MELISSA TOOLEY

FROM FRENZIED TO FOCUSED

How School Staffing Models Can Support Principals as Instructional Leaders

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About the Author

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Acknowledgments

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INTRODUCTION

A combination of new and increased demands on U.S. schools today—the alignment of curriculum to new standards, new summative student performance assessments, more rigorous educator evaluation and support systems, and a growing population of students who need extra supports[1]—is raising expectations for public school teachers, and in turn, changing the roles of school leaders. School principals are increasingly expected to focus on "instructional leadership" by engaging more deeply in areas related to curriculum and instruction, including assessing and developing teacher practice.[2] However, even assuming that principals are comfortable with and capable of taking on these responsibilities, many of the other roles principals have traditionally been responsible for have not yielded to make way for these new demands. Not surprisingly, a 2012 survey found that 75 percent of principals believed their role had become too complex.[3]

In addition to being a school's instructional leader and managing instructional staff, principals are still largely expected to directly manage the non-instructional aspects of their schools as well, including schedules, finances, facilities management, and student safety and discipline, all while maintaining a positive school culture and climate. This means also managing all of the individuals responsible for helping complete these tasks—the secretaries[4], the counselors, the custodians, and the nurses. A 2016 Bain & Company study of 12 of the nation's largest school systems found that the average number of instructional and non-instructional staff members that a principal was directly responsible for was *nearly 50*. This seems Herculean relative to other industries: as the Bain report highlights, managers of other highly skilled professionals, such as accountants, are responsible for an average of five employees, and even managers of less skilled employees, such as call-center employees, typically manage only about 15.[5]

As such, many public school principals—especially those serving large, high-need student populations—are presented with the task of serving as not only their schools' CEO but also their chief operating officer, chief financial officer, chief talent officer, chief experience officer, and chief information officer. With the rise of additional school choices for students and families, they can increasingly add chief marketing officer to the list as well. This is in addition to the roles principals play as middle managers (e.g., leading or participating in teachers' professional learning communities), and even entry-level employees (e.g., covering "lunch duty"). Not surprisingly, in 2011–12, principals nationally reported spending an average of 58 hours a week on school-related tasks, a number that has likely increased with the implementation of teacher evaluation and support systems.[6]

How can school systems make principals' roles more manageable while also ensuring that teachers are receiving the support they need to continue improving classroom instruction for their students? The remainder of this paper offers insights to help answer this question.

BACKGROUND: CURRENT APPROACHES TO DISTRIBUTING SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

Research provides little insight into how best to fix the issue of principals managing an overwhelming number of responsibilities, at the expense of instructional leadership. But one potential solution that has gained traction in recent years is the idea of "distributed school leadership."[7] In distributed leadership staffing models, other staff within the school building take on some of the typical responsibilities of the principal.[8] While distributed leadership models can take a variety of forms, there are two primary models currently in use: teacher leadership and expanded school administration teams.

Teacher leadership positions help relieve some of principals' "middle management" responsibilities, like coaching individual teachers or leading professional development activities. While the definition of "teacher leadership" is debated—some argue that to be a teacher leader one must still be teaching in the classroom some portion of the time, while others would include curriculum specialists and/or instructional coaches under this umbrella—it is generally agreed that these are career pathways that allow teachers to gain professional responsibility and promotion without having to become administrators.[9] Proponents argue that in addition to improving student achievement, this model allows schools to better retain highly-motivated mid-career teachers and attract a higher-quality pool of talent to the profession.[10] While this approach to distributing school leadership tends to be more teacher-centric than principal-centric,

an implicit assumption is that while principals remain the overall instructional leaders of the school, involved in developing the strategic vision and plans for teaching and learning, they should be delegating much of the day-to-day aspects of classroom-level implementation to teacher leaders.

The second model expands the school administration team beyond the principal (and assistant principal, where applicable) by creating new school leader (NSL) roles, often focused on operations, to help relieve them of some of their typical duties (see **How Do "New School Leaders" Differ from Assistant Principals?** on page 4). This model is typically designed to enable principals to focus more on instructional leadership. While the definition of "instructional leadership" is also not widely agreed upon, it generally encompasses establishing a school vision for success, creating a positive culture and instructional climate, and assessing and developing curriculum and teacher practice.[11] In addition to promoting teacher effectiveness and student achievement, these NSL roles are expected to boost principal retention by making their jobs more manageable.[12]

Both distributed leadership models serve a common purpose: narrowing the scope of principals' responsibilities while better supporting and developing teachers. The difference is that while the first distributed leadership model focuses on repurposing and/or elevating the roles of teaching staff to help take on some of principals' instructional leadership responsibilities, the second

focuses on hiring additional administrators to take on non-instructional leadership responsibilities so principals can prioritize instruction.

While these models need not be mutually exclusive, to date, the teacher leader model has garnered significantly greater attention from policymakers and practitioners.[13] This paper, then, specifically sets out to examine the second model more closely, asking how and whether including an additional administrator role in high-need schools can bolster principal ability to focus on instructional leadership, particularly by supporting teaching practice.

How Do "New School Leaders" Differ from Assistant Principals?

While some larger traditional public schools have a second school administrator in the form of an assistant principal (AP), or vice principal, there are no public data available on what proportion or type of schools have these roles. Additionally, the minimal research conducted on assistant principals documents a lack of clarity around the role. Historically, many assistant principals have focused on student behavior and engagement issues, but how the role is defined ultimately depends on what responsibilities the AP's principal chooses to assign.[i] Research on school leadership has suggested that, similar to the principalship, the AP role needs to be revisited to improve morale and job satisfaction. And while the AP role in some schools is changing to include more focus on instructional leadership, much more needs to be done for the AP role to successfully serve as a stepping stone to the principalship.[ii]

This paper focuses on what impact adding a new school leader (NSL) to a school has on the school's level of instructional leadership, regardless of whether it has an AP. However, a school could potentially rebrand and/or re-envision the traditional AP role to attempt to meet some of the same goals as a NSL. Conversely, it could use a NSL to help take on some of the AP's typical responsibilities so the AP could focus on other areas, including instructional leadership.

[i] Ashley Oleszewski, Alan Shoho, and Bruce Barnett, "The Development of Assistant Principals: A Literature Review," *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50, no. 3 (2012): 264–286, **http://ncees.ncdpi.wikispaces.net/file/view/ The+Dev.+of+APs.pdf**

[ii] Ibid.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND METHODOLOGY

The two primary questions behind this research are: 1) What roles and responsibilities do principals perceive as part of their job as instructional leaders? and 2) How does creating additional capacity on school management teams affect principal ability to focus on instructional leadership, as measured by teacher and principal perceptions? We also delve into several additional questions to provide a fuller context for the impact of these new school leader (NSL) roles: Does adding a NSL impact schools, and particularly teacher daily practice, in other ways? What conditions and supports can bolster the impact of these roles? What are potential challenges and pitfalls?

To answer these questions, New America first examined the existing literature on school leadership. We then studied three public school districts that have attempted to help principals focus on instructional leadership by changing their school leadership staffing models to include a NSL, albeit with differing approaches based on context, ultimate goals, and available resources. We commissioned the FDR Group, an independent, nonpartisan public opinion research firm, to conduct separate focus groups with principals and teachers in each district (see appendix for additional details on the FDR Group's methodology).[14] New America also conducted phone and in-person interviews with district leaders to better understand their theories of action around creating additional leadership capacity to support principals, the

design choices and trade-offs they made, and their perspectives on implementation and outcomes to date. We visited schools in each district to get a better sense of the role that principals and other school leaders play. Because one district adopted a highly-researched model[15] that is in place at both the state and national level, we also interviewed key state and national leaders disseminating that model to provide further context and model details. Finally, we interviewed leaders of two regional charter networks to gain more insight into the evolution of innovative school staffing models.

To select districts for this research, New America identified districts that had a NSL model in place in a substantial proportion of their schools for at least one full school year.[16] We then narrowed the list to districts where roughly 40 percent or more of students served are classified as "low-income," because principals in low-income schools are likely to experience more difficulty staying focused on instructional leadership due to additional student and teacher needs.[17] After reaching out to nine districts, we selected three of varying sizes, geographies, and demographics which employed promising, yet varied, alternative school leadership models and which were willing to be fully engaged in the research process.

The chart on the following page outlines general characteristics of the three districts that participated in this study.

Study District Characteristics

District		Council Bluffs Community School District, IA [2015–16]	Fitchburg Public Schools, MA [2016–17]	District of Columbia Public Schools, DC [2015–16]
# of Students		9,125	5,272	48,439
# of Traditional Schools*		15	7	109
Average Traditional School Size, by Grade Span**	**Elementary**	430	647	386***
	Middle	966	638	399***
	High	1,232	1,211	726***
Student Characteristics	**% English Language Learners**	7	11	11
	% Low-Income (% Receiving Free/ Reduced Price Meals)	68	59	76
	% With Disabilities	18	24	15
	% Race **White**	79	33	13
	African American	5	6	64
	Asian American	1	5	N/A
	Hispanic	14	49	18
	Other	1	7	4

Legend

*Nontraditional schools include special education-specific schools, adult education schools, transitional schools (e.g., transition from homeschooling to public education), and youth engagement schools. None of the school districts' jurisdictions include charter schools. Only 56 of the 109 District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) traditional schools reflected participate in DCPS' new school leader model.

**Fitchburg Public Schools (FPS) has one K–8 school, McKay Arts Academy, which enrolled 673 students in 2016–17. DCPS has 16 PreK–8 campuses as well as three 6–12 education campuses. The size of DCPS' PreK–8 campuses and 6–12 education campuses both average about 480 students, but they vary widely.

***Varies widely for traditional schools; schools with a NSL are larger, on average, than those without a NSL. The average size of DCPS elementary, middle, high, PreK–8 schools, and 6–12 education campuses (respectively) with a NSL role is: 411, 438, 767, 663, and 596. Comparatively, the average size of schools without a NSL is: 358, 320, 507, 353, and 386.

Sources

Council Bluffs Community School (CBCSD) District Sources:

Council Bluffs Community School District, "Welcome to Council Bluffs Schools," 2017, **http://www.cb-schools.org/**.

Council Bluffs Community School District, "Enrollment 2015–16," 2017, **http://www.cb-schools.org/enrollment-4/**.

Council Bluffs Community School District, "Enrollment," 2017, **http://www.cb-schools.org/enrollment/**.

Correspondence with CBCSD, October 2016.

Fitchburg Public Schools (FPS) Sources:

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "School and District Profiles: Fitchburg Enrollment Data," 2017, **http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/profiles/student. aspx?orgcode=00970000&orgtypecode=5&**.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, "Public School Districts: Fitchburg," 2017, **http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general. aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=00970000&orgtypecode=5**.

Homefacts, "Fitchburg, MA Schools K–12," 2017, **http://www.homefacts.com/schools/Massachusetts/Worcester-County/Fitchburg-2.html#top_rated_schools**.

Correspondence with FPS, January 2017.

District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) Sources:

District of Columbia Public Schools, "DCPS at a Glance: Enrollment," 2017, **https://dcps.dc.gov/node/966292**.

District of Columbia Public Schools, "DCPS Data Set—Enrollment," 2017, **https://dcps.dc.gov/node/1018342**.

Correspondence with DCPS, October 2016.

DISTRICT PROFILES

Here is a closer look at the adoption, implementation, and impact of the new school leader models in each of the three districts researched: Council Bluffs Community School District, Iowa; Fitchburg Public Schools, Massachusetts; District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, DC.

Council Bluffs Community School District, Iowa
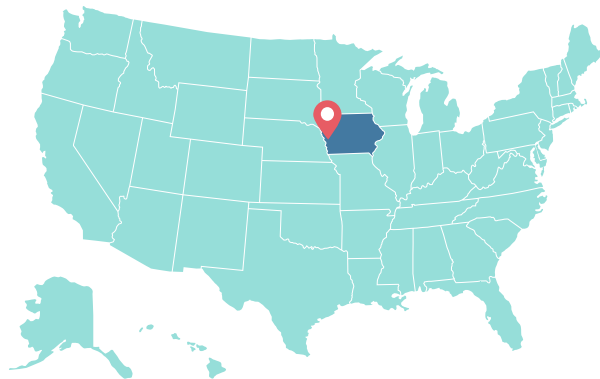
Adoption of the School Administration Manager Role

At the end of the 2006–07 school year, Council Bluffs Community School District (CBCSD), a high-poverty district located just across the Missouri River from Omaha, Nebraska, learned that it had the lowest graduation rate in the state of Iowa. That same year, the Iowa West Foundation performed a study of community-wide needs in 2007 that identified improvement of public education, specifically

CBCSD, as the most important community need. As the district leadership team debated how to address these concerns, the new superintendent, Martha Bruckner, read about a model being implemented in a few Iowa schools under the name School Administration Manager Project, or SAM®, in concert with the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) professional association.

