and across the country causes the level of teacher competence to be more critical than it has ever been?**

**Discuss why you agree or disagree.**

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**The variations in student learning are directly correlated with the quality of the teacher.**

McKinsey & Company, 2007

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**The difference in performance between students who are assigned three effective teachers in a row versus those assigned three ineffective teachers in a row is 49 percentile points.**

McKinsey & Company, 2007

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**Sanders and Rivers (1996) found that the least effective teachers elicited average student gains of roughly 14 percentage points a year, however the most effective teachers elicited an average gain of 52 percentile points a year.**

Hattie, 2009

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**The single most important influence on student learning is the quality of teaching.**

**But despite this recognition, most school districts have not defined what they mean by good teaching.**

Danielson, 2006

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**2. What Matters Most in Terms of Teacher Effectiveness?**

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**Effective Teachers**

**It appears that the most important difference between the most and least effective classrooms is the teacher, but the most important variable appears to be **WHAT THEY DO** rather than what they know.**

**Wiliam, 2007**

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**Teachers have the tendency to gravitate towards approaches that are congruent with their prior practices.**

**Stein and Coburn, 2008**

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**If the research on professional development over the last twenty years has shown us anything, it is that we can change teacher thinking without changing teacher practice.**

**The only thing that impacts student achievement is teacher practice.**

Wiliam, 2007

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**So if we are serious about raising student achievement, we must focus on helping teachers change what they do in classrooms.**

Wiliam, 2007

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**What is your approach (or the approach in your district) to teacher learning?**

**Talk to your “shoulder buddy” or at your table.**

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**Where Most Districts are  
Right Now...**

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**Much of Current Teaching  
Focuses On**

- **Knowledge - Select, identify, label, describe,**
- **Comprehension - Match, illustrate, defend**
- **Application - Organize, generalize, solve, apply**

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**Learning at higher levels in  
Elementary Classrooms**

- *5<sup>th</sup> graders spent 91.2 percent of their time listening to the teacher or working alone.*
- *Only five percent of 5<sup>th</sup> graders worked in small groups.*
- *Only fourteen percent of students had a consistently high-quality instructional climate.*
- *Most classrooms had a fairly healthy emotional climate.*

Pianta et al., 30 March 2007

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## Didactic Instruction

- High levels of didactic instruction reduces performance by four percent.
- Didactic instruction or traditional instruction includes:
  - Teachers lecturing students
  - Asking for short, single answers

Simmons, 2006

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## How Much Instruction in Your Schools is didactic?

- What percentage of teaching is didactic?
  - Elementary
  - Secondary
- Come up with a percentage at your table.

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## Look at the Following Slides

What does this information mean for teaching and learning?

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## Collaboration Amongst Students

**Sustained, on-task discussions amongst students accounts for only 1.7 minutes per 60 minutes of class instructional time.**

Kamil et al., 2008

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## Time on Task $d = 0.38$

- On average, students are engaged in their lessons about half of the total class time.
- The lowest level of engagement is when teachers were lecturing or when students were asked to watch television.

Hattie, 2009

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## Time on Task $d = 0.38$

- The highest engagement is when students are working in groups or laboratories.

Hattie, 2009

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**Nuthall (2005) found that most of the material taught in class is already known by the students, and Yair (2000) found that students spend 85 percent of their time listening (or pretending to listen) to a teacher talking.**

Hattie, 2009

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### **Expectations in Common Core**

- **Analysis – Compare, contrast, classify, prioritize**
- **Evaluate – Judge, criticize, defend, recommend**
- **Create – produce, design, develop, formulate**

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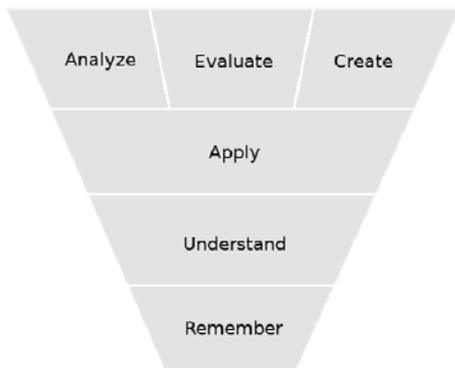
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(Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001)

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## Setting Higher Expectations

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### Goal Setting $d = 0.56$

A major finding from the research is that:

- Achievement is enhanced to the degree that students and teachers set challenging rather than “do your best” goals, relative to the student’s present competencies

Hattie, J., 2009

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### Goal Setting $d = 0.56$

- It is not the specificity of the goals but the difficulty that is crucial to success
- There is a direct linear relationship between the degree of goal difficulty and performance

Hattie, J., 2009

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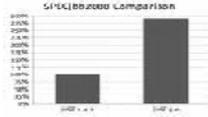
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## Goal Setting $d = 0.56$

- The performance of students who have the most challenging goals is more than 250% higher than the performance of students with easier goals



Hattie, J., 2009

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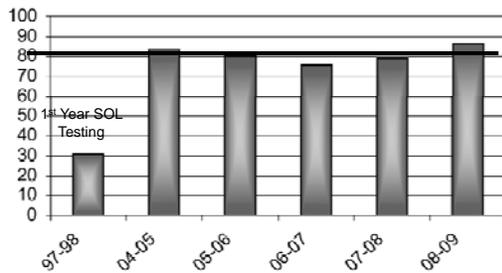
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## State Assessment Results Algebra I: Percent Passing




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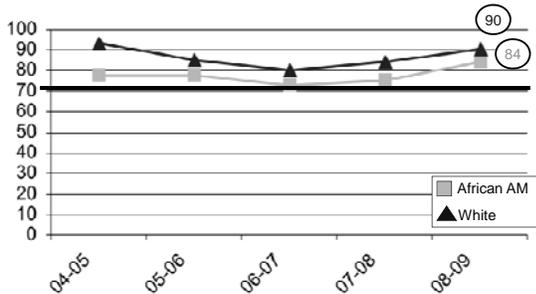
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## Results: Algebra I – Race




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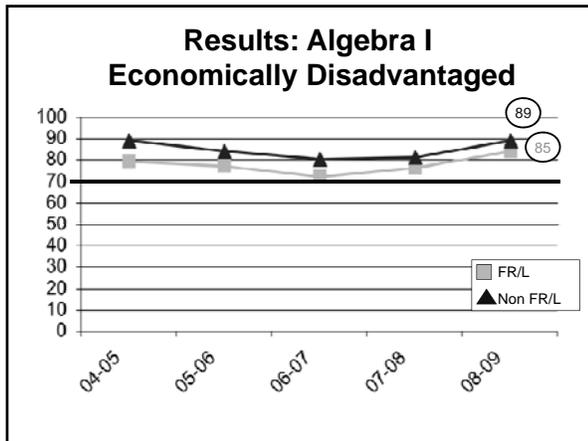
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**How to move from where we  
are...  
to where we need to  
be.**

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**Two Studies**

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**1. District and School Improvement Work**

- 48 districts – 4 year phase-in
- Focused – continuous improvement process
- Researched-based practices
- Implemented deeply
- Feedback, learning systems (DLT, BLT, TBT's)

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**2. Large-Scale, Six-Year Leadership Research Study**

- This is the largest leadership study of its kind to date
- Nine states, 43 school districts, and 180 elementary, middle, and secondary schools.

Louis, et al. 2010

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**Large-Scale, Six-Year Leadership Study**

- Survey data from 8,391 teachers and 471 school administrators; interview data from 581 teachers and administrators, 304 district level informants, and 124 state personnel; and observational data from 312 classrooms.

Louis, et al. 2010

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**The Good News...**

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**Recently, at least  
10 large-scale,  
quantitative studies, have assessed  
the effects of leadership behavior  
on student performance and  
engagement.**

**All have reported significant  
positive effects.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**Leadership is second only to  
classroom instruction as an  
influence on student learning.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**The Caveat**

**To date, we have not found a single case of a school improving its student achievement record in the absence of effective leadership.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**The instructional leadership concept implies a focus on classroom practice.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**The evidence to date suggests that few principals have made the time and demonstrated the ability to provide high quality instructional feedback to teachers.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**One of the most powerful sources of districts' influence on schools and students was through the development of school leaders' collective sense of efficacy about their jobs.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**Two primary findings:**

- 1. Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership**
- 2. Higher-performing schools award greater influence to teacher teams**

Louis, et al. 2010

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**Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student achievement than individual leadership.**

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**Principals and district leaders have the most influence on decisions in all schools; however, they do not lose influence as others gain influence.**

Louis, et al. 2010

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### **Questions**

- **Do you have the necessary leadership in your district (at the district and building levels)?**
- **Can you develop this capacity?**
- **What does this mean for your leadership?**

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### **Developing Systems Level Accountability**

- **Reciprocal accountability**
- **Integrity – follow through**
- **Demonstrating leadership through learning**
- **Teams at all levels**
- **Inquiry-based learning**

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**What is the biggest ongoing challenge in education?**

**Talk to your shoulder partner and be ready to report out in 2 minutes.**

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**Read handout #1  
Implementation Gap**

- Read the 3-page handout
- Highlight points important to you
- Go around the table and share one thing each from the reading
- Large group debrief

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**Reality Check**

- How many of you think you implement well in your organization?
  - How do you know?
- Be ready to report out

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**What is the Difference  
Between Highly Effective...**

- Teachers
- Principals
- Superintendent
- Central Office Staff

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**It is what teachers get students to do in the class that emerges as the strongest component of the accomplished teacher's repertoire, rather than what the teacher specifically does.**



Hattie, J., 2009

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**Whose responsibility is it to help students learn at higher levels?**

**Whose responsibility is it to help teachers increase the rigor of instruction?**

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**What do you, as superintendent, need to do to effectively implement the Common Core?**

**Or, what do leaders need to do to help teachers teach at higher levels?**

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**What is our 2<sup>nd</sup> biggest challenge?**

**Talk to your shoulder partner and be ready to report out in 2 minutes.**

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**Reality Check**

- **How many of you think you monitor well in your organization?**
  - **How do you monitor?**
  - **If you collect monitoring data, how do you act on it?**

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**What are the Primary  
Purposes of Monitoring?**

**Discuss this at your table  
and  
be ready to report out.**

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**We Close the Achievement Gap  
by Closing the Implementation Gap**

**Is this true for your organization?**

**Discuss this at your table  
and  
be ready to report out.**

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**“There’s only two things in life...**

**But I forget what they are!”**



John Hiatt – Buffalo River Home

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**Really there are...**  
**3 things in life.**

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**3 Things**

- 1. Focus your work on a few important things**
- 2. Improving instruction**
- 3. Inquire, learn as a system, and develop leadership capacity**

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**3 Things**

- 1. Focus your work on a few important things**
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## 1. Focus

- Marzano, Waters, McNulty (2005)
- Robinson (2007), and Robinson, Lloyd, & Rowe, (2008)
- Reeves (2011)
- Schmoker (2011)
- McNulty & Besser (2011)

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## Marzano, Waters, McNulty (2005)

- 21 principal responsibilities
- Differential impacts of leadership
  - Focus and magnitude of change

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## Robinson (2007), and Robinson et al. (2008)

Read the section on  
“Strategic Resourcing”  
Pages 3-4 in Handout #2

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Leadership Dimension	Average Effect size
2. Strategic resourcing	0.31
<p>0.27 ES = 11%</p> <p>0.84 ES = 30%</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Robinson et al., 2008</p>	

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**What does this mean for your principals?  
Discuss and report out.**

**What does this mean for you and the central office?  
Discuss and report out.**

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**Multiple simultaneous initiatives reduce the coherence of the teaching program.**

Robinson, V., M., J. 2007

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**Robinson et al. (2008) found that student performance was positively impacted when... the principal worked to reduce the number of other initiatives in the building.**

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**Numerous researchers caution against adopting too many initiatives that detract from the improvement focus and usually result in “initiative fatigue.” (Reeves, 2006)**

[See Reeves (2006, 2011); Elmore (2006); Fullan (2010); Schmoker (2011) and McNulty and Besser (2011)]

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**The single variable that had the highest relationship with increased student performance was...**

**FOCUS**

Reeves, 2011

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## Focus

- **Focus results in student achievement gains that are five times greater than schools and districts that score lower in focus**
- **“Weeding the Garden”**

Reeves, 2011

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**Based on a double-blind review of more than 2000 schools, the compelling conclusion of the research is that schools with higher levels of focus...**

Reeves, 2011

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**... not only have higher levels of student achievement... but are also better able to implement other essential leadership and teaching strategies.**

Reeves, 2011

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### **McNulty and Besser (2011)**

- **A limited number of focused goals and strategies**
- **“The vast majority of improvement plans have too many goals and strategies; consequently, the efforts of staff are spread across so many initiatives that they are rarely implemented effectively, nor do they then achieve the intended outcomes.”**

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### **Determining Your Current Status**

**See handout # 3**

**District and Building-Level  
Accountability Questions**

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### **You Have A Lot on Your Plate**

- **SB 1- a new assessment program beginning in the 2011-12 school year**
  - **End-of-course (EOC) assessment program at the high school level**
- **Teachers provide instruction related to the Common Core Standards (CCS) in the fall of 2011.**

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### **New Requirements**

- **Students assessed on the CCS beginning in the Spring of 2012 (KCAS).**
- **Assessing teacher & leader effectiveness (are students learning?)**
  - Comprehensive / holistic approach incorporating multiple measures

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### **Specifics on Effectiveness Framework**

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### **Teacher Effectiveness Framework**

- **Demonstrates content knowledge and research-based practices and strategies appropriate to student learning**
- **Plans formative and summative assessments to guide instruction and measure student growth toward learning targets.**

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**Teacher Effectiveness  
Framework**

- **Develops and communicates student friendly learning targets that lead to mastery of national, state and local standards**
- **Designs and implements instructional plans that are data-informed and address students' diverse learning needs**

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**Principal Effectiveness  
Framework**

- **Create a comprehensive, rigorous, and coherent curricular program**
- **Develop and utilize assessment and accountability systems to monitor student progress**
- **Collaboratively develop and implement a shared vision and mission emphasizing a culture of collaboration, trust, learning, and high expectations**

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**District  
Accountability Questions**

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**1. What is the focus for your district? (i.e. district's specific improvement goals and strategies)**

- **What are you working on to improve staff capacity?**
  - **Work individually**
  - **Share at your table**
  - **Report out**

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**2. How clear are all staff members on the goals and strategies for improvement?**

- **How many strategies are there?**
- **How well are the strategies being implemented?**
  - **Work individually**
  - **Share at your table**
  - **Report out**

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**3. If the strategies are being implemented, how will you assess if they are effective ?**

- **What data will you collect?**
- **How will you collect this?**
- **How often?**
- **What will be done with these results?**
  - **What actions will you taken as a result of the data?**

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**Leaders who execute...**

**...focus on  
a few clear priorities**

Bossidy, L., & Charan, R., (2002)

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**You should pay special  
attention to a handful of  
*high-leverage* behaviors.**

Patterson, K., et. al. (2008).

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**Focus**

**Don't do too many things:**

- 1. Focus on implementing a few things well and deeply**
  - One page improvement plan
- 2. Monitor and provide feedback and support**
  - Monitoring schedules
  - Ongoing differentiated professional development

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## Focus

### 3. Learn as a system

- Active, data-based inquiry at each level of the system

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## What is Focus?

- One page improvement plan
- Monitoring and feedback schedule
- Ongoing differentiated support and professional development

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**Focus  
is the first obligation  
of leaders.**

Reeves, 2011

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### **3 Things**

- 1. Focus your work on a few important things**
- 2. Improving instruction**
- 3. Inquire, learn as a system, and develop leadership capacity**

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### **Developing Shared Knowledge on District Leadership and Student Achievement**

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### **Review Handout # 4 District Factors Affecting Achievement**

- Read through the list silently**
- Highlight specific ideas or factors that are interesting or important to you**
- Follow the protocol**
- Report out**

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**District Factors Affecting  
Achievement**

**Modified “Final Word” Protocol**

- **Begin with one person reporting out on one thing that was important to them and why (everyone else is silent!)**
- **Conduct a quick round robin on just that one thing**
- **Go on to the next person and repeat the process**

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**Report Out**

**What was interesting to you?**

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**Based on the reading,  
what is the most important  
work for the district?**

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**What role should the superintendent play in strengthening instruction?**

**How should they do this?**

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**What we need is more powerful teaching and learning.**

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**The Two primary Ways to Strengthen Instruction**

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## 2. Focus on Instruction

1. Specific effective teaching practices
  - The school or district agrees on everyone learning and using some specific effective practices that are learned, implemented, monitored, and provided feedback on.
2. Continuous learning of effective practices
  - Teacher-based teams use data to determine needs; develop shared lessons and units; develop, administer, and score shared assessments; and develop interventions.

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## 1. Identifying Effective Teaching Practices

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## You Have a Number of Effective Practices Identified:

- Teaching to the Common Core
- Research-based instructional practices
- Formative assessment
- Design and implement data-informed instructional plans
- Accountability systems to monitor student progress

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**While beginning with a narrow focus is legitimate, a school or district must expand the breadth of its discussion of effective teaching.**

Marzano, , R. J., (2009)

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**The important message here is that providing feedback to teachers regarding effective instruction necessitates articulating a broad array of strategies organized into a comprehensive framework.**

Marzano, , R. J., (2009)

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**At a Minimum, You Should Be Clear On:**

- 1. What is the strategy?**
- 2. Why is it important?**
- 3. How to use the strategy appropriately**
- 4. When to appropriately use the strategy**

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## 2. Focus on Instruction

1. Specific effective teaching practices
  - The school or district has agreed on everyone learning some specific effective practices that are learned, implemented, monitored, and provided feedback on.
2. Continuous learning of effective practices
  - Teacher-based teams use data to determine needs; develop shared lessons and units; develop, administer, and score shared assessments; and develop interventions.

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## 2. Teacher-Based Teams

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### Next We Will Explore Teacher Based-Teams

- These teams are referred to as
  - Professional learning communities (PLCs)
  - Data Teams
  - Teacher-based Teams (TBTs)
  - Other
- When done well, they are the best method for teacher learning and continuous improvement for schools and districts.

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## Teacher Based-Teams

- Often they are not actively facilitated, or fully implemented
- You can not over-structure the teams (especially new or less effective teams)
- One structure that needs to be provided is the consistent use of protocols
- Next we will use a protocol

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## What Do We Know About Teacher-Based Teams – TBTs?