The SAM Project was originally developed for Jefferson County Schools in Kentucky in 2002 by Mark Shellinger, now the director of the National SAM Innovation Project, a nonprofit organization that helps schools across the U.S. implement the SAM model.[18] According to Carol Lensing, SAI's SAM coordinator until 2017, the SAM Project provides tools intended to "assist principals in distributing management responsibilities and work to support staff...to keep routine administration work from pulling the principal away from instructional leadership work." Participating principals are expected to establish goals for increasing time spent on supporting instruction and to meet with the SAM daily to review how they are spending their time during the school day. In fact, time tracking for principals is one of the SAM model's "non-negotiables."[19] Another important part of the program is delegating specific duties to the SAM and/or other members of the school staff so that the principal is not immediately pulled away every time there is an issue within the building (see **National Perspective on SAM Staffing Models** on page 10).

Superintendent Bruckner saw significant potential for improving the quality of education in the district if it could get principals to focus more on instruction.

But, she said, "it was apparent that we could not ask principals to change their focus from management to actual instructional leadership if we did not give them some way to manage the daily routines of school."[20] To address this issue, she requested financial support from the Iowa West Foundation to conduct a SAM pilot in the three largest elementary schools as well as in the two middle and two high schools. The foundation granted the request and the district rolled out the SAM initiative in these seven schools in the 2007–08 school year.

Implementation and Evolution of the SAM Role

As participating principals embraced the SAM initiative, and saw an increase in their time focused on instruction, additional principals were interested in adopting the model. The superintendent asked the district's school board to fund six more schools through the district's general fund in 2008–09, and by 2009–10 every traditional school had a SAM, with the two smallest elementary schools sharing a SAM, as well as a principal.[21] Lensing says that Council Bluffs is unusual within Iowa, as most districts do not end up adopting the SAM model district-wide, instead choosing to prioritize the position within their neediest schools. The district is also somewhat atypical in that it has created a new full-time school staff position with additional funding to execute the SAM duties; the vast majority of the roughly 900 schools currently implementing the SAM model across the nation have designated one or more current school support staff members to take on specific SAM responsibilities (see **National Perspective on SAM Staffing Models** on page 10).[22]

Council Bluffs may also differ from other districts in that it encourages its principals to determine which tasks to assign their SAM based on principal preferences and school needs, as long as the SAM is helping to free up time to focus on instruction. According to CBCSD principals and teachers, in addition to tracking the principal's time, SAMs are generally taking on the following types of non-instructional tasks, many of which were previously handled by principals or assistant principals:

- maintaining principal calendar and school schedules, including finding coverage when a teacher is out

- helping handle student discipline issues

- supervising and evaluating paraprofessionals

- serving as liaison to parents; setting up parent-teacher conferences

- organizing assemblies and staff meetings

- ordering equipment and supplies in response to teacher need

- scheduling building repairs

Carter Lake Elementary School principal Doreen Knuth talks with a student during a classroom visit. Photo courtesty of Council Bluffs Community School District.

National Perspective on SAM Staffing Models

According to National SAM Innovation Project Director Mark Shellinger, there are three different models currently being implemented nationwide in over 900 schools in 22 states:[i]

- **SAM Model 1:** School creates a new staff position to serve as the SAM [~40 schools use this model]

- **SAM Model 2:** School uses existing staff position(s) to serve as the SAM and provides a stipend [~80 schools use this model]

- **SAM Model 3:** School uses existing staff position(s) to serve as the SAM and does not provide a stipend [~800 schools use this model]

Shellinger does not have a preference for which model a school uses, as prior research on the SAM Project indicates that all can positively influence principal time use.[ii] However, he believes that the third model may have more staying power because it is more cost-effective, and hence likely to be sustainable. Despite believing that schools are "horribly understaffed," he says the research shows that "you don't change principals' time use by adding people but by adding structures to thinking about and talking about [time use]."[iii]

In all three models, the four expectations of SAMs are to:

1. help the principal schedule his or her time using the proprietary TimeTrack® software

2. help the principal develop and train "First Responders®"—staff members who, in addition to the SAM, will take the first crack at dealing with specifically delegated management issues so the principal is not pulled away;

3. help the principal and support staff use the "SAM communications protocol," which is a structured way of dealing with requests for principal time so the school community uses the principal more for instructional work; and

4. meet with the principal daily to discuss how he or she used time the day before, consider what follow-up is needed, and examine one TimeTrack chart or graph showing the leader's time spent with an individual teacher or group in order to reflect on what the leader should do to help move teacher practice forward. The daily meeting is also intended to deal with any First Responder issues that need further attention, and any areas that pulled the principal from the instructional work that was planned.[iv]

[i] E-mail from Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), November 3, 2016; conversation with Mark Shellinger, November 30, 2016.

[ii] Previous research on the SAM model found that principal focus on instructional leadership and reduction in hours worked were similar regardless of whether a new full-time staff person or existing staff member took on the role of managing the set of SAM processes. See Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project* (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project.pdf**; Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf**.

[iii] Conversation with Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), November 30, 2016; e-mail from Mark Shellinger, May 30, 2017.

[iv] E-mails from Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), November 3, 2016 and May 30, 2017.

How SAMs Have Changed Principals' Roles as Instructional Leaders in Council Bluffs

District administrators indicate that having a SAM allows principals to focus on aspects of their job that they would not otherwise be able to, and they have the data to prove it. While principals are not required to share their time-tracking data with the central office, many volunteered to have their data reported to the Iowa West Foundation, as evidence of the impact of the foundation's SAM investment. Among principals who have been leading schools in the district since the SAM Project's inception there, the percent of time they spent focused on instructional leadership activities (see **What Counts as Instructional Leadership in the SAM Project?**) had doubled in several cases. As of 2013, the average time principals spent on instructional leadership was hovering around 65 percent, up from 39 percent among those same principals in 2009.[23]

Council Bluffs principals said that having a SAM has a direct and positive impact on the quality and quantity of time they can devote to instructional leadership:

> You just can't [provide teachers feedback and engage them in reflective questioning] unless you have spent the time in their classrooms. And to know the curriculum and their instructional materials and the things they are struggling through right now, you just don't have that level of understanding unless you have the time.

> Without a SAM I would not be able to manage the weekly bite-sized feedback chunks to help move [teacher practice]. I think I have had some of the best, deepest, richest conversations with staff members about things that I probably would not have caught before—and to be able to meet needs better through those conversations.

The change in principals' instructional leadership roles seemed to be greatest in elementary schools, which do not have assistant principal roles in place as the middle and high school do in CBCSD, and where principals seem to take a more hands-on

What Counts as Instructional Leadership in the SAM Project?

Instructional leadership for SAM time-tracking purposes falls into 15 categories of tasks, although a 2009 Policy Studies Associates evaluation of the SAM Project commissioned for the Wallace Foundation found the top instructional leadership activities principals engaged in at the beginning of their implementation of the SAM process to include seven categories: 1] observation of classroom practice; 2] classroom walkthroughs (differing from observation only in that a lesser amount of time is spent observing instruction); 3] planning, curriculum, and assessment; 4] decision-making committees, groups, and meetings regarding instructional decisions; 5] instruction-related office work prep, including preparing for feedback, evaluations, or instructional meetings; 6] employee feedback regarding instruction; and 7] working with students in the classroom (one-on-one or in groups).[i]

The other categories include: providing employee feedback that is "non-directive;" supervising students in the classroom; interacting with parents/guardians regarding instruction or student achievement/progress; attending district-level meetings to discuss instruction or student learning; attending external meetings regarding instructional issues; modeling/teaching while a teacher observes; delivering professional development to instructional staff; and providing celebratory feedback regarding curriculum, instruction, or assessment.[ii]

[i] Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project.pdf**

[ii] SAM Instructional Leadership Categories rubric provided via e-mail by Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), June 6, 2017.

approach to instructional leadership than principals at the middle and high school levels.

> ## You just can't [provide teachers feedback and engage them in reflective questioning] unless you have spent the time in their classrooms.

One elementary principal said one major aspect of her job that has changed since SAM is "having that uninterrupted time with your teachers. [Before] invariably you would be in a [professional learning community (PLC)][24] and you would be hauled out to deal with a discipline issue or something of that sort, [so] you could never be fully present with teachers."

Another elementary principal said, "I was principal for [x] years before I had a SAM, and the time that I would put into scheduling walk-throughs, scheduling observations, scheduling my week… would eat up time that I could be in the classroom or be in PLCs. So to have someone take that over for me—and just kind of direct their work while they are doing that—it has been night and day of how much I can support teachers."

For the most part, teachers concurred with what principals said about how SAMs have changed their roles. One middle school teacher explained that "before the SAM…the conversations with the principal were more geared toward 'how is the student doing…after they have been to the office?'….Now my discussions with my principal are more of, 'my kids are not getting this concept'…. the conversations—and I think it's because of the SAMs—have to do more with how are we better improving student achievement."

Other teachers discussed how the level of feedback they receive from their principals has improved. One said, "before the SAM was there, [the principal] would be in and out of our rooms, but he may not give as much feedback as when the SAM was there. So it seemed like with the SAM that we got more

feedback, for a longer period of time throughout the year, than we did without the SAM."

Another teacher, who spends three-quarters of the day as an instructional coach, indicated that the SAM allows schools to "be more data-driven. It takes a lot of time to go through results and to analyze, whether it be a district assessment or [a state] assessment…Not having the SAM, I don't think there's any way our principal could go through any of that data."

While principals are focused more on instructional leadership with the onset of SAMs, Council Bluffs principals indicate that little changed, and little should have changed, in how they are evaluated or what they are held responsible for. They continue to be evaluated by the same rubric and they hold themselves accountable for their schools' success, which they think is a result of many factors that go beyond instruction:

> Nobody says, "Oh, those halls are filthy—not my problem." I mean, we are responsible for every element of the school. And the Iowa leadership standards…one of them is management. If any of us ignored that—I mean, you should be held accountable for that.

> ## Sometimes it [can be]…a misconception that it's about academics, but being an instructional leader means that we provide an environment for our staff to be successful, so that our kids can be successful.

> I am evaluated on [being an] instructional leader. I think that means many things. Sometimes it [can be]…a misconception that it's about academics, but being an instructional leader means that we provide an environment for our staff to be successful, so that our kids can be successful. A lot goes with that. There are many culture and climate issues that have to be

addressed in order for those people to be able to do their jobs—we have to be able to provide the supports necessary for that to happen. And provide the supports in the classroom for them to be successful to raise achievement.

Conditions that Further Support Principals as Instructional Leaders

Council Bluffs has blended state and district resources to support principals' work as instructional leaders. The district contracts with the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) to provide SAM-related tools, such as the TimeTrack software and data housing, as well as training. In addition to providing initial training to the SAMs themselves, SAI also provides a coach to work with both the SAM and the principal in reflecting on time use tracked through the TimeTrack tool, the impact of the changes in the use of time, and discussion of how to help the principal be a "leader of leaders" within the school building.[25]

Additionally, in 2009–10, Council Bluffs redesigned its process for providing professional development (PD) to principals, as well as the PD content. Instead of primarily offering whole group principal PD and only visiting school sites every quarter, principals' supervisors—Julie Smith, director of elementary education, and Jason Plourde, director of secondary education—now work closely with principals through a series of frequent meetings to collaborate and grow their practice.[26] Smith and Plourde visit each principal assigned to them weekly at the secondary level and biweekly at the elementary level to provide on-the-job coaching. The supervisors also convene principals for monthly PLCs to study around a topic that principals have chosen, such as "how to build capacity in others" or "giving feedback." About three times a year, principals participate in "cluster visits" where several principals visit a classroom together, and then engage in a guided discussion about a specific aspect of teaching so that there is an opportunity for norming and sharing ideas and strategies.

Smith and Plourde say that their strategy is to work with principals as partners rather than as bosses.

They attempt to engage in reflection as opposed to providing advice, and focus most of their meeting time on the school leader's agenda, not their own. That is not to say that the principal supervisors aren't guiding the principals' focus—as Plourde explained, the supervisors discuss "multiple piles of dirty laundry, but principals choose which one to focus on" at any given point. Principals concurred with this characterization. As one principal put it, coaching visits with her supervisor have "been really powerful…and [have] helped me grow. And sometimes it is: 'I've got this direct problem going on, what do you think?' But it's really a coaching opportunity instead of 'You need to do this, this, and this.'"