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## Teacher-Based Teams Activity Handout # 5 Reading and Protocol

- Break into small groups (5 or less)
- Read “Last Word” Protocol
- Read Excerpt on Instructional Data Teams
- Follow Protocol

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**Debrief Protocol**

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**What Do We Know About  
Teacher-Based Teams –  
TBTs?**

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**Largest Leadership Study to Date**

- **Collective leadership has a stronger influence on student learning than any individual source of leadership**
- **Higher-performing schools award greater influence to teacher teams**

Seashore Louis et. al, 2010

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**A growing body of evidence suggests that when teachers collaborate to pose and answer questions informed by data from their own students, their knowledge grows and their practice changes.**

David, 2008/2009

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**In a comprehensive five-year study of over 1,500 schools, they found that when teachers formed professional learning communities, achievement increased in math, reading, science, and history and absentee and dropout rates decreased.**

Darling-Hammond, L., et al. 2009

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**With teachers operating in grade-level teams that meet regularly, the school creates structures for examining student progress, as well as for creating a more coherent curriculum and allowing teachers to learn from one another.**

Darling-Hammond, L., 2010

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**“By using an inquiry-based team framework, achievement scores rose from the worst to the best in the district.”**

Gallimore et. al., 2009

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## **Caveats**

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**Collaborative inquiry is among the most promising strategies for strengthening teaching and learning.**

**The biggest risk, however, is not providing the necessary leadership and support.**

David, J. L., 2008/2009

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**“Time for collaboration by itself, even when administratively supported, was unlikely to improve achievement unless additional conditions were in place to structure its effectiveness.”**

Saunders, W. M., et al., 2010

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**Provided the right conditions, leadership, and protocols, teachers will make use of collaborative time in ways that improve achievement.**

Saunders, W. M., et al., 2010

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**Protocols that Articulate Specific Inquiry Functions are Critical:**

- **Jointly and recursively identifying appropriate and worthwhile goals for student learning**
- **Finding or developing appropriate means to assess student progress towards the goals**
- **Bringing to the table the expertise of colleagues**
- **Planning, preparing, and delivering lessons**
- **Using evidence from the classroom to evaluate instruction**
- **Reflecting on the process to determine next steps**

Gallimore et al., 2009

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**“With a balance of administrative support and pressure, teacher groups are more likely to persist in addressing problems long enough to make a causal connection between instructional decisions and achievement gains.”**

Gallimore et. al., 2009

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**Positive outcomes are unlikely in the absence of building leadership that supports and holds teacher teams accountable for sustaining the inquiry process until they see tangible results.**

Gallimore et. al., 2009

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**See Handout # 2**

**Read pages 6-7**

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Leadership Dimension	Average Effect Size
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development	0.84
<p>0.27 ES = 11%</p> <p>0.84 ES = 30%</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Robinson et al., 2008</p>	

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**If TBT's are to be successful**

- What does this research finding mean for the principal?
- In order for the principal to be effective in this work, what does this mean for the District Leadership Team (DLT), superintendent, and central office?

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**Critical Components for Effective TBTs**

**Structures are Essential:**

- Regular times
- Active facilitation
- Protocols
- Leadership

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### 3 Things

1. Focus your work on a few important things
2. Focus on instruction
3. Inquire, learn as a system, and develop leadership capacity

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The problems  
are in the system,  
not the people.

Demming

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### Inquiry and Learning

The BIG questions:

- Are you making progress and why?
- If you are not making progress, why?

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**Sharing and Developing Leadership**

- **Develop teams at each level of the system (Classroom, Building, and District levels)**
- **Share responsibility and accountability for progress (in actions and outcomes)**
- **Develop capacity by providing differentiated professional development**

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**Teams at All Levels**

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**Develop Broad-Based Instructional Leadership**

- **District Leadership Team (DLT)**
- **Building Leadership Team (BLT)**
- **Teacher-Based Teams (TBT's)**

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**Don't expect teacher teams to learn if there are not effective learning teams at each level of the system.**

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**District Leadership Team (DLT)**

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**DLT Purpose**

**The District Leadership Teams (DLT) exist to improve instructional practice.**

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### **Primary Responsibilities of DLT**

- Provide and maintain a focus
- Provide for effective professional development
- Monitor and provide feedback
- Learn from the data and take actions to implement the work deeply
- Assure the provision of differentiated professional supports

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### **DDT Membership**

- Superintendent
- Asst. Supt.'s
- Other central office staff
- Principals
- Teachers
- Support staff

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### **Building Leadership Teams**

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## **BLT Purpose**

**The Building  
Leadership Teams (DLT)  
exist to improve instructional  
practice.**

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## **BLT Membership**

- **Principal**
- **Asst. Principal(s)**
- **Teachers (from each grade level, or departments representing multiple teacher data teams)**
- **Support staff**

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## **Primary Responsibilities of BLT**

- **Provide and maintain a focus**
- **Provide for effective professional development**
- **Monitor and provide feedback to staff**
- **Learn from the data and take actions to implement the work deeply**
- **Assure the provision of differentiated professional supports**

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## Changes in Central Office

- From enforcing procedures
- From managing compliance
- From rewarding staff for following orders and “doing things right”
- to building school capacity
- to managing improvement
- to rewarding staff for getting results by “doing the right things”

Darling- Hammond (2010)

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## Shared Responsibility and Accountability

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## District and Building-Level Inquiry / Accountability Questions

1. What were your improvement goals and strategies this year?
2. How clear are all staff members on the goals and strategies for improvement?

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**3. What, How, and How Often Do You Provide:**

- Feedback
- Additional supports
- Differentiated professional development?
  - Work as an individual or team and reach consensus
  - Report out

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**4. Feedback, Supports, or PD**

- How do you measure the effectiveness of your feedback, supports, or professional development?
- How do you know if people need more or different feedback, supports, or PD?
- What other supports have you provided? (Observations, modeling, coaching, etc.)
  - Have they been successful?
  - How do you know?

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**5. Does the District (school) Have a Systematic Way of Learning from Its Work?**

- How do you identify and replicate success?
- How do you reduce or shorten failure?
- What supports or differentiated professional development has proved to be effective?

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**6. Do You Have Data Teams by Grade, Department, and Course?**

- **How well are they functioning?**
  - How do you know?
  - Are students making improvements as a result?
- **Do you monitor the effectiveness of each data team?**
  - How? How often?
- **What supports does the District (or Building) provide?**
  - Structures (time, protocols, etc.)
  - Training and facilitation
  - Identify some supports you have provided?

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**Schools That Doubled Their Performance Followed a Set of Similar Strategies:**

- **Set goals**
- **Analyzed student data**
- **Used formative assessments**
- **Collectively reviewed evidence on good instruction**
- **Used time more productively**
- **Were led by leaders providing instructional leadership**

Hattie, 2009

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**Leading Change**

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**A Metaphor for Our Learning**  
**Focused Deep Learning**

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**Fractal**

- A fractal is generally a geometric shape that can be split into parts, each of which is (at least approximately) a reduced-size copy of the whole – a property called **Self-Similarity**
- The term was coined by Benoit Mandelbrot in 1975. He was a French mathematician best known as the father of fractal geometry

Wikipedia 2009

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**Fractal**

- It has a simple and recursive definition
- Because they appear similar at all levels of magnification, fractals are often considered to be infinitely complex

Wikipedia 2009

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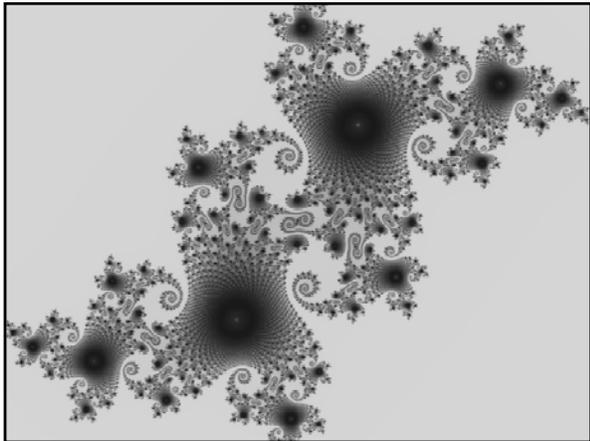
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**The Broccoli Principle**

Sue Long, SST 9 OH 2009

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**Fractal Learning Experiences**

- **Small focused experiences that:**
  - **Have system-wide impact**
  - **Are conducted in a relatively short period of time**
  - **Display the strengths and weaknesses of the organization**

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## Fractal Learning Experiences

- **Small focused experiences that:**
  - **Provide for a collective “mastery experience”**
  - **Develop individual and collective efficacy**
  - **Provide a learning experience for the system**

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**A few behaviors can drive a lot of change... enormous influence comes from focusing on just a few vital behaviors.**

Patterson et al., 2008

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**You should pay special attention to a handful of high-leverage behaviors.**

Patterson et al., 2008

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**2 Ways to Learn as a School and District**

- 1. **Specific effective teaching practices**
  - The school or district has agreed on everyone learning some specific effective practices that are learned, implemented, monitored, and provided feedback on.
- 2. **Continuous learning of effective practices**
  - Teacher-based teams use data to determine needs; develop shared lessons and units; develop, administer, and score shared assessments; and develop interventions.

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**Change Quiz**

- Which is most true?
- a) I personally struggle with change.
  - b) The people I work with struggle with change.
  - c) As a group, the districts and buildings that I work with can't stay with their change initiatives long enough to make them last.