One reason Smith offers for why principals can deeply engage in this kind of development work is that tasks principals took on a few years ago are now performed by others: distributed leadership is key. One area of distributed leadership she mentions specifically is the district's teacher leaders. In 2013–14, Iowa's state legislature authorized and funded the Teacher Leadership and Compensation System (TLC) to help districts plan and implement a multitude of teacher leadership opportunities. As a result, Council Bluffs decided to hire a director of professional learning, Melissa Chalupnik, to facilitate a plan for PD for both certified (licensed) and classified (non-licensed) staff where teacher leaders would be highly leveraged.[27]

According to Chalupnik, every traditional school has a variety of teacher leaders—some specific to their building, some cross-building—from full-day release mentors, to classroom strategists who are full-time classroom teachers but pilot new initiatives and model reflective teaching practices for others. Chalupnik estimates they have roughly 150 staff members in seven different roles across their 15 traditional schools. While Council Bluffs previously had math and literacy model teachers at the elementary level, and instructional coaches and department chairs at the secondary level, Chalupnik says that transitioning to a network of formal teacher leaders, who serve as members of the building leadership teams, has eased some of the principal workload. For example, literacy coaches

help analyze data and mentors help new teachers in areas where they are struggling. However, Chalupnik explains that while teacher leaders can also help facilitate PLC groups, some principals have had trouble letting go of this role.[28]

Principals in Council Bluffs see the impact of all of these supports, particularly those who have worked elsewhere. As one principal shared, "I have never been in a district with this much support....I cannot believe the amount of things I can do in a building with that kind of support. Not just the SAMs but everybody, the teacher leaders, and [the assistant principals in my school and the other principals throughout the district]. It's a really great environment. I can't separate SAMs from loving this district and [my] colleagues."

CBCSD has also embarked on work since 2010–11 to develop a clear mission, norms, and a culture of trust that Smith points to as critical in getting everyone in the district moving in the same direction. One example Bruckner offers is that after the assistant superintendent and principal supervisor complete a walkthrough of a principal's building, the three sit down to debrief. She says,

> the conversation consists of progress toward implementation and how the visit provided evidence toward meeting the goals of the school improvement plan. These are usually videotaped and posted to the assistant superintendent's blog for everyone to view. While there is an option to not have it videotaped and instead have the assistant superintendent write about the visit with photos, most principals like the videotape option so staff can hear the conversation. It promotes transparency and the notion that we are all part of the school improvement process.[29]

Similarly, although principals are not required to share their instructional leadership time tracking data with their supervisors, some opt to do so to help them continue to improve in this area.

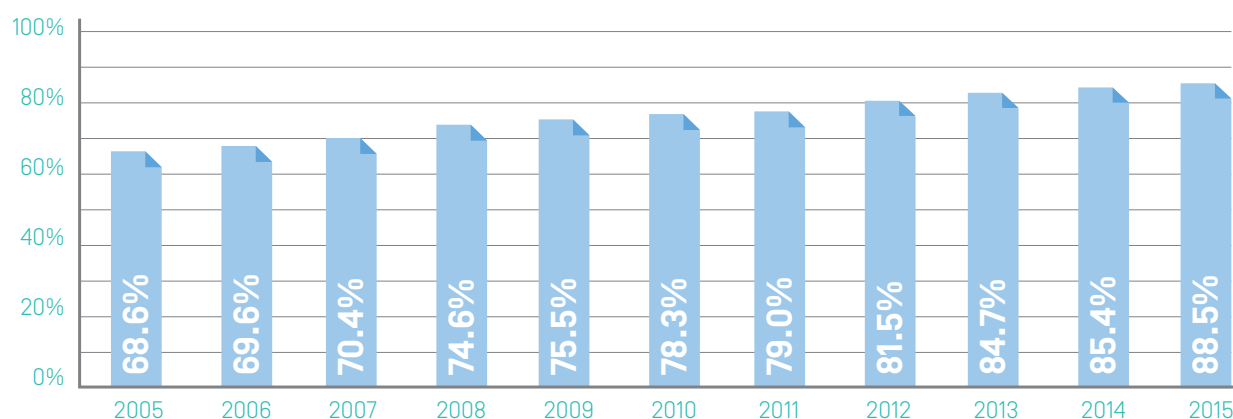## Benefits SAMs Provide to Teachers and Schools More Broadly

Teachers and principals shared several benefits they perceive SAMs providing beyond freeing up principal time to focus on instruction. Both groups discussed how having a SAM has improved relationships between principals and teachers, in part because of changes to the way principals and teachers view each other's roles. One elementary principal said, "[Now] I feel like I can actually understand the teachers and what's going on in their classrooms." A middle school principal said, "when I gave feedback to a teacher today, he's not the easiest teacher, but it was really well received because he knows I've been in the classroom... and I'm there to help....Without being freed up to have those constant visits, I don't know if he would receive that feedback well, and then things would be status quo."

One teacher characterized his initial reaction to hearing about the SAM role and objective as, "'oh, great, the principals are going to be in the classroom more,' kind of like a gotcha. But...now that we have had the SAM, the principals are really talking about curriculum. It's more of a 'we're all in this together, the village is raising the kids'—and I think it's been a positive experience for us."

> **I think the school is being managed better than when I was trying to do both [instructional leadership and building management] by myself.**

Council Bluffs teachers indicate that by working with principals more closely on instruction, their school's instructional culture has changed. One teacher relayed how she felt some dread in learning about the roll-out of SAMs and the expectation that principals be in the classroom more, "but...by the end of the year, it was [normal that] they are in your room all the time. The principal, he was...leaving post-it notes or e-mail, some kind of direct feedback

CBCSD Four-Year Graduation Rate (2005-2015)

Year	Rate
2005	68.6%
2006	69.6%
2007	70.4%
2008	74.6%
2009	75.5%
2010	78.3%
2011	79.0%
2012	81.5%
2013	84.7%
2014	85.4%
2015	88.5%

Source: Council Bluffs Community School District, "Home: Council Bluffs Community Schools," 2017, **http://www.cb-schools.org/**.

to me all the time—and it just became the norm, it got to be very comfortable to have another adult in giving you feedback."

SAMs have helped improve culture and morale within schools in other ways as well. Teachers see that it has somewhat improved principals' quality of life, and reduced the possibility of burn-out for principals as well as teachers. As one teacher said, if the SAM were gone, "the principal would not make it out of the office."[30] Another said without a SAM that, "I think eventually we would lose some [teaching] staff." A principal offered, "I think the school is being managed better than when I was trying to do both [instructional leadership and building management] by myself because [my SAM] is so much more able to be responsive to teachers. And when people's needs are getting met, there's a direct correlation to morale." Teachers also discussed how having students see another "administrator" walking the hallways, being visible, has a positive impact on school culture.

While it is difficult to paint a clear line from the SAM initiative to improved student outcomes, several principals thought this was a fair "dotted line" to draw. As one indicated,

> one of the major goals for the high schools in this district is to raise the graduation rate because we were one of the lowest in Iowa. And

for the past 10 years it has climbed every year. So everybody in this district, from elementary to middle to high school are a piece of THAT happening. All the wrap-around services, all the mental health services, all the agencies that we can go to help different kids—to provide them all these opportunities that we did not have 15 years ago. There's a lot of pieces that go into that. So [it is difficult] to narrow down to one piece or the other, [but SAMs are] a piece of it.

Asked what the hypothetical impact of getting rid of SAMs would be, one middle school principal said, "kids will not be coming to the secondary schools as well [prepared] as they are now, if [the elementary schools] lose their SAMs."

Challenges

Virtually all Council Bluffs principals mention instructional leadership when describing what they perceive as their primary role. Still, in terms of demands on their time, they say it continues to be a challenge to balance students' academic needs and the instructional support needs of teachers with the other needs of students and families, who are often living in poverty, dealing with mental health or substance abuse issues, or facing a host of other difficulties. As one principal explained, "the one common thing we can all say is that, because

we have SAMs, the amount of time we can spend supporting teachers and families and kids went up—but none of those [other] things went away."

Despite the myriad responsibilities allocated to the SAMs in Council Bluffs, it has been a relatively low-paid position, compensated less than a first-year teacher. Teachers mentioned substantial SAM turnover at the elementary level, where there is no assistant principal with whom principals can share responsibilities. A unique 2013 rule in Iowa requiring any position called a SAM to have a special license (see **Licensing SAMs in Iowa** below) may also impact the supply of prospective SAMs. While the move is intended to create more consistency in the skills SAMs have by ensuring that everyone called a "SAM" goes through the same training process, superintendent Bruckner is concerned that it could be a barrier to getting well-qualified candidates, like retired school administrators, into the position.

Additionally, Council Bluffs is struggling to figure out how to continue funding its SAM initiative, even at the current salary levels, because the foundation that provided a substantial portion of the initiative's original funding is unable to sustain the initial level of funding into perpetuity. Every year the foundation stops funding for two of the district's SAMs. And because the SAM role is copyrighted, Council Bluffs is required to contract with the state SAI network for technology, data processing, coaching services, and annual data verification services, which costs between $20,000–30,000 annually.[31] In light of these issues, Bruckner indicated that the district may have to consider calling the SAM position something else, and developing its own training and time-tracking tools in order to maintain it in every school.

Licensing SAMs in Iowa

In 2012, Iowa's governor, Terry Branstad, presented the state legislature with an education reform package, within which he recommended that all schools have a SAM as one element of developing excellent schools across the state.[32] The proposal went through the legislature but ultimately was not funded. Instead, the Iowa Board of Educational Examiners wrote rules requiring SAMs to be licensed staff members.[33] The three-year initial license requires an application, a background check, and completion of an approved SAM training. To convert it to a five-year professional license, the SAM must complete one year of SAM experience and three PD credit hours, and demonstrate competencies in relevant technology and personal skills, as verified by a supervisor.[34] Carol Lensing, the School Administrators of Iowa (SAI) SAM coordinator until this year, helped develop the state's regulations to ensure that they reflected the initial training SAI was already providing to SAMs and the schools that employ them. The SAI SAM coordinator supports the Board of Examiners to ensure all employed SAMs
are licensed.

Fitchburg Public Schools, Massachusetts
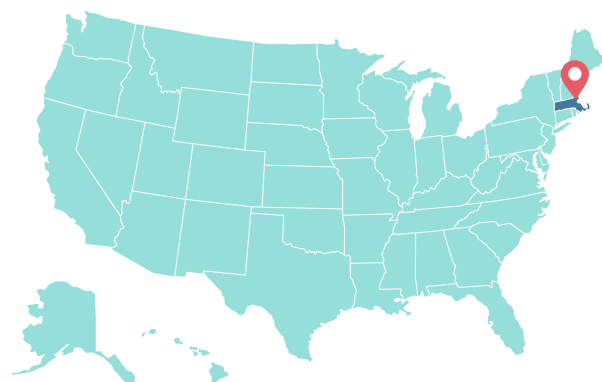
Creation of the Student Program Support Administrator

Located in a former mill town 10 miles from the New Hampshire border and 50 miles from Boston,[35] Fitchburg Public Schools (FPS) was one of the first districts in Massachusetts to pilot new educator evaluation and support systems under the state's federal Race to the Top grant in 2012–13. When FPS negotiated its evaluation system with the teachers' union, it outlined several different methods through which administrators would be expected to assess teacher practice and provide aligned job-embedded professional development. In addition to announced classroom observations, which make up the evaluative component, the system includes learning walks, walkthroughs, instructional rounds, lesson study, and other non-evaluative approaches to help refine teacher practice.[36] However, the time necessary to plan for and complete this work was significant and while all schools had at least one assistant principal (AP), the AP's role was traditionally to handle most of the discipline, not to focus on curriculum and instruction. Without additional assistance, superintendent Andre Ravenelle and his team were concerned that principals would have difficulty finding sufficient time to ensure the new evaluation and support system could live up to its promise of helping teachers reach their full potential.

At the same time, the central office was hearing from schools and parents about a need for a more transparent, integrated approach to special education. This was a particularly critical need as the district had an above average number of students in special education relative to the state, with several group homes located in FPS' boundaries, and had struggled to stay in compliance on special education services and documentation.[37] Historically, evaluation team leaders (ETLs)—who were on a teacher contract, but based out of the district's central office—had led the mandatory Individualized Education Program (IEP) meetings for students who required special education services. While there were some efficiencies to the ETL role (e.g., one ETL could serve several schools), there was a relationship piece that was lacking: parents felt that ETLs did not know their students' particular situations, and school staff felt ETLs did not fully appreciate how each school worked.[38]

As a high-poverty district, Fitchburg did not have a lot of resources to create new positions. The administrative council sat down to discuss possible options for how to meet these two different identified needs: improve principals' ability to spend time in classrooms, and improve the quality of special education services being provided in schools. As one principal explained, "we were asked as administrators what we would need to do our jobs. So deans came up, another assistant principal came up, assistant principal in charge of curriculum came up, a SPED [special education] administrator came up. There were a lot of things that came up that would help our students." The council determined that the highest-potential solution within tight budget constraints was to use existing funds from the ETL position to create another school-based administrator role that would serve as part of the school leadership team. Hence, in the 2012–13 school year, the student program support administrator (SPSA) role was born.