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**It's Not That Schools Don't Change**

**"Schools are accustomed to changing – promiscuously and routinely – without producing any improvement."**

Elmore, R. F., 2004

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**What does this mean for the people you work with?**

**Especially for those in leadership positions.**

**Talk at your tables.**

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### **Leading Change**

- **How hard is it to change?**
- **Could you change if your life depended on it?**
- **What are the odds/percentage?**

Deutschman, 2005

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### **Why Is Change So Hard?**

- **Contrary to popular belief, it is not change that is so hard, it is being honest with ourselves and realizing that WE need to change.**
- **So the real question is “Why is change so hard for US?”**

Quinn, 2004

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**When Was the Last Time You Did  
Something for the First Time?**

- Think about new experiences you have had
- What were they?
- Write them down
- Then share with your partner

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**What does this mean for you?**

**For the people you work with?**

**For those in leadership  
positions?**

**Talk at your tables.**

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**The Journey**

**“People who think that they can be  
truly great leaders without personal  
transformation are fooling  
themselves.”**

Boyatzis & McKee, 2005

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**Don't expect other people in the organization to change if you are not changing, learning, and acting differently too.**

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**Why Do We Believe (Often Passionately) in Ideas Even When They Do Not Work?**

**It is often attributed to:**

- An overreliance on anecdotes
- Dressing up one's own belief in the trappings of research/science
- Relying on one's past experiences
- The need for certainty, control, and simplicity
- The lack of seeking evidence to demonstrate what is not working

Hattie, 2009

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**Why Do We Believe in Ideas Even When They Do Not Work?**

- **Another reason for the lack of change is the overreliance on our own judgments, rather than evidence**
- **In education we have a long history of placing more reliance on “professional judgments” than on evidence**

Hattie, 2009

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**“An arrogant system would conclude that all of the problems were caused by defects in the children, none of them caused by defects in the system.”**

(Englemann, 1991, p. 298)

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**A Model for Change**

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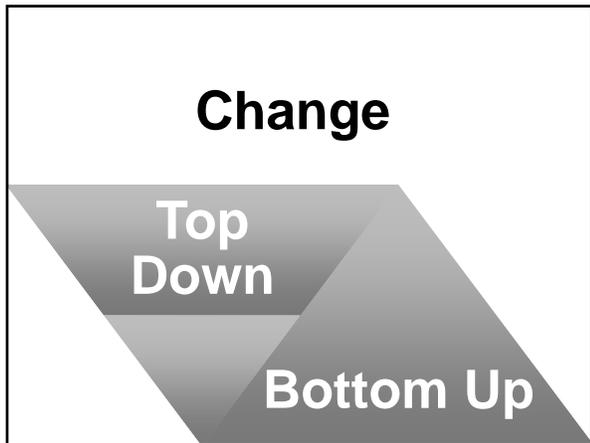
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- Six Strategies**
1. Use data well
  2. Focus your goals
  3. Implement shared instructional practices
  4. Implement deeply
  5. Monitor and provide feedback support
  6. Learn/Inquire

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**Where does your balance lie?**

**What does this mean  
for the people you  
work with?**

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**What We Have Discussed**

- Higher standards
- Two big problems to address
- 3 essential actions
- Research on effective leadership for districts and schools
- What should education look like and what actions can you take

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**Now it is time to integrate this  
into action and commitments  
you will take.**

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**Making Commitments**

- I will make the following commitments:
  - Identify on paper what you will commit to, follow-up on in the next 100 days

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**Based on Your Priorities**

- How do you plan on implementing deeply?
  - What needs to happen?
  - How will responsibility and accountability be shared across the whole district?

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**Based on Your Priorities**

- How do you plan on monitoring?
  - What needs to happen?
  - How will responsibility and accountability be shared across the whole district?

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**Based on Your Priorities**

- **Do you have teams at each level (teacher, building, and district)?**
- **What do you need to do to create and support effective teams?**

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**Based on Your Priorities**

- **For those of you with teams**
  - **What have they learned about moving the work forward?**
  - **What actions have they taken to support individual and team learning**

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**In order to make these commitments, I will need the following:**

- **List the supports, resources, etc. you will need to achieve your commitments**
- **From whom?**

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**Improving practice can only be  
done by teachers, not to teachers.**

Wurtzel, 2007

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## **Questions and Discussion**

**Brian McNulty, Ph.D.**  
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## The Implementation Gap

We are now a decade into the 21st century. Yet, looking at schools today, many people would say that schools have not changed significantly from a hundred years ago. According to Hayes–Jacobs (2010, pp. 60–61), “The overwhelming majority of our schools run on the same length of the school year and same daily schedule, with the same rigid grouping of students, and the same faculty organizations, and fundamentally the same type of buildings as in the late 1890s.” Others say that schools change “promiscuously (but) without producing any improvement” (Elmore, 2004, p. 104). Schools seem to change direction and programs frequently and randomly but without challenging many of the structures and processes that keep us right where we are. To paraphrase Einstein, it is insane to expect different outcomes from the same practices, no matter how hard we try.

In any case, most people would agree that schools and districts have struggled to implement meaningful, long-term improvements. While there are exceptions, the majority of schools and districts are still struggling to bring up overall improvement or make any significant or sustainable gains for specific subgroups.

While there are multiple reasons for this lack of progress (the wrong strategies, processes, and leadership, to name a few), the single most predictable problem is the lack of follow-through at all levels of the system. In our work with hundreds of districts and buildings across the country, we have consistently identified the lack of follow-through as the single biggest factor associated with the lack of progress for districts and buildings. We’ve come to call this the “implementation gap.” Interestingly, this lack of follow-through is not usually related to a lack of knowledge (people know what to do), but rather a lack of execution. For example, we have known for some time that most educators (teachers and administrators) know more about effective practice than they regularly use in their work (Sparks, 2005). This lack of follow-through is not limited to teachers but is endemic to the entire system. We all know more about effective practices than we regularly use.

## **Teacher Follow-Through**

To highlight this problem, let's begin with teacher follow-through. William (2007), like many other researchers, found that the difference between the most effective classrooms and least effective classrooms was attributable to the teacher. However, he also found that the difference between the most effective teachers and least effective teachers is not what they know, but rather what they do. He says that if we are serious about raising achievement, we need to help teachers change what they do in classrooms (i.e., implement more effective teaching practices). This finding is particularly interesting, because the usual fallback position when people aren't implementing is to assume that they need more professional development. In fact, what they really need is more practice and support in implementing (e.g., more practice in applying successful methods in the classroom, more modeling, more coaching, and more observations (see Reeves, 2010). Pfeffer and Sutton (2000) recommend that we focus less on providing more formal training programs and more on actually doing the work (i.e., multiple opportunities for practice). Interestingly, there is a similar finding between teachers and students in that "it is what teachers get students to do in the class that emerges as the strongest component of the accomplished teacher's repertoire (Hattie, 2009, p. 35). This problem cannot be attributed to just teachers, however, as we have found this to be a systems problem. For teachers, follow-through has to do with implementing the focused instructional practices in their classrooms and following through in their Teacher-based Teams (TBTs).

## **Administrator Follow-Through**

When it comes to most administrators, it is difficult to even say that we have a focus or priority on instruction because so little of our time is spent in this area. Elmore (2006) found that "direct involvement in instruction is among the least frequent activities performed by administrators of any kind at any level, and those who do engage in instructional leadership activities on a consistent basis are a relatively small proportion of the total administrative force" (p. 48). So if instructional improvement is important, then it must have a higher priority, and administrators at every level must act more on this priority.

The first major hurdle, then, is to establish instruction as the highest priority for everyone. In our work with districts and buildings, the first way

that we usually assess this priority is to ask administrators to conduct a simple time audit and to determine how much time they spend in classrooms every day or are directly involved in other instructional issues. When administrators collect data on the actual amount of time they spend in these activities over one week, they typically find that the time is significantly less than the estimated amount.

Most administrators agree that, if instruction is to have the priority, they should commit to a minimum of at least one hour per day. While part of this time should be dedicated to the Building Leadership Teams (BLTs) and Teacher-Based Teams, the other time should be spent in classrooms conducting observations and walk-throughs and providing feed-back. Many superintendents who have realigned their priorities toward instruction have found it more realistic to schedule one day per week to focus on instruction. This may seem like a high standard to set for superintendents, but districts that have made significant progress found that their participation on the District Leadership Team and time spent in schools and classrooms resulted in higher performance across the schools in the district. Some districts have completely realigned their central offices in such a way that all of the central office staff members are focused on supporting instruction in the buildings (Honig, et al., 2010).

For administrators, therefore, the follow-through has more to do with monitoring the instructional practices and providing feedback and support.

In examining principal effectiveness, Duke (2007) found that the difference between more effective and less effective principals was not their commitment to specific reform initiatives but rather their level of follow-through and monitoring. Unlike teachers, we don't expect principals to implement the instructional practices themselves but to ensure that staff members are effectively implementing the practices. Therefore, the principal's implementation responsibilities are more related to monitoring teacher follow-through and providing feedback, guidance, and the provision of supports like mentoring, coaching, and opportunities for observation.

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) and Marzano and Waters (2008) made similar findings for the superintendent and central office staff. They found that more successful districts had superintendents and central office staff that actively monitored, evaluated, and provided feedback on the implementation of their curricular and instructional initiatives, including the quality of

research-based instructional practices. These districts also used ongoing formative indicators to measure both their level of implementation and the impact of their efforts on student achievement.

When districts begin their efforts to monitor the levels of implementation and the impact of their strategies on student learning, they are often initially dismayed at the lack of implementation at the classroom level. Changing classroom practices takes more than just monitoring the level of implementation; it also takes feedback and differentiated levels of support. As Bossidy and Charan (2002) caution, “Leadership without the discipline of execution is incomplete and ineffective” (p. 34).

If you walk away with only one lesson from this text, it should be this:

**We close the achievement gap  
by  
closing the implementation gap.**

## Principal Leadership and Student Achievement

In the most recent meta-analytic study, Robinson and her colleagues (2008) identify five key principal leadership practices that positively impact student achievement and provide effect sizes for each. Effect size is a statistical concept that measures the strength of the relationship between two variables. In meta-analyses effect sizes play an important role in summarizing findings from different studies into a single analysis or effect size. In the following study the variables studied are principal leadership actions and student achievement.

1. Establish goals and expectations
2. Strategic resourcing
3. Planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and the curriculum
4. Promoting and participating in teacher learning and development
5. Ensuring an orderly and supportive environment (Robinson, 2007; Robinson, et al., 2008)

We discuss these five findings below but also integrate other research findings and recommendations for implementation of these findings.