Evolution and Implementation of the SPSA Role

The SPSA role is similar to that of the former ETL in that individuals in the job facilitate, coordinate, and supervise delivery of special education services. It is different in that it exists at the school level, and also supports other school management responsibilities. Roann Demanche, FPS' director of pupil services, said that at first "the superintendent said, 'I want this percent of the SPSA['s time] to be managing the day-to-day discipline kind of stuff,' which seemed to be diverting the principal's attention away from that instructional leadership role for evaluation." But she said the district leadership team quickly realized after the first year that "you really have to let the school administrative team figure out what system is going to work best for their particular building. Because [it] became very daunting for a lot of our SPSAs to manage both the discipline on a day-to-day basis and the SPED component."

Now each school administration team[39] works together to determine which members will play which roles, an arrangement central office administrators see as having the added benefit of creating a pipeline for school leadership in a way that did not exist as robustly previously. Thus, assistant principals may no longer just focus on discipline all day, and the various school leader positions are involved in multiple aspects of administration, including special education. Superintendent Ravenelle says that the district intends for the SPSA to not be seen as "just a SPED job" but to help everyone in the school think of educating special education students as their responsibility, and to help provide evaluation and implementation around inclusion practices from a role with more authority.

According to principals and teachers, SPSAs' responsibilities vary by school, but typically they include a mix of instructional and non-instructional duties, including:

- Overseeing all special-education specific work, such as:
  - complying with state and federal special education requirements, including completing paperwork*
  - facilitating IEP meetings and writing IEPs in consultation with parents and teachers*
  - managing the evaluation process when students are referred to special education*
  - communicating with parents of special education students outside of IEP meetings*
  - helping schedule student accommodations for state testing
  - managing programming in self-contained classrooms (e.g., guided learning for students with severe cognitive impairments, etc.)
- Conducting special education teacher and paraprofessional observations and evaluations
- Attending grade-level meetings and data team meetings
- Facilitating professional learning communities and other types of PD for both general and special education teachers, such as providing expertise on SPED laws, procedures, etc.
- Handling student discipline (mostly for special education students, but sometimes for general education students too)

Indicates a job responsibility formerly held by the ETLs based in Fitchburg's central office

How SPSAs Have Changed Principals' Roles as Instructional Leaders

Central office administrators perceive huge shifts in how principals approach their work compared to five years ago, and the culture shift that has come along with it, where classroom practice is now much more transparent. Assistant Superintendent Paula Giaquinto said principal walkthroughs of teacher classrooms used to be "an event, as opposed to now where the expectation is, 'this is part of our practice...we do walkthroughs with the coaches, we do walkthroughs with the math directors.'" The other big change noted was a

clearer, more intentional focus on data literacy and assessment literacy by principals, where they are seeking the data they need to determine where they, their coaches, and their teachers need to focus—something the central office does not think principals would have the capacity to grapple with if the SPSA were not helping take on some administrative responsibilities.

Fitchburg principals report being grateful to have SPSAs on board to better manage and integrate special education within their schools, as well as pitch in on other leadership responsibilities, especially staff evaluation. As a result, principals generally feel they and/or their assistant principals can now devote more time to their myriad other responsibilities, including focusing on supporting curriculum and instructional practice:

> Before, if it was a kid in crisis, I might have to leave [the data meeting] to go deal with it. Now, having an extra body and someone that you can depend on…you can stay in the meeting. And I have a huge focus on social/emotional curriculum.…One of the reasons we are able to do that is that we are not dealing with 80 percent of the small stuff anymore.

> Sometimes the instructional piece is not necessarily doing evaluation. It's leading a PLC, it's leading PD, it's identifying people to come in and conduct that PD by looking at data and assessment. So I am able to do a lot more with that.

> My job has stayed the same but it has given a lot of relief to my assistant principal and my guidance [counseling staff]. So [my AP is] no longer running all discipline calls. He can do some more instructional leadership and kind of grow him into, hopefully, a future principal role. And guidance can do more groups and do more preventative measures rather than responding to a crisis.

> We have literacy and math coaches in the building too. [So] instead of dealing with something else, I might be working with [a

teacher's] coach [to review strategies a teacher is using and discussing what else his or her students might benefit from]."

Teachers, however, perceive little change in principals' roles or day-to-day responsibilities,

We are not dealing with 80 percent of the small stuff anymore.

including involvement with their practice, since SPSAs came on board. However, principals say that it is not clear whether teachers are in a position to notice all of the changes to their role because of the "behind-the-scenes" nature of some of their instructional leadership work (e.g., reviewing data with coaches), and the fact that coaches, not principals, are often the ones working most closely with teachers on developing their practice.

Several teachers note that the social-emotional needs of students have increased over the last few years and they assume principals are spending any available additional time focused on student discipline or students in crisis. Some principals agreed. One said, "you have more people helping out but there's more things to handle. [Another principal] mentioned crisis management: I don't know the numbers from every school, but I've got six kids in crisis at any time."

While some FPS principals describe their primary role as that of instructional leader, many perceive their ultimate role as the visionary of their building whose primary purpose is to ensure that all parties—students, teachers, support staff, administration—get what they need to succeed. FPS principals continue to be held accountable (and hold themselves accountable) for their school's overall success, which will be attained partially, although not solely, by focusing on teachers' classroom practice. Principals said:

> The main [role] I think is instructional leader, as well as manager. Strategic planner.

Communicator...and also a facilitator of those larger conversations—the sharing of information back and forth between the different constituencies, within the building and beyond the building.

I think my job is to work with my teams... [staff, students, the community] to really set the tone for the school—to set an environment for our school where everybody can succeed. Where teachers get their maximum success as educators, where students get their maximum success... and [are] progressing and that teachers are making sure that they are tracking that progress and making good plans for kids. And that I am putting in those processes where all that can happen and then monitoring those processes and working with those teams to see that through.

I look at my job to set the vision and to implement and execute the plan to make sure that that vision is met. So that is basically what everybody else said—facilitation, communication, quality control, I would say.

> **I think my job is to work with my teams...[staff, students, the community] to really set the tone for the school—to set an environment for our school where everybody can succeed.**

Conditions that Further Support Principals as Instructional Leaders

Principals in FPS are provided with supports from the state, central office, and external trainings to develop their instructional leadership skills. As a district rated "Level 3," or middling, in Massachusetts' state accountability system,[40] FPS has access to resources and trainings from the state department of education through its District and School Assistance instructional leadership

network meetings. The central office also provides all school leaders with the opportunity to attend the National Institute for School Leadership's Executive Development Program, which focuses on instructional leadership practices—including, but not limited to, strategy, curriculum, coaching, and leading other instructional leaders—and has demonstrated evidence of improving school leader practice and student achievement outcomes in schools that have used it.[41]

The central office leadership also holds up the role of teacher leaders, which include school-based math and literacy coaches in nearly all schools and an "Advanced Academics Learning Initiatives" resource coach in the elementary and middle schools, as key in helping principals focus on instructional leadership at the right level.[42] Coaches work directly with teachers through a collaborative problem-solving model, and the district's data review cycle is usually the process through which principals and coaches work most closely. Here the principal is interfacing with coaches as they are reviewing data, working on instructional alignment, and developing curricular enhancements. Many of the math and literacy coaches have been there since the inception of the coaching initiative over a decade ago, and the principals view them as valuable assets in getting the job done in a different way. Coaches are "a buffer [for principals in protecting their time] as much as a resource, whether it's around...inclusive practices or content or data," says Giaquinto. She further explains the role of coaches in FPS by saying that,

> we don't recommend that coaches be put on teachers' action plans. Because you know, there's a saying that you don't need to be sick to get better. Instead, we usually ask the principals and coaches to start the year working with their strongest teachers. We have some formal protocols for the coaches to use, what we call the nine-day coaching cycle...where the coaches meet, plan, observe, develop co-teaching, and then at the end of that, debrief with the principal about that experience. We also have on-demand coaching where teachers will approach a coach and say,

"I'm really struggling with XYZ, can I talk to you?" And they can develop their own plan. We have coaching where teachers can work together...[as well as] where the coach will model certain new techniques or lessons or new curriculum.

Principals reinforced the importance of coaches and how performing walkthroughs with them and reviewing data and next steps during data meetings are an asset to their ability to provide instructional leadership. Math and literacy coaches also came up as "saviors" and the go-to resource for many teachers during the focus groups, although several teachers expressed that these coaches are not as helpful for teachers who do not teach English or math. As one teacher said, coaches "are knowledgeable and are accessible for everyone, but I feel bad for the science and specialists and social studies [teachers]."

## Benefits SPSAs Provide to Teachers and Schools More Broadly

Assistant Superintendent Giaquinto sees two benefits the SPSA role provides to schools. First, she says that "it humanizes special education" by developing meaningful relationships around the work with school-based administrators and teachers. She believes that having the SPSA as part of the leadership team gives principals a perspective that they may not consider every day, which is helpful to the principal and ultimately to both the general and special education students. Alicia Berrospe, FPS' director of special education, explained that another benefit of the new role is that SPSA input is taken more seriously by teachers than ETL input was, because SPSAs are administrators and have the authority to hold educators accountable for those expectations.

These benefits were reinforced principals and teachers. In addition to having another school-level administrator with whom to brainstorm and share other responsibilities, principals saw value in SPSAs primarily in how they are improving the special education process and services. Principals perceive special education staff as more effective because

of the support received from SPSAs "from the compliance, to the instructional, to the data, to the professional development piece of it. That would probably be the greatest—and the most important—gain." FPS principals also indicate that SPSAs are helping slow down referrals to special education. As one principal shared, SPSAs "are able to give [general education] teachers strategies to help kids before the teachers would go to referral. Before, if a kid was struggling there wouldn't be a lot of supports—or sometimes not the knowledge base needed for certain students."

Several of the general education teachers who participated in the focus group did not know the title SPSA, or what the role entailed prior to being asked to participate in our research. These teachers did not feel that they had much interaction with

> **Before, if a kid was struggling there wouldn't be a lot of supports—or sometimes not the knowledge base needed for certain students.**
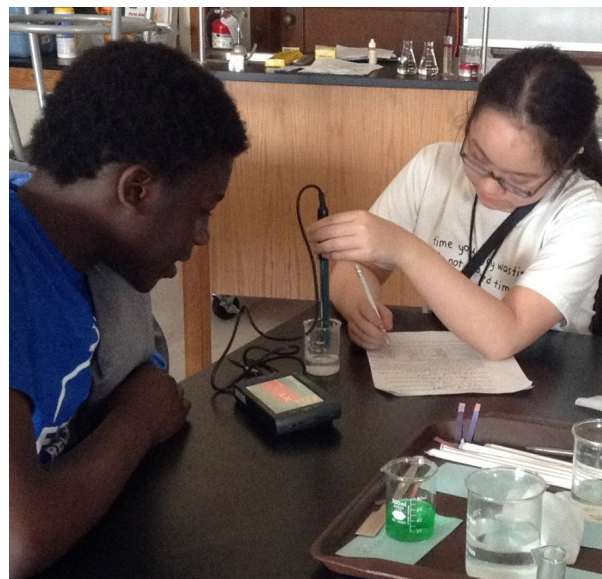
Longsjo Middle School students in the STEM lab. Courtesy of Fitchburg Public Schools.

their SPSA, although they knew the person and indicated that they always seemed busy serving their school's special education needs. But others found it valuable to reach out to their school's SPSA as an advisor for working with struggling students, whether technically considered "SPED" or not, and others found their SPSAs to be proactive in offering information that would help them better serve students who had IEPs in their inclusion classrooms. Most of all, special education teachers voiced the impact that having an SPSA in the building has for their ability to strategize and receive constructive feedback about instruction, whether they were lead teachers in pull-out settings or co-teachers in inclusion classrooms.

Whether most directly related to SPSAs, the thoughtful implementation of more rigorous

Fitchburg High School students. Photo courtesy of Fitchburg Public Schools.

overall efforts to help principals focus more of their time on instructional leadership. "Six years ago, FPS only had Level 3 schools," he explained, "but now we have two Level 1 [schools, the highest rating from the state,] and one Level 2 school."

Challenges

FPS has succeeded in making the SPSA role a stepping stone to leadership positions, but perhaps not in the way that they had hoped. Originally the SPSA was a lower-level school administrator, but the district was losing them to other districts because they were in what one teacher referred to as "no-man's land"—that is, they were compensated more than teachers, but not as much as an assistant principal, although their workload was similar to an AP and they had an administrative license. FPS viewed SPSAs as enough of a priority to find the additional funds to compensate them at parity with assistant principals in 2016–17. At the same time, SPSAs were given responsibility for formally evaluating the special education staff.

Generally teachers, and SPSAs themselves, describe

> **Nobody can do the job....they are always just chasing after their tail.**

the SPSA role as an unforgiving job because of the amount of paperwork required to remain in compliance with federal and state law, in addition to all of the other SPSA responsibilities. Said one teacher of his SPSA: "he has a tough time balancing between [special ed work] and the discipline issues.... It's really tough because lots of times the special ed meetings that we were going to hold or conferences that we wanted to discuss...end up getting pushed aside because of discipline issues." Other teachers are more blunt about the SPSA role in their school. One said, "nobody can do the job....they are always just chasing after their tail." Teachers feel that SPSAs need a secretary to help them with all of their paperwork in order to prevent burnout.

Principals say they are still concerned about the potential for turnover in the SPSA role, despite its recent increase in salary, as SPSAs have administrative licenses and can use this experience to move into a leadership role in a more affluent district where the role is less demanding. And because principals often find that the best source of new SPSAs is from within their own special education staff, when an SPSA leaves they typically have to replace both a special education teacher and an SPSA, which means devoting time to hiring and getting the new staff up to speed.

District of Columbia Public Schools, Washington, DC
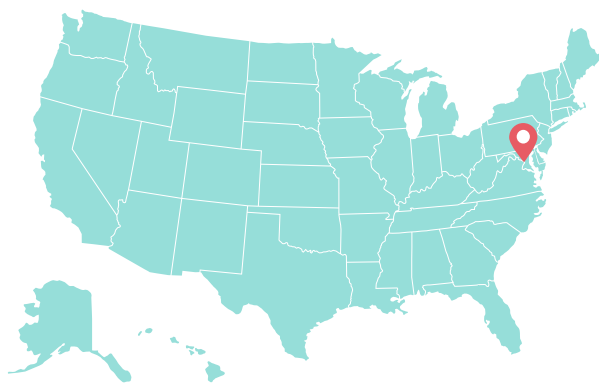
Creation of the School Strategy & Logistics Role

In the spring of 2013, District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) was featured in an Education Resource Strategies report, *A New Vision for Teacher Professional Growth and Support*, which assessed DCPS and two other districts on their use of people, time, and money that were targeted on improving teaching. The report documented how DCPS teachers spent a higher proportion of their time on non-instructional activities that were not professional-development related, 21 percent relative to 12 percent at the Achievement First charter network studied in the same brief.[43]

DCPS began to research how it could change this

aspect of teachers' roles so they could be focused more on teaching. For one, the district looked at exit surveys and found teachers often said they were frustrated by not having the supplies and operational support they needed to do their job, and spending time (and sometimes their own money) trying to get them. As Scott Thompson, currently deputy chief for innovation and design in DCPS' Office of Instructional Practice,[44] shared, "we saw clear evidence that having to deal with things like fixing broken copiers, not receiving supplies on time, and so on, had a direct effect on teacher retention." As a result, the Office of Human Capital started reviewing school staff roles to see how it could be more effective and efficient with them.[45]

At the same time, DCPS had been increasing its focus on distributed school leadership. With research in the field showing principals' roles were not sustainable, Thompson and his team had begun to discuss how they could streamline the job. The district had started to help principals distribute instructional duties, but after the instructional practice team conducted a focus group with principals, it realized that most principal time was spent on building management. DCPS decided it needed to help principals distribute their operational duties as well.

To help envision what another model of school leadership might look like, DCPS looked to examples in the charter school world. After conversations with the Uncommon Schools and Democracy Prep charter networks in New York, DCPS' human capital team believed that the solution was to offer schools a new senior-level, operations-focused staff member who had the authority to supervise and evaluate classified staff. Thompson described the theory of change behind the district's thinking this way: "we expected that adding a new school-based administrator focused on operations—on top of the foundation of other DCPS processes [that aim to support educators]— would ultimately influence teacher effectiveness and retention with the expectation that student learning would also benefit."

The district already offered principals the option

of a school-based "administrative officer" role responsible for many areas of operations (other school operations roles are focused on a specific workstream, such as finance, student enrollment, etc.). But the job did not have any supervisory authority, despite requiring seven years of experience and a master's degree. As such, it was a difficult post to fill, and few principals opted to include it in their schools. To overcome this obstacle, Thompson and his team decided to create a new role that could supervise building management responsibilities called the director of strategy & logistics, or DSL.

Implementation and Evolution of the Director/Manager of Strategy & Logistics Roles

As a director-level role, the DSL is compensated more than an administrative officer but has reduced paper qualifications: four years of experience and a master's degree preferred, but not required. In lieu of the higher paper qualifications, the central office has enacted a more robust selection process. As part of the interview process, candidates are required to complete a performance task where they develop a 30-, 60-, and 90-day plan for managing school operations. DCPS also developed a manager of strategy & logistics (MSL) role for smaller schools, with similar qualifications and responsibilities as the DSL (three years of experience and a bachelor's degree), and pay similar to the administrative officer.[46]

The Office of Human Capital worked with the Office of the Chief Operations Officer to pilot the new roles in 2014–15 with nine schools in order to understand the impact on principal time use, teacher satisfaction with school operations, and operations staff performance. However, the district did not make any additional funding available to most schools seeking to add this position.[47] DCPS principals have broad authority over their school budgets, so while they may consult with their supervisors or other central office staff, it is ultimately up to them to determine how valuable having a DSL/MSL would be relative to other priorities.

Prior to the pilot, principals reported spending 48

percent of their time on building management and operations; after the pilot they reported spending only 19 percent of their time in this area.[48] Given these results, the district decided to make the position available to all interested schools in 2015–16, and 32 more schools chose to do so, bringing the total to 41. About half of the new 32 positions came from within the school building, indicating that many schools likely repurposed a previous staff position to finance the new one. That same year, DCPS moved management of the DSL/MSL program from its human capital office to its operations office. In the most recent school year, 2016–17, there were 60 schools with a DSL or MSL in place.

These directors/managers of strategy and logistics are charged with supervising all operational functions and operational staff within the building, from finance and student data systems to facilities and supplies, so that school leaders and teachers can focus on classroom instruction and student learning functions.[49] To ensure DSL/MSLs are well equipped for their jobs, Deputy Chief of School Operations and Programs Douglas Hollis created a system of ongoing development opportunities. DCPS provides DSLs/MSLs six to ten days of onboarding training, operational coaches who visit schools twice a month, and internal and external professional development on time, project, and personnel management.[50]

The role can look different across schools depending on the school community, principal priorities, and what other staff are already in place to fulfill various tasks, explains Director of Strategic School Operations Vashaunta Harris. However, student-facing work, such as school discipline, is not a responsibility that DSLs/MSLs may take on. Principals and teachers shared that DSLs/MSLs are handling the following types of non-instructional responsibilities in their specific schools:

- Handling building maintenance issues; liaising with central office and vendors
- Ordering and delivering supplies
- Helping organize assemblies, field trips, and other school events
- Budgeting

- Supervising and evaluating front office and custodial staff
- Responding to emergencies
- Managing special projects (e.g., remodeling school)
- Finding coverage when teachers are absent
- Maintaining school calendar (and/or principal calendar, in absence of administrative assistant)

How DSLs/MSLs Have Changed Principals' Roles

One of the four goals of the DSL/MSL role is to allow principals to "meaningfully delegate all non-instructional functions, allowing them more time to focus on instruction and people management," according to the DCPS website.[51]

In focus groups, principals say that they do have more uninterrupted time, whether it is working directly with parents, teachers, or other instructional leaders, because they are not dealing with putting out building-management fires as often. One said, "I can definitely say that…with [the DSL], I am very much more able to be in classrooms, or in conversations with teachers, or in conversations with my leadership team, or in conversations with parents in a way I wasn't before."

However, principals share that several other key roles still compete for their time: disciplinarian,

> **I can definitely say that…with [the DSL], I am very much more able to be in classrooms, or in conversations with teachers, or in conversations with my leadership team, or in conversations with parents in a way I wasn't before.**

crisis manager, and public relations director (both with central office and the larger community). Principals acknowledge that while they intend to be in classrooms more often, they are more likely to be

using the instructional leadership time they do find to "have those meetings with the people supporting [teachers] with instruction" like assistant principals, department chairs, and/or coaches, and "doing more from a bird's-eye view" rather than interfacing directly with teachers themselves.

Correspondingly, while some teachers did not view their lead principal as being more focused on instruction post-arrival of the DSL/MSL, most teachers describe more visibility of and more "hands-on" support from the instructional leadership team in their school:

> My principal definitely—she just did an observation for me. I think she's a little more focused on instruction and on where students are than she was before. She still has to focus a little bit on behavior but…it's really powerful to see her walking the halls. I think it sets the tone for our school and she knows every child, she knows what's going on in the classrooms, I have seen her go into classrooms where a teacher needs extra support and she was just helping out. I think it is great that she has been able to be more hands-on.

> My principal is walking the halls every day; we talk all the time. My APs they come to our classroom, and they … may not be as hands-on with instruction as the LEAP [professional learning community] leaders are, but they are … with the kids. So, I have seen a change since [the DSL] has taken over the logistics of the school.

Conditions that Further Support Principals as Instructional Leaders

In 2013–14, DCPS launched its Teacher Leadership Innovation (TLI) program, which gives subject-specific instructional leadership roles to classroom teachers. TLI teacher leaders were expected to spend at least half of their time in the classroom instructing students but, for the remainder of their time, principals could engage them in guiding colleagues, as they saw fit, in return for a small annual stipend.[52]

With the roll-out of its Learning together to Advance our Practice (LEAP) initiative in the 2016–17 school year, DCPS began offering principals a new structure for providing teachers with content-specific feedback and development opportunities aligned to the new Common Core State Standards. LEAP offers weekly teacher PD carried out in small content-specific professional learning communities across similar grade levels (e.g., third–fifth grade math). Principals designate content experts in math and literacy—TLI teacher leaders, instructional coaches, or assistant principals—as LEAP leaders to facilitate the PD based on the district-developed LEAP curriculum, and then conduct classroom observations and debriefs related to the content covered during the weekly session.[53]

As one teacher interviewed noted, because DCPS implemented its LEAP teacher professional development initiative shortly after the first schools began implementing the DSL/MSL roles, it is difficult to tease out how much one is responsible for increasing school leaders' focus on instruction versus the other.

District staff, as well as principals' supervisors and the school's advisory team (comprised of teachers and parents) work closely with principals to think about what staffing roles to include in the school. During budget season every spring, each team in the central office lays out the requirements that schools have to meet on staffing, and also recommendations for how principals can use any leftover funds.

The Office of Instructional Practice, which oversees instructional leader staffing, has adopted a more flexible approach to its staffing requirements, given school-to-school variability in what roles principals say they find to be most impactful for helping grow instructional practice (teacher peers versus administrators), and how disruptive it would be for all schools to shift to one standardized instructional leadership model. The office allows principals to determine their ideal instructional staffing, as long as they follow guidelines for teacher-to-instructional leader ratios to ensure that each school has a sufficient number of such leaders beyond the primary principal. For example, a TLI teacher leader, who leads classrooms at least 50 percent of the time, can be responsible for a maximum of four teachers, while a full-time instructional coach can be responsible for up to 10 teachers (an AP falls in the middle, at six). Principals must submit their instructional leadership plans for the district to review. For plans that do not meet the recommended guidelines, central office staff members consult with principals' supervisors, and push for changes or create exceptions where they make sense.

School leadership meeting at Powell Elementary School. Photo courtesy of DC Public Schools.

Benefits DSLs/MSLs Provide to Teachers and Schools More Broadly

DCPS intended its new DSL/MSL approach to school operations to benefit schools in several ways beyond helping principals focus more on instructional responsibilities.

First, the district expected one benefit to be that "teachers will have more support around operations, allowing them more time to focus on instruction."[54] According to most DCPS teachers in our focus group, the red tape that used to characterize virtually any operational or logistics request has been largely eliminated, which they attribute to the DSL/MSL position. As one teacher explained, "DSL has kind of made it so that [if you need supplies] you don't have to submit paperwork, wait for the paperwork to get approved by the principal…so it has circumvented a lot of that."

Along the same lines, having a staff member designated for all things non-instructional means that building maintenance problems and supply requests are addressed more quickly. DCPS teachers say this allows them to spend more of their time focusing on their instructional practice while also making classrooms more conducive to learning: "kids act [better] in a well-put-together classroom. When they see things are broken, they approach things differently." Principals concurred, with one attributing "a nice swing up" in their teachers' satisfaction with school-based communications and resources to the DSL/MSL role, as measured by DCPS' stakeholder satisfaction survey.