### **1. Establish Goals and Expectations (Effect Size [E.S.]=0.42)**

“Clear goals focus attention and effort and enable individuals, groups, and organizations to use feedback to regulate their performance” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 661). Having clear improvement goals and specific teaching strategies can have a direct effect on student achievement at the building by focusing staff members on learning specific researched-based strategies and their impact on student learning.

In many schools and districts there continues to be a parade of new initiatives every year. One approach is piled upon another, while none are implemented well, and none are ever formally removed or discarded. Consequently, teachers and principals end up with multiple demands on their time.

The goal-setting process, when done well, helps everyone in the building to focus on those few things that, if done well, matter the most. Principals and building leaders should use the goal-setting process to gain consensus on the need for improvement and then on the specific strategies to achieve that improvement. By focusing on a limited number of strategies (i.e.,

instructional strategies and Data Teams), everyone should be able to implement these few strategies well and deeply. “Goals provide a sense of purpose and priority in an environment where a multitude of tasks can seem equally important and overwhelming. Clear goals focus attention and effort and enable individuals, groups, and organizations to use feedback to regulate their performance” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 661).

“Goal setting works by creating a discrepancy between what is currently happening and some desired future state. When people are committed to a goal, this discrepancy is experienced as constructive discontent that motivates goal-relevant behavior. Goals focus attention and lead to more persistent effort than would otherwise be the case” (Robinson, 2007, p. 11).

Robinson cautions, however, that goals will only have this motivating effect if three conditions are met:

1. “Teachers . . . need to feel they have the capacity to meet the goal from either their current resources or from the expertise and support they will receive while pursuing the goal.
2. People need to be committed to goals, and this requires that they understand and value them. As long as this is the case, it does not matter whether or not they participate in the actual setting of the goals.
3. Specific rather than vague goals are required because specificity makes it possible to judge progress and thus adjust one’s performance.

Self-regulation is impossible if the goal and therefore, progress towards it, is unclear” (Robinson, 2007, p. 11).

These three conditions provide leaders with some direct guidance on how to effectively engage staff in the improvement efforts. To address the issue of capacity building, staff members need to believe that they can successfully accomplish the tasks that are set out for them. It helps significantly, then, to have a limited number of focused goals and strategies so that staff members believe they will be able to implement them successfully.

Staff members also need to experience some early success with their implementation. We want people to make a direct connection between the actions they take and improved outcomes for students, which they should be able to see. It is important that the improvement strategies are powerful and focused enough so that people can see the impact of the strategies in a relatively short period of time. School leaders don’t just set the direction, however; they also communicate and emphasize the importance of

implementing and monitoring the strategies deeply on a school-wide basis, and they report to the staff on a regular basis on both the level of implementation and the impact on student learning.

It should not be surprising that setting clear goals and strategies helps people to focus their efforts. Nor should it be surprising that, when we collectively work toward reaching the goal using more powerful teaching and collaborative teaming, we make progress.

## **2. Strategic Resourcing (E.S.=0.31)**

This finding was not about the principal or other building leaders securing additional resources; rather, Robinson, et al. (2008) found that student performance was positively impacted when the principal worked to reduce the number of other initiatives in the building and then aligned current resources with the goals and strategies. Numerous other researchers, like Reeves (2006), Elmore (2006), and Fullan (2010), all caution against adopting too many initiatives that detract from the improvement focus on the building and result in “initiative fatigue.” Robinson (2007) even cautions that “extra resources can have detrimental effects (because) ... multiple simultaneous initiatives can reduce the coherence of a teaching program” (p. 13).

One of the primary responsibilities of principals and other building leaders is to help staff maintain a focus on the improvement strategies. There are always new projects, programs, grants, or other “shiny baubles” to distract people from the hard work of improving instruction in the classroom. It is the principal’s role to limit these distractions and to align resources behind the focused goals and strategies.

Because the largest single resource in any building is the teaching staff, keeping staff focused on the improvement strategies is the most effective use of resources. In implementing the strategies, however, there are several resource issues that will need the attention of the principal and BDT, including:

- The provision of professional development on the specific instructional practices chosen for improvement, including opportunities for practice, observations, modeling, coaching, and so on.
- Restructuring the school schedule to provide time for the IDTs to meet and plan.
- Training and facilitation in the Data Teams process.

We know that using Data Teams can be highly effective (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Gallimore, et al., 2009), but to be effective, there must be training in the process, regularly scheduled time to meet, “predictable, consistent settings,” a focus on instruction and student learning, and processes and tools like protocols to effectively carry out the work (Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore, 2009).

### **3. Planning, Coordinating, and Evaluating Teaching and the Curriculum (E.S.=0.42)**

This finding refers to the active oversight and coordination of the instructional program in the school. Effective building leaders are actively involved in the instructional process, including having ongoing discussions of instruction, observing classrooms and providing feedback, ensuring that staff members use ongoing assessment results, actively monitoring student progress, and working actively to strengthen instructional practices in classrooms.

Robinson, et al. (2008) found that “leaders in higher performing schools are distinguished from their counterparts in otherwise similar lower performing schools by their personal involvement in planning, coordinating, and evaluating teaching and teachers. Four interrelated sub-dimensions are involved in this leadership dimension:

“First, teachers in higher performing schools report that their leaders are actively involved in collegial discussion of instructional matters, including how instruction impacts student achievement (Heck, et al., 1991).

“Second, the leadership of higher performing schools is distinguished by its active oversight and coordination of the instructional program. School leaders and staff work together to review and improve teaching—an idea captured by that of shared instructional leadership (Heck, et al., 1990; Heck, et al., 1991; Marks and Printy, 2003).

“Third, the degree of leader involvement in classroom observation and subsequent feedback was also associated with higher performing schools. Teachers in such schools reported that their leaders set and adhered to clear performance standards for teaching (Andrews and Soder, 1987; Bamberg and Andrews, 2004) and made regular

classroom observations that helped them improve their teaching (Bamberg and Andrews, 2004; Heck, 1992; Heck, et al., 1990).

“Fourth, there was greater emphasis in higher performing schools on ensuring that staff systematically monitored student progress (Heck, et al., 1990) and that test results were used for the purpose of program improvement” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 662).

The Building Leadership Team (BLT) and the Teacher-based Teams (TBT) are where specific discussions of curriculum, instruction, and assessment should occur. Both of these teams should actively monitor the progress of students and examine where and why students are struggling. The discussions in the teams should focus on teaching and student learning and should include the following:

- Using data to identify common learning needs of students
- Analyzing student work
- Identifying research-based or promising instructional practices to use collectively
- Constructing common lessons and units
- Implementing these lessons and units collectively in the classroom
- Collaboratively designing, using, and scoring Common Formative
- Assessments (see Saunders, Goldenberg, and Gallimore, 2009)

In addition, the principal and BLT should actively monitor and provide feedback on the use of, and the effect of, the shared instructional strategies. They do this through collegial walk-throughs, classroom observations, and feedback to staff, and followed up by reinforcing expectations for staff follow-through.

#### **4. Promoting and Participating in Teacher Learning and Development (E.S.=0.84)**

Of all of the findings in this meta-analytic study, the following one had the largest effect size. “This is a large effect and provides some empirical support for calls to school leaders to be actively involved with their teachers as the ‘leading learners’ of their school” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 663). These researchers go on to point out that professional development involves

more than principals just arranging for staff to learn. “This leadership dimension is described as both promoting and participating because more is involved than just supporting or sponsoring other staff in their learning. The leader participates in the learning as leader, learner, or both. . . . The principal is also more likely to be seen by staff as a source of instructional advice, which suggests that they are both more accessible and more knowledgeable about instructional matters than their counterparts in otherwise similar lower achieving schools” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 663; emphasis added). The principal must be the lead learner of the school and the teams.

When applied to our two strategies (instructional strategies and Data Teams), this means that the principal must actively and deeply engage in the learning and leading of both of these strategies. Principals will need to know (or learn) what the strategies look like when they are being implemented well. They will need to know how to use data well and how to facilitate the Data Teams process with the Teacher-based Teams (TBTs.)

Principals also need to have a deeper understanding about what powerful professional development looks like and how to provide professional development opportunities that result in actually changing classroom practices. A number of prominent researchers have been examining the connection between changing classroom practices and professional development.

Robinson (2007) identified a number of characteristics that principals need to focus on that were associated with effective professional development, including:

- “Providing extended time and using it effectively
- Ensuring teachers were engaged in the learning
- Challenging problematic discourses, especially around low expectations for students
- Providing opportunities to participate in a professional community that was focused on the teaching-achievement relationship
- Involving school leaders who supported the learning by setting and monitoring targets and developing the leadership of others” (Robinson, 2007, p. 17).

## **5.Ensuring an Orderly and Supportive Environment (E.S.=0.27)**

This finding involves “creating an environment for both staff and students that makes it possible for important academic and social goals to be achieved” (Robinson, et al., 2008, p. 664). This includes having clear codes for conduct or discipline, minimal interruptions of teaching time, and safe and orderly environments. Teachers in higher-performing schools attribute these outcomes to better leadership on the part of the principal. When the researchers examined the relationship between principal leadership and school order, safety, and a supportive environment at a deeper level, they found that “there was a strong statistical link between improvements in relational trust and gains in academic productivity” (Robinson, 2007, p. 19). What the researchers meant by this was that there is a direct relationship between safety, order, supportive environments, and trust in the school. When principals help to create supportive, trusting environments, safety, order, and student achievement improve.

This concept of “relational trust” includes four components: social respect or civil regard; competence; personal regard or caring; and integrity, or doing what you say (see Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2004). While the research suggests that it is possible to develop respect and caring in individuals, it is difficult to develop these kinds of dispositional characteristics. Many of us have heard stories about dogmatic and heavy-handed leaders who have made progress in a school or district, but the reality is that progress is usually short-lived. People do respond to fear and punishment, but they don’t learn well under these conditions, and the improvements then don’t last. So it may be that principals or other leaders who do not have the ability to demonstrate respect and caring for the people with whom they work should not be in leadership positions.

While it is difficult to develop competencies like respect and trust, it is reasonable to expect that all principals can and should develop competence in the area of instruction. While no one expects principals to be the source of all knowledge on instruction, it is very reasonable to expect that they, like everyone else, must be willing to actively and publicly learn about instruction. Principals can’t just say that “instruction is important” and not follow through without sacrificing their own integrity. Hord and Sommers (2008) caution that teachers watch to see if principals who talk about instruction really spend their time on instruction and in classrooms. Jorgenson and Peal (2008) found that teachers lost respect for their

principals if they weren't in their classrooms. While teachers understand that principals have many other responsibilities, they also felt that there was no excuse for principals not spending more time in the classroom. Principals need to focus more of their time on their most important responsibility— instruction. This, in turn, builds trust and respect in schools.

“In schools where trust levels increased over a three year period, teachers reported a greater willingness to try new things, a greater sense of responsibility for their students, more outreach to parents, and stronger professional community involving more shared work, more conversations about teaching and learning and a stronger collective focus on student learning. Increased relational trust produced more coordinated, mutually supportive and more effective efforts to engage students in learning. With increased trust comes more and better quality cooperation, more social support and a stronger sense of mutual obligation, binding together the efforts of teachers, principals and parents. . . . The relationship between trust and trends in student achievement were apparent even with rigorous control of student and community background variables” (Robinson, 2007, pp. 20–21; emphasis added).

It is evident from these findings that the principal plays a key role in the development of relational trust, improved cooperation and collaboration among staff, and improved outcomes for students by focusing on what matters most— instruction.

While we will talk more about the implications of these findings, it is interesting to note that the highest effect size was achieved when principals participated in and facilitated teacher learning and development. Robinson, et al. (2008) make the point that principals are not just ensuring that their staff members receive professional development, but that principals are actively leading the instructional improvement work and learning from it. Even when they were controlling for students' backgrounds, the researchers found that, when principals and other school leaders are actively involved in teacher learning and development, it results in higher student outcomes. This finding has major ramifications for the principal's role with both the BDT and the IDTs.

Robinson, et al. (2008) goes on to say that “leaders who are perceived as sources of instructional advice gain greater respect from their staff and hence have greater influence over how they teach” (pp. 663–664). Conversely, there was no increase in school performance when teachers identified the

principal as a close friend or as a participant in discussions. To make a difference in their schools' performance, principals must play a more active and direct role in instructional improvement.

Robinson and her colleagues also made another important finding regarding principal leadership. They found that the impact of instructional leadership (E.S.=0.42) was almost four times more powerful than transformational leadership (E.S.=0.11). This is not to say that transformational leadership (or collaborative leadership) is not important, but rather, when it comes to increasing student performance, instructional leadership is paramount.

## **District and Building-Level Accountability Questions**

- 1. What is the focus for your district? What are the districts specific improvement goals and strategies this year? (What are you working on to improve staff capacity?)**
  - Identify the goals and strategies
  
- 2. How clear are all staff members on the goals and strategies for improvement?**
  - How **many** strategies are there?
  - How **well** are the strategies being **implemented**?
    - How do you assess and know if staff members are implementing the strategies?
  
  - If the strategies are being implemented, how will you **assess** if the strategies are **effective**?
    - What data will you collect?
    - How will you collect this?
    - How often?
    - What will be done with the results?
    - What actions will you take as a result of the data?
  
- 3. What, how, and how often do you provide:**
  - a. Feedback?**
  - b. Additional supports, or**
  - c. Differentiated professional development?**
  - How do you measure the effectiveness of your feedback, supports, or professional development?
  - How do you know if people need more or different feedback, supports, or PD?
  - What other supports have you provided? (observations, modeling, coaching, etc.)
    - Have they been successful?
    - How do you know?

**4. Does the district/school have a systematic way of learning from its work?**

- How do you identify and replicate success?
- How do you reduce or shorten failure?
- What supports or differentiated professional development has proved to be effective?

**5. Do you currently have Teams by grade, department, and course?**

- How well are they functioning?
  - How do you know?
- Are students making improvements as a result?
- Do you monitor the effectiveness of each Data Team?
  - How? How often?
- What supports does the district (or building) provide?
  - Structures—time, protocols, etc?
  - Training and facilitation?
  - Identify some supports you have provided.

## District Factors Affecting Achievement

In reviewing the most recent research, there appears to be fairly strong consensus on what effective districts do to improve student academic outcomes. These findings have been identified by a number of researchers, however the following are heavily grounded in the work of Leithwood and Jantzi (2008) and an extensive six year large scale leadership study by Louis, et al. (2010):

- 1. A focus on student achievement and on the quality of instructional practices, including the use of effective research-based instructional practices** (Togneri and Anderson, 2003; Simmons, 2006; Supovitz, 2006; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008; Marzano and Waters, 2008; Fullan, 2010; Harris and Chrispeels, 2009).
- 2. Development of instructional leadership at the district, school, and classroom levels, including training for central office staff, principals, and teachers on high-quality instruction and the leadership of improvement** (Togneri and Anderson, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008; Fullan, 2010; Harris and Chrispeels, 2009).
- 3. Training, capacity building, support, and expectations in the effective use of data across the district, in decision-making, and in assessing student learning and progress. Emphasis on the role of the principal in promoting and participating in the formal and informal use of data.** (Togneri and Anderson, 2003; Marsh, et al., 2005; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Amanda, et al., 2008; MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008; Fullan, 2010; Harris and Chrispeels, 2009; Filbin, 2008; Fullan 2008).
- 4. Collaborative goal setting in establishing a limited number of focused, nonnegotiable district goals for achievement and instruction that are stable over an extended period of time. Creating understanding and support for the district goals from school boards, community partners, and all school staff** (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Marzano and Waters, 2008; Fullan, 2010).

- 5. Monitoring the implementation of the strategies, evaluating the results, and creating feedback loops to all staff on progress in achievement and instructional goals** (MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008; Marzano and Waters, 2008).
- 6. Ongoing, targeted, and differentiated professional development, and the phasing in of improvement efforts over time** (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Harris and Chrispeels, 2009; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009).
- 7. Distributing leadership with an emphasis on the development of teams and professional communities** (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Harris and Chrispeels, 2009; Hattie, 2009; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2009).
- 8. Allocating and aligning resources to support the goals for achievement and instruction, including district-sponsored professional development** (Togneri and Anderson, 2003; Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; Marzano and Waters, 2008; MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008).

**While all of the district conditions are significantly correlated to student achievement, the strongest relationship is with the district's concern for student achievement and the quality of instruction** (Leithwood and Jantzi, 2008; MacIver and Farley-Ripple, 2008).

**The most consistent finding across all of the studies is the importance of the district maintaining a strong focus on improving instruction while raising standards and achievement** (Bottoms and Fry, 2009).

In reviewing this list, what should become clear is that the research strongly recommends that the primary focus for the district should be on improving instruction. The focus of this instructional improvement should include the two primary strategies; shared learning through teams at every level, and deep implementation of research-based instructional practices.

Too many districts are overly ambitious when it comes to establishing goals and strategies. The research recommends, however, that districts learn by focusing on a few important things (in instruction) and then examining the effectiveness of their implementation. Districts do this by focusing on a limited number of goals and strategies that can be implemented deeply and monitored, and for which feedback can be provided frequently. Districts

then should tailor their implementation support through professional development opportunities like peer observations, coaching, and modeling. Once these strategies are implemented deeply, other instructional practices can be phased in over time.

While there is a need for some traditional professional development in the areas of high-quality instruction and data use, the most effective way for teachers to learn about instruction is from other teachers; therefore, the primary way to deliver professional development should be through Teacher-based Teams (or professional learning communities, PLCs.) Professional learning occurs not just in the Teacher-based Teams however, but also in the District Leadership Teams and the Building Leadership Teams. These teams should become the primary mechanism for distributing leadership and learning across the buildings and the entire district. In this way, the district can reinvent itself into a continuous learning and improvement organization whose primary responsibilities are to improve learning and provide effective supports across the district.

In working with districts to implement the research recommendations, we have found that the idea of focusing and deepening the work has resonated with many districts. The idea of using data to focus on a limited number of goals and strategies to improve instruction that are implemented deeply and monitored well sounds seductively simple. The good news is that these are all relatively simple ideas; the challenge, however, is that they are not easy to implement well across the district. As Phil Schlechty (2009) has often said, “Simple is not easy.”

Darling-Hammond (2010) says: “In this new paradigm the design of the school district office should also evolve from a set of silos that rarely interact with one another to a team structure... This means they must continuously evaluate how schools are doing, seeking to learn from successful schools and to support improvement in struggling schools... Districts will need to become learning organizations themselves—developing their capacity to investigate and learn from innovation in order to leverage productive strategies and develop their capacity to support successful change” (p. 271).

While these changes will be challenging for most districts, having the right focus, structures, and processes makes significant progress possible and much more probable.

## Teacher-Based Teams (PLCs)

The primary purpose of the teacher-based teams (TBTs) should be “the improvement of instructional practice and performance, regardless of role” (Elmore, 2004, p. 66).

Darling-Hammond (2010) has explored the concept of teacher instructional data teams, which The Leadership and Learning Center refers to as TBTs, in depth and has concluded that “multiple studies have found it useful for groups of teachers to analyze and discuss student performance data and samples of student coursework in order to identify students’ most common errors and misunderstandings, reach common understanding of what it means for students to master a given concept or skill, and find out which instructional strategies are or are not working, and for whom” (p. 228). She goes on to say that “many studies have identified the collaboration associated with professional communities of teachers as a key element of successful schools. . . . With teachers operating in grade level teams that meet regularly, the school creates structures for examining student progress, as well as for creating a more coherent curriculum and allowing teachers to learn from one another (p. 261). She also reported that “a number of large-scale studies have identified specific ways in which professional community building can deepen teachers’ knowledge, build their skills, and improve instruction” (p. 229).