Another benefit of the DSL/MSL role that DCPS was hoping for, according to its website, was that "retention rates and overall morale will be higher among school leaders, teachers, and staff." While it is likely too soon to measure impact on retention, one principal mentioned the effect of having more information and having it more quickly:

> I think the impact that it has on teacher morale is [via] the communication piece.… Teachers get frustrated when they do not feel like there is enough communication. I am okay to admit that sometimes I drop the ball with

communication…because I am one person monitoring multiple things. So in the sense that the DSL can own that communication— not just the happy-go-lucky stuff, but owning, making sure teachers know…little things like "the copy machine is down until Wednesday and it is Monday."

Principals and teachers generally did not perceive a relationship between the DSL/MSL role and student outcomes, at least at this point in the program's implementation.

Challenges

While principals and teachers generally perceive the DSL/MSL role as positively impacting their schools, principals still find themselves struggling to focus on the instructional aspects of their job. Thompson admits that the district could be doing more to support principal development as instructional leaders. The district does offer principal academies, one- or two-day workshops, a few times over the course of the year, but, he says, "we recognize that

> **Kids act [better] in a well-put-together classroom. When they see things are broken, they approach things differently.**

a small number of sessions, without consistent follow-up, isn't going to dramatically improve practice." Thompson says that the support principals receive around instructional leadership mostly depends on their individual supervisor's focus and skills in this area.

Another reason some principals may continue to struggle to find time to focus on instruction may be that they are not using the DSL/MSL role to its full potential. In some places, teachers see the DSL/MSL as the principal's "right hand…for anything not instruction." In others, teachers do not seem to perceive their DSL/MSL to be different from other front office staff members, except that they manage other operations staff. Based on comments from

principals, perhaps these distinctions depend on whether the individual is a DSL or a MSL. While the DSL and MSL job descriptions are nearly identical, principals may feel more latitude to assign additional responsibilities to a DSL than an MSL:

> I saw the [MSL] job description and was like, [my business manager's] doing all this stuff anyway. And it was a promotion. And she deserved it. And a piece for me is that I no longer had to do evaluations for custodians.

> When I made that promotion from business manager to DSL, and I knew how much more she was making and how much more valued that position was in the budget, I felt a lot more empowered to give her more [work] too—a lot more than she ever got as a business manager. Even though she was doing a lot of the stuff, it's still not everything.

Another possibility for why principals struggle to find more time for instructional leadership is that, because no additional financial resources are offered to schools to bring on a DSL/MSL, they may have to leave other positions unfilled to fund the position, and are now plugging holes in those areas. Both principals and teachers in the focus groups emphasized that student behavior and crisis management are big issues for their schools, and distract students from learning, but DSLs/MSLs are not authorized to handle these issues, given that they are student-facing:[56]

> Because there were so many operational things that I needed support with, I went without a dean of students [who would handle discipline, in order to get a DSL]. And I could really use a dean of students to help support some of the other things that are going on in my building. While it would sound like I should have all this extra time, I now just have time to help manage student behavior a little bit more....But I am trying to figure out, at least in my mornings, how do I support teachers with instruction? And then I know in the afternoon, here come all my time in specials, and lunch and recess, issues that I

have to try to deal with. So...I don't know if it is a matter of more time. Maybe I am able to utilize a few extra minutes to do some things that just have to be done, so I don't have to take so much home at night.

While some of the DCPS teachers in the focus group highly regard the DSL/MSL in their building, a few teachers discussed obstacles they face in working with their current DSL/MSL. Some teachers underscored the importance of having the DSL/MSL not just be "good at operations" but to be affable and to understand teachers' needs and why they are making requests. Two teachers described

> **While it would sound like I should have all this extra time, I now just have time to help manage student behavior a little bit more.**

their DSLs/MSLs as being "very tight with the money" in a way that was counterproductive to their instructional goals, as the cheapest version of a product may not actually be equipped to deliver the lesson that they have planned, or to hold up to daily use by students. Several teachers said that their DSLs/MSLs are efficient at their jobs, but have "some strained relationships in the building" because of the

manner in which they interact with staff, or even interfere with instructional goals: "I would say [my AP] in some ways circumvents our MSL," said one; "so if you say, 'I want to do this activity, but I need these supplies,' she will go and take you to the supply closet and you get them, and you go around" the MSL.

As a result, teachers want principals to hire someone who shares their vision for the school because the DSL/MSL "can really help build up a staff culture or really tear it down by having a different vision and ideas from the principal."

Summary of Districts' New School Leader Models

	Council Bluffs Community School District	Fitchburg Public Schools	District of Columbia Public Schools
NSL Role/ Initiative Name	School Administration Manager [SAM]	Student Program Support Administrator [SPSA]	Director or Manager of Strategy & Logistics [DSL/MSL]
Initiative Goal(s)	Increase principal focus on instruction	1) Increase principal focus on instruction; 2) Improve special education service delivery	1) Increase principal focus on instruction and people management; 2) Allow teachers to focus more time on instruction; 3) Provide more support/career paths to operations staff; 4) Increase school staff morale and retention
Key Responsibilities	• Maintaining principal calendar and school schedules • Tracking principal time • Fulfilling supply requests • Overseeing building maintenance • Helping to handle student discipline issues • Organizing assemblies and staff meetings • Serving as liaison to parents	• Overseeing all special-education-specific work • Conducting special education teacher and paraprofessional observations and evaluations • Attending grade-level and data team meetings • Facilitating teacher PD Handling student discipline, as assigned	• Overseeing all school operations [managing student information systems, supplies, maintenance issues, budgeting, emergency planning & response, etc.] • Ordering and delivering supplies • Organizing school events • Finding coverage when teachers are absent • Maintaining school calendar
School Admin Team Member?	No*	Yes	Yes
New role in schools?	Yes	Yes***	Yes***
Funding Source	District general funds	District general funds	School funds
License required	Originally none, now SAM license [unique to Iowa]	Originally teacher, now school administrator	None
Salary****	Slightly less than first-year teacher [$~43,000]	Same as assistant principal [~$80,000]	Varies based on role/experience, similar to teacher with a bachelor's degree and 10–20 years experience [~$68–98,000]
Supervised by	Principal	Principal [and dotted line to district Director of Pupil Services]	Principal
Supervisor of	Front office and facilities staff**, paraprofessionals	Special education teachers and paraprofessionals	Front office and facilities staff

Legend

*SAMs are often invited by principals to be part of the building leadership team, along with teachers, to help inform non-instructional decisions, but are not considered by the district or school to be part of the school administration team.

**A district supervisor serves as the formal evaluator for custodial service staff within schools.

***A portion of the SPSA role was previously performed by a member of FPS' central office team. Some DCPS principals may have given up another staff position in order to fund the DSL/MSL role in a cost-neutral manner—in some cases, a staff person whose former role was eliminated took on the DSL/MSL role.

****Information was obtained via focus groups, district administrator interviews, job descriptions, and publicly available websites (e.g., District of Columbia Public Schools, "Compensation and Benefits for Teachers," 2017, **https://dcps.dc.gov/ page/compensation-and-benefits-teachers**; Salary.com, "Assistant School Principal Salaries in Fitchburg, Massachusetts," 2017, **http://www1.salary.com/MA/Fitchburg/Assistant-School-Principal-salary.html**).

RESEARCH FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

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Key Findings

Each of the districts studied identified specific chunks of principal (and teacher) time not being dedicated to an instructional focus, and created their "new school leader" (NSL) position to address that. Despite the varied designs of the roles and processes supporting them, principals in schools with NSL positions across all three districts tend to value the positions highly, and see them as providing important benefits. Each of the NSL roles appeared to create space within principals' daily schedules, to varying degrees, and often led to a perceived increase in their focus on instructional responsibilities. While teachers in the three districts also found value in the NSL positions, they generally did not perceive as great of a change in principal focus on instruction as the principals themselves did.

Several possible reasons exist for this discrepancy between perceptions, including the fact that principal expectations of what it means to fulfill instructional leadership responsibilities may differ from that of teachers. While many principals defined their primary role as the school's "instructional leader," their views on what instructional leadership does or should entail varied widely, within and across districts. All principals saw instructional leadership as ensuring student achievement and success, and several expressed that instructional leadership to them is *primarily* focused on supporting the quality of teaching. However, some principals also said it includes their role as school vision setter, and others said it includes ensuring a strong school culture (from creating and implementing student discipline strategies to maintaining the cleanliness of the school), which might differ from teacher expectations of instructional leadership.[57]

Additionally, principal approaches to fulfilling the instructional leadership role differed within and across districts as well. Whether principals focused on supporting instruction more directly or indirectly depended on the school and district resources available (including staff), district expectations, and personal preference. When a principal's instructional leadership approach is indirect, teachers may have less insight into principals' daily work to improve the quality of teaching strategies, resources, feedback, and development opportunities.

While the inclusion of NSL roles in these school districts seems to be beneficial overall, it has not fully solved the primary problem districts intended to address: many principals still struggle to manage their full range of responsibilities, including supporting teacher practice, and many teachers still desire more frequent, actionable input and feedback.

Many factors influence the finding that the addition of a NSL is beneficial but not sufficient in helping principals focus on instructional leadership. First, the breadth of principals' job responsibilities, including what they view as "instructional leadership" tasks, can make it difficult for them to focus on supporting effective instruction. Second, a principal's interest and skill in improving teacher practice impacts ability to reap the full benefit of a NSL role. Some focus group principals, particularly

more veteran ones, voiced reluctance to delegate certain aspects of the job that they enjoy or see as important to school culture, even if others could easily take on the task (covering cafeteria duty, for example). Third, even when principal preference is to focus on supporting instruction, the addition of the NSL role seems to provide insufficient capacity to help them do so. Both principals and teachers voiced that some school needs, particularly student- and family-climate related ones, are not sufficiently covered by their NSL role.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, is the question of whether district conditions are in place to support principal capacity to focus on instructional leadership. As the principal support framework developed by the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership outlines, there are three key actions districts can take to support principals as instructional leaders, including: 1) developing a shared vision of the day-to-day work that principals should engage in to affect teacher practice at scale; 2) creating a system of targeted supports to develop principals as instructional leaders; and 3) rethinking principals' responsibilities to allow them enough time to focus on instructional leadership.[58] Each of the three districts profiled here has clearly focused on addressing this third condition through NSL and teacher leader roles, but the extent to which they have addressed the other two varies.

Additional Findings

In addition to answering our key research questions, our study of these three districts produced several other findings that can help inform districts' work to develop and implement NSL models:

1. Districts provided varying degrees of flexibility/ autonomy and structure in what principal and NSL roles should be, and this often evolved over time to be more flexible based on feedback from principals. CBCSD and FPS both determined what responsibilities should not be put on principals (daily "fires" and special education compliance work, respectively), and then provided some flexibility about how other aspects of principal and other school leader

roles should play out. DCPS made it clear what could and could not be on the NSL's plate and let principals determine how to use their NSL, within those parameters, to re-envision their own role. But only CBCSD provided clear guidance about what types of instructional leadership responsibilities principals *should* be focused on.

2. What the NSL is responsible for, and how principals use the position to change their own time use, can be just as important as the title/level of the NSL. For example, SAMs are not considered school administrators in CBCSD, while the SPSA and DSLs/MSLs are in FPS and DCPS, respectively, but the SAMs are the most directly involved in helping principals focus on instructional responsibilities because of the intentional time management process assigned to their role.

3. Teachers and principals in two of the districts (CBCSD and FPS) describe NSL retention concerns. They perceive the responsibilities of the NSL to be too much for one staff member to manage for long without burning out, especially since they believe these staff members could get paid similarly to do less in another role and/or in another district. This can blunt the impact of having an NSL, as hiring and training replacement NSL staff requires additional time on the part of the principal.

4. The need for and impact of a NSL may depend on other aspects of school staffing and context. For example, high school principals across all three districts do not appear to see their role as being as directly involved in developing instruction as elementary principals do, given the existence of department chairs, and the fact that they are not expected to have expertise in each subject area taught. As one teacher in CBCSD shared, "there are a ton of school districts that don't have [NSL roles], so obviously they have something in place that works. But for the size of our district and the size of our schools [and our student demographics], I think it is a necessity."

5. District culture and priorities play a large role in whether new models of school leadership are

adopted with the goal of providing principals with more time to focus on supporting instruction. All three of these districts have also chosen to implement other distributed leadership initiatives and/or systems to improve the quality of teaching and leading in their schools, in addition to the NSL roles.