While there continues to be emerging research on the benefit of Teacher Based Teams, (TBTs) positive outcomes are only achieved when there is clarity on the purposes of the teams, training in the process, active facilitation, structures, and supports.

## TEACHER COLLABORATION

Pappano (2007) identified some specific tasks that require teacher collaboration, including:

- Identifying what students need to know and be able to do by the end of the year
- Writing Common Formative Assessments and collectively reviewing the results
- Reflecting and identifying which classroom practices produce the best results
- Agreeing, adopting, and using the most effective practices

DuFour, DuFour, and Eaker (2008) have worked extensively with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) they recommend that team members “work together to clarify exactly what each student must learn, monitor each student’s learning on a timely basis, provide systematic interventions that ensure students receive additional time and support for learning when they struggle, and extend and enrich learning when students have already mastered the intended outcomes” (p. 18).

## **MEMBERSHIP OF Teacher-Based Teams (TBTs)**

Teacher-Based Teams are small groups of teachers who collaborate to improve instruction and accelerate student learning. Instructional Data Teams are comprised of teachers who have been carefully, selectively, and purposefully placed around the table, functioning as a team.

These teacher-based teams focus on academic achievement and are driven by common academic standards. While we will talk more about the role of standards in the Teacher-based Teams process, it’s important to know that common standards drive an instructional Teacher-based Team; therefore, members of the team must all teach the common academic standard, at the same time within the year.

There are also times when teachers can operate as a Teacher-based Team but teach different courses entirely. This is common for schools that have specialists, such as counselors, elective teachers, and others. The analysis of school-wide or district-wide data may pinpoint a “nonacademic” area in need of improvement, such as attendance, student engagement, or discipline. When teachers have a common focus, an art teacher, counselor, special educator, and physical education specialist can sit around the table and have rich dialogue because they have a common purpose and focus.

TBTs examine student work generated from a common formative assessment, which is measured with a common scoring guide or answer key. While this will be discussed more in later chapters, members of an IDT all use the same assessment, administer the assessment at the same time, and use a common scoring guide to measure levels of proficiency.

Teams are formed based on the criteria:

- All teachers on a TBT have a common standard or common area of

focus.

- All teachers on a TBT administer a common formative assessment.
- All teachers on a TBT measure learning with a common scoring guide or answer key.

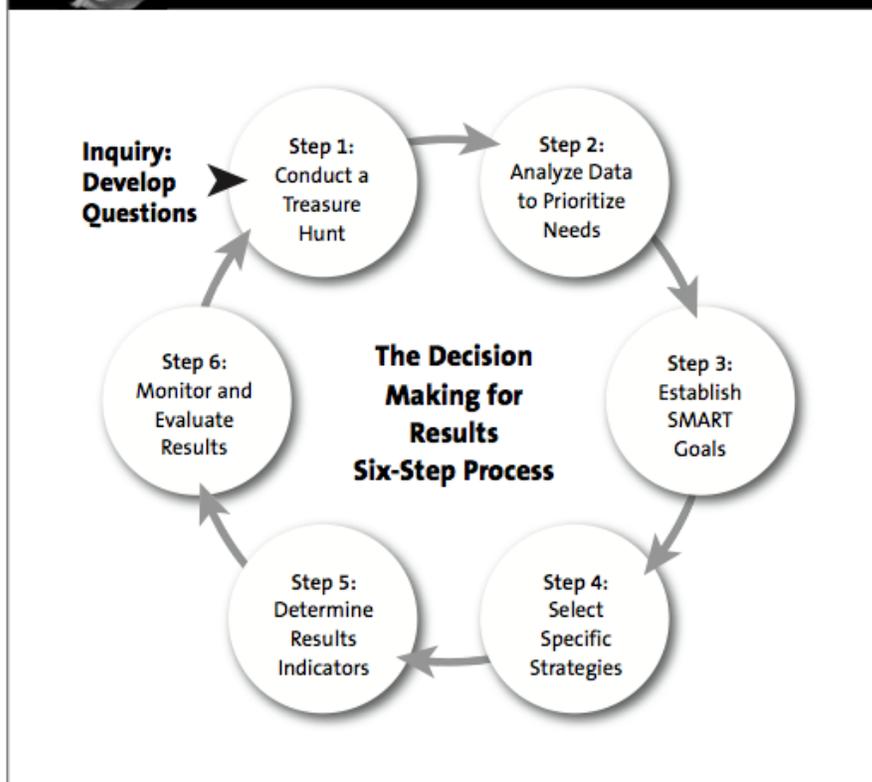
As teams are driven by the above criteria, membership may include:

- Grade-level teachers
- Course or content-area teachers
- Specialist or elective teachers
- Counselors and support personnel
- Data Team leaders

Notice that the principal is not an ongoing, formal member of the TBT unless the team is not making progress. If the TBT is making progress (i.e., all students are making progress), then the dialogue that occurs in the meeting is limited to teachers on an instructional team and is driven by the common instructional elements. Principals can certainly contribute to the dialogue, lending practical experience and expertise, but should only be a small voice in the TBT meeting, not the leader. Principals monitor the effectiveness by attending the meetings (not always in their entirety), providing feedback to the TBT leader and team, and observing and providing feedback as teachers use the agreed-upon common instructional strategies in the classroom.

## **PURPOSE OF THE TEACHER-BASED TEAMS**

The purpose of the TBT is quite simple: to improve teaching and learning and ensure that all learners and learning are accelerated on a continuous basis. In order for TBTs to achieve this purpose, they must use a systematic process. Teacher-Based Teams marry two powerful practices (strategies addressed in previous chapters): using data well and having teachers collaborate. Teacher-Based Teams use a data-driven process—a Decision Making for Results process that focuses on the collection and analysis of effect data (student performance data) and the impact of teacher action (antecedents leading to cause data). This systematic, structured process acts as the “fuel” for every TBT. When TBTs are implemented as a skeletal structure alone, the process will not work. Data Teams need to fuel the practice of collaboration by using an explicit data-driven process. School leaders need to actively monitor, support, and provide feedback. It is each team’s effective use of the process that will get results.



- Step 1: Conduct a Treasure Hunt
- Step 2: Analyze Data to Prioritize Needs
- Step 3: Establish SMART Goals
- Step 4: Select Specific Strategies
- Step 5: Determine Results Indicators
- Step 6: Monitor and Evaluate Results

### **The Decision Making for Results Six-Step Process**

Data Teams will become another failed initiative if they are not fueled by a research-based process for making data-driven decisions. While TBTs provide the structure for the powerful conversations and decisions around teaching and learning, it is the Decision Making for Results process (above) that powers every effective Teacher-Based Team.

## **Inquiry Process**

According to Reeves (2002), “Data-driven decision making begins by asking fundamental questions.” Earl and Katz (2006) tell educators that data should drive their search for answers. While data may point us in the right direction, we should let our questions determine which data we examine. Therefore, our questions help determine what matters the most in the school-improvement process.

Teacher-Based Teams are driven by questions that teams have about student learning. Building Data Teams or Building Leadership Teams inquire about learning and effective teaching, and District Data Teams use inquiry to gather information on teaching, learning, and leadership. Regardless of the subgroup of the Data Team focus, all teams are driven by inquiry.

## **Collecting and Charting Data (Treasure Hunt)**

Data Teams use this first official step in the process to disaggregate data and to look at learning by subgroups and levels of performance. According to Schmoker (1999), “You cannot fight what you cannot see.” Data make the invisible visible. Not only do teams use data from a short-cycle Common Formative Assessment; they also place a name with every number.

This process allows TBTs to visualize the learners and accelerate the progress for all. As leaders in the process, we can help to develop a trust with how the data will be used. Data in this process should not be used to rank, evaluate, or judge. The data in this step should promote dialogue, lead teams to action, and inspire additional questions.

## **Analyze to Prioritize**

Earl and Katz (2006) say, “Data by themselves are benign. Meaning is brought to data through the human act of interpretation. Data are symbols that stand for sets of experiences. Making meaning from data is about using the symbols to reconstruct the underlying experiences. Engaging with data in this way is an active process.”

Teams are given the time, the permission, and the authority to make

meaning of their data.

Teams examine performance trends and behaviors, which usually occurs in many collaborative meetings. However, the deep analysis that occurs in the TBTs is what separates common conversations about numbers from collaborative dialogue that takes teams “beyond the numbers” (White, 2005). In other words, teams embrace the complexity of analysis and use their experience, knowledge, and expertise to form inferences behind student learning. The hypotheses are data driven and reflect the root causes of performance, which are not based solely on the quantitative information.

At this point the TBTs also engages in a process of determining the most urgent area of need for students, one that must be addressed in this data cycle.

### **Setting, Reviewing, and Revising Incremental Goals**

We’ve learned much about goals from Schmoker. In fact, he reminds us “without explicit learning goals, we are simply not set up and organized for improvement or results” (1999). Goal setting is not a new practice for educators; in fact, most of us could recite the SMART goal chant. Typically, teachers view goals with two lenses: (1) as a summative measure of student learning, and (2) as a means to evaluate teachers.

TBTs take goal setting to new heights as they use incremental goals to analyze, monitor, and adjust professional practice—which is what makes this part of the process incremental. TBTs embrace the continuous-improvement cycle as they set, review, and revise goals throughout each data cycle (usually every two to three weeks). The obvious outcome for each goal is for all students to reach or exceed proficiency levels. However, because TBTs use an incremental process, acceleration is the expectation, and not all students are expected to reach proficiency levels.

It is through goal setting that TBTs develop the target and the structure in which they can work toward results. It is through incremental goals that TBTs can monitor and adjust their practices. And it is through incremental goals that teachers and students can celebrate their short-term gains.

## **Strategies**

TBTs have structured and explicit conversation about instruction. By definition, this is the part of the process where there is a shift in focus, from one on the student (Steps 1-3) to one on teachers (Steps 4-5). Instructional strategies are defined as actions used by the teachers to impact the cognition of students. TBTs, first and foremost, focus on the root causes of student success and of student obstacles (Step 2). It is through this lens that they focus on dialogue regarding the strategies that are most likely to impact the learners. It is also through this dialogue that teams filter research-based, action-oriented strategies that are targeted to the particular student need. Teachers share their secrets about teaching, they teach one another strategies, they share their wisdom and experiences, and they may share research. While they may contribute individual ideas, it is through collaboration that they commit to using the specific strategies that will best impact student learning.

## **Results Indicators**

TBTs monitor the effectiveness of their strategies and the impact the strategies have on student learning. They do this by crafting Results indicators. Results indicators are statements that “paint the picture” (White, 2005) of effectiveness before students are assessed. Results indicators illustrate effective teaching and the learning that follows. Teams can see the results of their actions through monitoring and know if the strategy is effective, or if the strategy must be tweaked and used in a different manner, or if the strategy is ineffective and therefore should not be used any longer. Results indicators allow teams to make midcourse corrections and celebrate short-term wins.

## **Monitoring**

We’ve learned about the importance of monitoring in Section One, and in the Data Teams process this is the most often misunderstood, misused, and neglected step of the process. This step is often forgotten as it is not a part of the 5-step meeting. It occurs during the alternate meeting. Teams monitor the agreed-upon strategies for effectiveness and impact on student learning. Teachers bring formal and informal evidence of student learning, and at this time they celebrate short-term wins and make mid-course corrections by tweaking their use of a strategy. At this time teams may also

shift course entirely and commit to using a different strategy—one that may have a stronger impact on student learning.

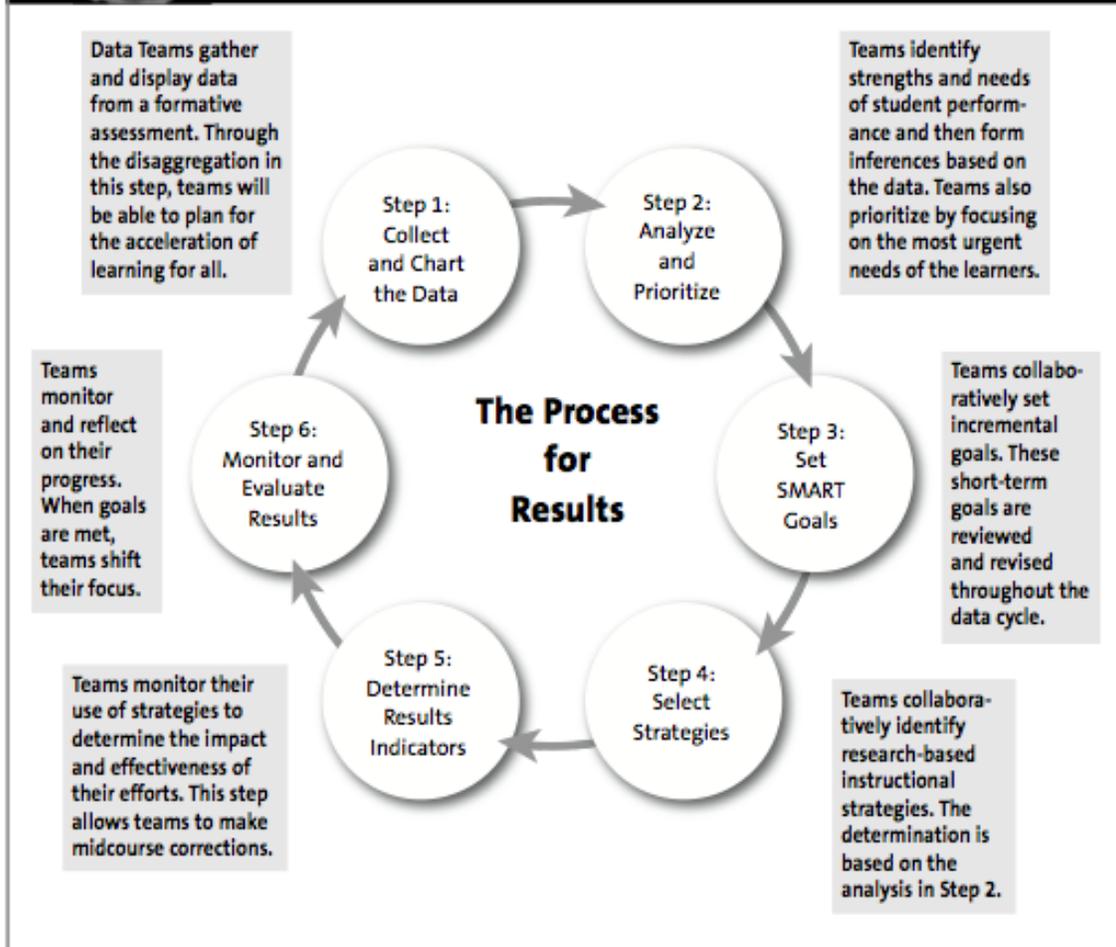
### **Using the Process**

This continuous process is used during every meeting and generally takes a team 45 to 90 minutes to use all five steps and leave with a plan of action. TBTs use the process as a continuous cycle every two to three weeks.

This data-driven, systematic, continuous process that leads to gains in all areas: teaching, learning, and leadership. As stated earlier, this is a process that places the focus on students and student achievement as well as on teachers and instructional strategies. “The essence of data-driven decision making is not about perfection and finding the decision that is popular, it’s about finding the decision that is most likely to improve student achievement, produce the best result for the most students, and promote the long-term goals of equity and excellence” (Reeves, 2002). Exhibit 5.2 provides a more detailed look at the Decision Making for Results process and the specific actions to be taken by the teams.

**EXHIBIT  
5.2**

**The Decision Making for Results Six-Step Process  
with Detailed Actions by Data Teams**



**THE PRINCIPAL AS THE INSTRUCTIONAL DATA TEAM  
ADVOCATE**

An advocate believes, supports, promotes, and encourages. In our daily lives, we advocate for our children, our families, social causes, and even for our favorite sports teams. Principals, as the instructional leaders of the school, must be the lead advocates for TBTs, because TBTs are a powerful form of professional development and the key to improving teaching, learning, and leadership. Lee Crews, a principal in Ft. Bend Independent School District, recently said, “Success builds success. Schools become better places when they’re working on the right work.”

The right work is when teachers are given the time, opportunity, structures, and expectations to collaborate—great things happen. Therefore, principals must advocate for, implement, and sustain their efforts to focus on the right work.

Principals need to foster and promote that vivid and rich image of staff members talking frequently about teaching and learning, sharing ideas that have worked for them, and offering materials and resources to implement with students. They need to support the replication of that attitude of collaboration and collegiality with every teacher and thus reach every student. TBTs provide the structure for these powerful conversations. Principals also present examples of success. This would include student progress results as well as specific actions of teachers and teams used to achieve the results.

When implementing TBTs at your school, you must make some very informed choices and decisions. TBTs are the right work—do it, and do it well. Eliminate distractions or initiatives that do not support the improvement of teaching and learning in your building. Focus on using TBTs as a valuable professional development strategy that will positively impact student achievement.

“Principals cannot transform a school through their individual efforts. Creating a professional learning community is a collective effort, but that effort has little chance of success without effective leadership from the principal” (DuFour, Dufour, and Eaker, 2008).

Your leadership as a building principal is responsible for the success or failure of the TBTs process in your school. Capture your success stories, share your journey using your results, and celebrate the deliberate and positive impact that TBTs have on student learning. This is a challenging undertaking but one of the most rewarding and beneficial experiences you will have as a building leader. How well you model collaboration, determine the right course, align the contributing systems, and empower the invested people will determine how effective the TBTs structure will be in your school.

## Modified Final Word Protocol

### Time

For circles of 5 participants: A total of 40 minutes if the time is followed religiously.

7 minutes per presenter

Presenter: 2 minutes

Response: 1 minute/responder: 4 minutes

Presenter: Final word: 1 minute

### Steps

1. Read through the identified section of text. Underline or highlight quotes or statements you find interesting or important.
2. The first person begins by reading what struck him most from the text. This person points out where the quote is in the text. In less than two minutes, this person describes why that quote struck him or her.
3. Each person responds to that quote and what the presenter said in less than one minute. The purpose of the response is to expand on the presenter's thinking about the issues, to provide a different look at the issue, to clarify thinking about the issues, and to question the presenter's assumptions about the issues.
4. After going around the circle with each person responding, the first person has the "final word." In no more than one minute the presenter responds to what has been said: Now what is s/he thinking? What is his/her reaction to what was said?
5. This process continues until everyone has had the opportunity to have the "final word."
6. Debrief

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## FEEDBACK FOR FACILITATOR

SEMINAR TITLE: \_\_\_\_\_

LOCATION & DATE: \_\_\_\_\_

FACILITATOR: \_\_\_\_\_

Your feedback is very important. It fosters continuous improvement for me and for this work. Feel free to make additional comments on the back of this page.

**What was the most helpful thing you learned as a result of this session?**

**What would have helped you learn more effectively/efficiently?**

**What questions do you still have about the discussion?**

**What else would you like the presenter to know about this session?**

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