6. Despite the existence of instructional coaches or other teacher leaders in all three districts,

many teachers still crave feedback from their principal specifically, perhaps because he or she ultimately evaluates their performance. However, it is worth noting that the value that teachers place on their principal's direct input on their practice varies depending on their principal's level of experience and whether the content area and grade level of that experience coincides with their own.[59]

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusions

Prior research on distributed school leadership— both teacher leadership and delegating administrative duties to other administrators—has highlighted promising practices and outcomes, as well as pitfalls.[60] This study reinforces many of these previous findings, while adding several new takeaways. Overall, these findings continue to raise questions about what the best overall school staffing structures and supports are for ensuring that teachers are receiving the assistance they need to continue improving classroom instruction and environments for their students, and that principals' roles are appropriate and manageable.

Principals participating in these focus groups work in districts that have made a concerted effort to create additional time, and sometimes support, for them to focus on the instructional leadership aspects of their job. Yet, principals said they still are—and think they should be—held accountable for every aspect of their school's functioning. Most principals in the focus groups said that they view themselves as their school's "instructional leader," but still see their role as ensuring that all of the various areas that impact a school's

success—including, but not limited to, instructional leadership—are implemented cohesively to meet their school's larger goals.

And perhaps principals have good reason to not want to move too far away from some "traditional" principal roles. One 2010 review of the research found that school leaders influence student achievement more by influencing teacher motivation and working conditions than by influencing teachers' knowledge and skills.[61] However, it is unclear whether this is in part because most principals have not been prepared and/or developed to influence teachers' knowledge and skills in the same way that they have been to influence working conditions.

Previous research makes the case that unless principals have structures and processes in place to help them reallocate their time, other tasks are likely to crowd out a focus on supporting instruction.[62] On the other hand, several findings from this research, including high levels of turnover of some of the NSLs due to burnout, and reports that possessing formal authority over other staff is important, indicate that processes and supports *alone* may be insufficient without additional leadership capacity. That is, in order to make

the role of principals and other school leaders manageable, and designed in a way that allows them to focus in tandem on improving instruction and other areas key to school success, many schools will require fairly-compensated additional staff to help share the extensive list of leadership responsibilities, in addition to well-designed processes and supports.

> **Many schools will require fairly-compensated additional staff to help share the extensive list of leadership responsibilities, in addition to well-designed processes and supports.**

Council Bluffs' SAM model is the only NSL model studied herein that includes both of these aspects: an additional full-time staff role as well as supporting structures and processes, such as the FirstResponder system that helps urgent internal and external needs get met in a timely manner while preventing the principal from being pulled into every issue that arises.

The biggest takeaway from this research is that there is no "silver bullet" model for leadership staffing and roles. Rather, different models may work best depending on the school and district context and the human capital and other resources available. But ultimately, it appears that improving student outcomes in larger, high-need schools will require thinking beyond who fills the role of "instructional leader" and how. Instead, districts should consider all of the various aspects that schools need to address to be successful—instruction, school climate, student academic, behavior, and personal supports—and divide responsibilities in these areas among staff in the most effective manner.

> **Improving student outcomes in larger, high-need schools will require thinking beyond who fills the role of "instructional leader" and how.**

In an ideal world, with more robust financial resources, perhaps larger schools would be structured more like other types of organizations, where senior and mid-level managers would take

C.W. Harris Elementary School principal Heather Hairston visits with a student.

Distributed Staffing Structures in Charter Networks

Several charter networks, including Achievement First and Uncommon Schools, have fully embraced new school leader models.[i] At Achievement First, a network of 32 schools in the northeast, senior- and mid-level leaders take on the bulk of typical principal responsibilities, so that the principal plays more of a high-level management role, similar to a CEO, although still shares direct instructional leadership and supervision duties with other leadership staff.[ii] In addition to the principal, schools have a director of operations, several academic deans focused on supporting teachers and curriculum and instruction needs, one or two deans of school culture who address student engagement and discipline, and—more recently—a dean of special services focused on special education. AF schools do not have assistant principals, and instead use their deans to fulfill many of the typical AP roles. These jobs are also a potential pipeline into the principalship.[iii] Sara Keenan, senior director of Achievement First's charter network accelerator, and former vice president of leadership development, explains that having principals manage a large leadership team requires a different skill set, one focused on planning, management, and accountability. "If principals aren't able to effectively manage the non-classroom roles to run the school site smoothly, these additional roles may not necessarily lead to improvement," she explained.[iv]

Meanwhile, Uncommon Schools—a network with 49 schools in the northeast—takes an "uncommon" approach to school leadership, even within the charter sector, by removing all operational responsibilities, including supervision, away from the principal.[v] Those responsibilities are filled by a school-based director of operations, who does not report into the principal but functions as an equal co-leader so the principal can focus on "teaching and learning, all day, every day," according to the network's website.[vi] Barbara Martinez, chief external officer of the Uncommon Schools network, says that every school also has a dean of students who is responsible for student culture and behavior, and a dean of curriculum and instruction who is the instructional leader for a subset of the teachers and who also takes on curriculum work such as writing lesson plans, overseeing assessments, leading data meetings, etc. Both deans report to the principal, but help free up principal time by taking ownership of several of the key areas that principals and their assistant principals typically take on in traditional public schools.

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[i] Research by Mathematica Policy Research studied a subset of Achievement First and Uncommon Schools middle schools in New York City and found that student achievement surpassed that of similar schools, although the research did not attempt to examine whether this outcome was influenced by their unique staffing models. Bing-ru Teh, Moria McCullough, and Brian P. Gill, Student Achievement in New York City Middle Schools Affiliated with Achievement First and Uncommon Schools (Cambridge, MA: Mathematica Policy Research, July 2010), **https://www.mathematica-mpr. com/our-publications-and-findings/publications/student-achievement-in-new-york-city-middle-schools-affiliated-with-achievement-first-and-uncommon-schools**.

[ii] Achievement First, "Achievement First Network Overview," 2017, **http://www.achievementfirst.org/schools/network-overview/**.

[iii] Conversation with Sara Keenan (senior director, Charter Network Accelerator, Achievement First), March 13, 2017; Achievement First, "School Leadership at Achievement First," 2017, **http://www.achievementfirst.org/careers/school-leaders/**.

[iv] Conversation with Sara Keenan (senior director, Charter Network Accelerator, Achievement First), March 13, 2017.

[v] Uncommon Schools, "About Us," 2017, **http://www.uncommonschools.org/our-approach**.

[vi] Uncommon Schools, "Leaders," 2017, **http://www.uncommonschools.org/careers/leaders**; e-mail conversation with Barbara Martinez (chief external officer, Uncommon Schools), April 2017.

on a bulk of principals' typical responsibilities (e.g., operations, finance, human resources, information/data, and compliance-oriented tasks) and teacher leaders would act as mid-level managers responsible for providing more frequent, content-specific feedback to teachers on their practice, while the principal role would be closer to that of a CEO. Roles would support each other in reciprocal fashion. For example, principals would support instructional coaches in reviewing data and reaching conclusions about where to focus in upcoming coaching sessions, and instructional coaches would support principals by sharing what they are seeing in classrooms and providing instructional support to teachers. In fact, several charter networks have put systems in place that do something very close to this (see **Distributed Staffing Structures in Charter Networks** on page 34).

Recommendations

The experiences of Council Bluffs Community School District, Fitchburg Public Schools, and District of Columbia Public Schools are informative for other high-need districts considering modifying school leader roles and staffing structures to better support high-quality teaching and learning. Before moving forward with such efforts, districts should perform a careful needs and resource assessment and reflect on whether the ideas they are considering will clearly address the problem(s) that they are trying to fix, without unintended consequences in other areas.

Of course, it is difficult to find one solution that can meet every goal a district has, particularly without clear, intentional supports to do so. As such, districts should determine what their *primary* goal is for including a NSL role, or any other type of distributed leadership role as part of their needs assessment: Is it to have principals focus work directly with teachers more often to improve their practice? To make the role of the principal more manageable and boost principal retention? To meet student and parent needs more quickly? Then districts can determine what supporting processes to put in place to coherently help meet that goal. (See **Key Considerations for States and Districts** on page 36

for other important areas to consider.) If the primary goal is improving principal's instructional leadership, most principals will also need assistance developing their level of knowledge and skills, including time management, to undertake this work well, even with additional staff capacity. Some may also benefit from coaching on how to change school norms about what "appropriate work" for principals to be involved in is, and how to build trusting relationships among various staff members to ensure new roles are implemented smoothly.

Figuring out how to meet various staffing and instructional goals within budgetary constraints was a challenge for the three districts studied here, and will be a challenge for others as well. Fortunately, the current development of state and district plans under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (now called the Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA) provides a huge opportunity to move on this option. New flexibilities around using ESSA Title II dollars for evidence-based activities could be one option, along with using Title I funds for school improvement purposes in higher-poverty schools and districts. In addition to strategically funding new leadership roles, states and districts can—and should—use funds to develop sample staffing models for meeting different assessed school needs and goals, along with tools, guidance, and meaningful professional development for principals and their supervisors to support this work. They can also begin to think through whether and how principal job descriptions and evaluation systems may need to change when NSL roles are added to better reflect expectations for the role.

States and districts can help principals move away from overseeing every aspect of their school's success, including directly supervising and developing every staff member, and instead focus on hiring and developing others to support them in fulfilling all of the key aspects of running a successful school.[63] Re-envisioning school staffing in this way can help create school systems that more effectively meet all of students' needs, academic and otherwise, and ultimately improve student outcomes.

Key Considerations for States and Districts: Ensuring School Leadership Staffing Supports Effective Teaching

1. **Clarify Roles and Responsibilities:** If principals are expected to be instructional leaders, has the district clearly defined the primary responsibilities of that role? How will the district make the role of principals and other school administrators clear so that everyone on staff understands how each member of the administration is, or at least should be, spending his or her time? How will the district balance the need for structure with appropriate levels of flexibility in defining principal, instructional leader, and NSL roles to help ensure desired outcomes are met?

2. **Assess Where Instructional Knowledge Lies:** Are all principals capable of supporting more effective teaching without further development?[i] Is it realistic to expect principals to be sufficiently versed in what high-quality instruction looks like in each grade and subject area they oversee to make a positive impact on instruction? If not, what development opportunities can be offered and/or how can other instructional leaders, such as teacher leaders, be deployed where there are gaps?

3. **Ensure Principal Supervisors Support Role Shifts:** If the expectation is that principals will focus more intently on instructional leadership responsibilities by delegating certain other responsibilities, how will their supervisors support this shift, and how will the district ensure that supervisors are prepared to perform that role? Will principals be evaluated and/or developed any differently (e.g., on their ability to distribute leadership in certain areas that are no longer considered their direct responsibility)?

4. **Align Staffing Choices with School and District Needs/Goals:** Will patching one hole in a school's staffing structure leave a new hole elsewhere? If there is not enough funding available to fill every hole, which positions will be most valuable given the school's and district's needs and goals? Is there one school staffing model that could be effective districtwide, or do school needs vary enough that schools should have some flexibility to determine which positions are most valuable to them?

5. **Consider the Whole Staffing Picture:** How will the district ensure that any new staff roles created are manageable and appropriately compensated, and are not simply shifting responsibilities from an overworked principal to another overworked staff member?[ii] If multiple staff roles are created to address principal capacity (such as teacher leadership and NSL roles), are they designed to complement each other?

6. **Reflect on the District's Enabling Conditions:** How will the district create the conditions and processes to support and sustain new staffing model(s), such as a focus on ensuring a manageable caseload for principals' supervisors?[iii] Will it adopt a national model, such as the National SAM Innovation Project, which offers specific training, coaching, and a host of recommended processes? If it will set up and monitor its own systems and processes, where will the staff and funding come from to do so? If the district will provide schools with the flexibility to develop their own models, how will the district ensure it has the capacity to support this variation?

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[i]Research by the University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership has found that "too few leaders charged with leading the improvement of instruction have developed sufficient expertise to identify high-quality teaching and explicate what makes that teaching 'high quality.'" See Center for Educational Leadership, "School and District Leaders as Instructional Experts: What We Are Learning," University of Washington, 2015, http://info.k-12leadership.org/download-school-and-district-leaders-as-instructional-experts-what-we-are-learning?_ga=1.49676004.315053796.1310498529.

[ii]In addition to being a finding from New America's focus group research, a recent review of the literature on teacher leadership found the level of demands of the role relative to the time available to dedicate to the responsibilities to be one of the biggest drawbacks. See Julianne A. Wenner and Todd Campbell, "Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A Review of the Literature;" Review of Educational Research 87, no. 1 (February 2017): 134–171; Madeline Will, "There's Now a Body of Research on What It Means to Be a Teacher Leader," Education Week, June 24, 2016, http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2016/06/what_does_it_mean_to_be_a_teacher_leader.html).

[iii]For further reading on this topic, see Gina Ikemoto, Lori Taliaferro, and Benjamin Fenton, Great Principals at Scale: Creating District Conditions that Enable All Principals to be Effective (New York: New Leaders, June 2014), http://newleaders.org/research-policy/great-principals-at-scale/; Center for Educational Leadership, "Principal Support Framework," University of Washington, 2015, http://info.k-12leadership.org/principal-support-framework.

APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP METHODOLOGY

New America commissioned the FDR Group, a nonpartisan public opinion research firm, to conduct focus groups in three traditional public school districts that have attempted to help principals be instructional leaders by changing their school staffing models to include an additional leadership role. The research was specifically focused on understanding principal and teacher perceptions and experiences of whether and how creating additional capacity on school management teams affected principal ability to focus on instructional leadership.

The FDR Group convened a total of seven focus groups between November 2016 and March 2017: two with educators in Council Bluffs Community Schools (Council Bluffs, IA); three with educators in Fitchburg Public Schools (Fitchburg, MA); and two with educators in District of Columbia Public Schools (Washington, DC). In total, 68 individuals took part in this qualitative research effort.

The focus group discussions followed a semi-structured interview protocol: the inclusion of some topics depended on the knowledge, interest, and experience of the interviewees, while other topics were asked of everyone. The FDR Group's charge was to capture the views and experiences of these educators in their own words, and transcripts of these words were the data used to inform the research takeaways.* All participants were assured of confidentiality.

The three participating school districts were selected because their school leadership models created additional leadership capacity to support principals as instructional leaders. New America approached leaders in each district and described the purpose of the research; the leaders agreed to participate and to help recruit staff to take part in the focus groups. In all three districts, to qualify for the teacher focus group, a teacher had to be teaching a core academic subject, and had to be in at least their second year of classroom teaching in the district.[64] All principals were also in at least their second year as principal in the district. The three districts differed in the approach they took for recruiting participants, as follows:

Council Bluffs Community School District

The district superintendent sent an e-mail message to virtually all principals and teachers; the message described the purpose of the research and included a link to a SurveyMonkey® questionnaire created by the FDR Group. Principals and teachers who were interested in participating in the focus groups completed the survey. From the list of those who were qualified and available on the dates for the focus groups, the researchers selected potential participants based on the needs of the research (i.e., to ensure that a variety of schools, grades, and subjects were represented). Of the 15 schools in the district eligible to participate (excluding alternative and technical schools), 13 schools were represented in the focus groups. In the end, all of the 11 principals who were invited took part; for teachers, it was 12 out of 13. The focus groups took place over the course of two days (November 1–2, 2016) in a conference room at Council Bluffs Community School District's central office.

Fitchburg Public Schools

The district superintendent invited each of the school principals and student program support administrators (SPSAs)[65] from seven out of eight schools; one was excluded because it was a non-traditional school and did not have an SPSA. All invited principals and SPSAs participated. For teachers, the researchers provided selection parameters for each school (that is, identified a grade and/or subject) and from these parameters the school principal made final selections and extended invitations; of the 13 teachers who were invited, 12 participated. The focus groups took place over the course of two days (March 8–9, 2017) in a conference room at Fitchburg Public Schools' central office.

District of Columbia Public Schools

District staff in the Office of the Chief Operating Officer identified traditional schools where a director or manager of strategy & logistics was in place for more than one year (n=35). Using this list of schools, central office sent e-mails to virtually all principals and teachers describing the purpose of the focus groups and inviting them to take part if they were available on the date and time scheduled. Because not every school in the district has a DSL or MSL, to qualify to participate, principals and teachers had to be in at least their second year of employment at their current school. In the end, 12 principals self-selected to take part, and of these 9 participated; for teachers, 11 self-selected and 8 participated. The focus group with principals took place on November 9, 2016, and with teachers on December 7, 2016.[66] Both took place in a conference room at District of Columbia Public Schools' central office.

*Focus groups are a valuable qualitative research tool for exploring people's spontaneous views on a given topic and for

uncovering underlying values that help explain why people feel the way they do. Although focus groups are tremendously helpful for listening to people explain their perceptions and experiences regarding specific issues, for uncovering the sources of their opinions and motivations for action, and for generating hypotheses for further research, they cannot determine how many people hold a particular view or share an experience. Our findings reflect the views of the focus group participants and cannot be generalized to the overall population of educators in these school districts.

Notes

[1] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Fast Facts," 2016, https://nces.ed.gov/fastfacts/display.asp?id=96; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Table 46: Number and percentage of public school students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, by state: Selected years, 2000–01 through 2010–11," *Digest of Education Statistics*, 2012, **https://nces.ed.gov/programs/digest/d12/tables/dt12_046.asp**; U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, "Children and Youth with Disabilities," *The Condition of Education*, 2016, **https://nces.ed.gov/programs/coe/indicator_cgg.asp**.

[2] Bradley S. Portin, Christopher R. Alejano, Michael S. Knapp, and Elizabeth Marzolf, *Redefining Roles, Responsibilities, and Authority of School Leaders* (Seattle: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington, 2006), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/3-Redefining-Roles-Responsibilities.pdf**.

[3] Dana Markow, Lara Macia, and Helen Lee, T*he MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership* (New York: MetLife, February 2013), **https://www.metlife.com/assets/cao/foundation/MetLife-Teacher-Survey-2012.pdf**.

[4] The terms *secretary* and *administrative assistant* are used interchangeably since both are common across schools.

[5] Chris Bierly, Betsy Doyle, and Abigail Smith, *Transforming Schools: How Distributed Leadership Can Create More High-Performing Schools* (Boston, MA: Bain & Company, January 2016), **http://www.bain.com/publications/articles/transforming-schools.aspx**.

[6] U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), "Public School Principal Data File, Table 5: Average hours per week that public school principals spent on all school-related activities and interacting with students, by state," 2011–12, **https://nces.ed.gov/surveys/sass/tables/sass1112_2013313_p1s_005.asp**.

[7] Christine M. Neumerski, "Rethinking Instructional Leadership, a Review: What Do We Know About Principal, Teacher, and Coach Instructional Leadership, and Where Should We Go from Here?" *Educational Administration Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2012): 310–347.

[8] Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf**.

[9] Catherine Fisk Natale, Katherine Bassett, Lynn Gaddis, and Katherine McKnight, *Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Pathways: A 21st Century Imperative* (Arlington, VA: Pearson & National Network of State Teachers of the Year, 2013), **https://www.nnstoy.org/download/career_pathways/Final%20updated%20Research%20Report.pdf**; Julianne A. Wenner and Todd Campbell "Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A Review of the Literature"; *Review of Educational Research* 87, no. 1 (February 2017): 134–171.

[10] Catherine Fisk Natale, Katherine Bassett, Lynn Gaddis, and Katherine McKnight, *Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Pathways: A 21st Century Imperative* (Arlington, VA: Pearson & National Network of State Teachers of the Year, 2013), **https://www.nnstoy.org/download/career_pathways/Final%20updated%20Research%20Report.pdf**.

[11] Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf**.

[12] Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf**.

[13] A 2011-12 data collection by the U.S. Department of Education found that about two-thirds of public schools employ instructional specialists or coaches. No similar data collection exists for NSLs, but anecdotal evidence indicates they are much rarer. See Amy Bitterman, Lucinda Gray, and Rebecca Goldring, C*haracteristics of Public and Private Elementary and Secondary Schools in the United States: Results From the 2011–12 Schools and Staffing Survey, Table 6* (Washington, DC: National Center

for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, 2013), https://nces.ed.gov/pubs2013/2013312.pdf; Eric Westervelt, "Hall Passes, Buses, Lunch Duty: What If The Principal Could Focus On Achievement?" *nprEd*, May 29, 2017, http://www.npr.org/sections/ed/2017/05/29/527114390/free-the-principal.

[14] FDR Group also held a shorter focus group in Fitchburg Public Schools with the student program support administrators to better understand this role.

[15] Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project* (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project.pdf; Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf.

[16] New America identified districts where roughly half or more of schools had a NSL model in place in order to understand the benefits and challenges of instituting such a model at some scale.

[17] Multiple sources document the increased needs of students living in poverty, as well as the fact that the teachers serving high-poverty schools are more often inexperienced than those in low-poverty schools. See for example, Leah Askarinam, "Schools in Poor Areas Have More Students With Mental Health Needs," *The Atlantic*, January 13, 2016, https://www.theatlantic.com/politics/archive/2016/01/schools-in-poor-areas-have-more-students-with-mental-health-needs/458808/; Lyndsey Layton, "Majority of U.S. Public School Students Are in Poverty," *Washington Post*, January 16, 2015, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/majority-of-us-public-school-students-are-in-poverty/2015/01/15/df7171d0-9ce9-11e4-a7ee-526210d665b4_story.html; Charles Clotfelter, Helen F. Ladd, Jacob Vigdor & Justin Wheeler, *High-Poverty Schools and the Distribution of Teachers and Principals*, 85 N.C. L. Rev. 1345 (2007), http://scholarship.law.unc.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=4276&context=nclr.

[18] Mark Shellinger developed the initial version of the SAM project as the coordinator of the Wallace Foundation-funded Leading Education Achievement in Districts (LEAD) team in Kentucky's Jefferson County School District. See Jefferson County Public Schools, "Alternative School Administration Study," October 11, 2005, http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED490688.pdf). Shellinger based the SAM role on a position that had been in place in the Victor Elementary District in Victorville, CA since 1992, although the Victor SAM position was not part of a larger effort to track principal time use. See National SAM Innovation Project (NSIP), "SAMS Connect," 2015, http://www.samsconnect.com/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/SAM-Info.pdf. The pilot was initially conducted in three Jefferson County schools, but quickly expanded, with Shellinger becoming the national SAMs expansion coordinator. See Christina A. Samuels, "Managers Help Principals Balance Time," *Education Week*, February 11, 2008, http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2008/02/13/23sam_ep.h27.html.

[19] Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf.

[20] Online conversation with Martha Bruckner (superintendent, Council Bluffs Community School District), April 2017.

[21] The three alternative schools in CBCSD do not have a SAM.

[22] Conversation with Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), November 30, 2016.

[23] CBCSD principal time tracking data prepared for Iowa West Foundation, shared with New America, September 21, 2016. Note that Iowa's teacher evaluation and support system, and thus the time principals are expected to spend conducting evaluations, did not change during the data collection timeframe (the most recent changes were in 2005), although the system is currently being reconsidered. See Iowa Department of Education, *Teaching Standards and Teacher Evaluation Task Force: Final Report*, October 15, 2012, https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/Final%20Report%20of%20the%20Teaching%20Standards%20and%20Teacher%20Evaluation.pdf.

[24]The term *professional learning community* is often used within education to describe a group of educators within a school that "meets regularly, shares expertise, and works collaboratively to improve their teaching skills and the academic performance of students." See Great Schools Partnership, "Professional Learning Community," *The Glossary of Education Reform*, March 3, 2014, http://edglossary.org/professional-learning-community/. However, Learning Forward, an organization focused on educator development, claims that true professional learning communities are more specific than that: "professional learning within communities requires continuous improvement, promotes collective responsibility, and supports alignment of individual, team, school, and school system goals. Learning communities convene regularly and frequently during the workday to engage in collaborative professional learning to strengthen their practice and increase student results. Learning community members are accountable to one another to achieve the shared goals of the school and school system and work in transparent, authentic settings that support their improvement." See Learning Forward, "Standards for Professional Learning: Learning Communities," 2015, https://learningforward.org/standards/learning-communities.

[25]Conversation with Carol Lensing (SAM coordinator (retired), School Administrators of Iowa), January 12, 2017.

[26]Online correspondence with Melissa Chalupnik (director of professional learning, Council Bluffs Community School District), April 2017; conversation with Julie Smith, Jason Plourde, and Melissa Chalupnik (CBCSD), November 2, 2016.

[27]Iowa Department of Education, "Guidance on the Iowa Teacher Leadership and Compensation System," 2013, https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/2013-07-15GuidanceOnTheTLCSystem.pdf.

[28]Several elementary CBCSD teachers in the focus group said that their principal still leads their PLCs. The focus group moderator did not specifically ask principals about their interactions with or deployment of teacher leaders, and it did not come up organically during the discussion.

[29]Online correspondence with Martha Bruckner, April 2017. Assistant Superintendent Corey Voorthman's blog is available here: http://vorthmann.blogspot.com/.

[30]Previous research on schools with the SAM role found that the average number of minutes principals participating in the SAM project spent in school decreased by 31 minutes one year after the baseline measurement. See Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project* (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project.pdf.

[31]The amount of a district's contract with SAI is reduced each year that it participates in the state SAM program. Additionally, in some cases, districts take on the monthly coaching task internally to reduce costs. Conversation with Martha Bruckner (superintendent), and Corey Voorthman (assistant superintendent, CBCSD), December 20, 2016; conversation with Carol Lensing (SAM coordinator (retired), School Administrators of Iowa), January 12, 2017; e-mail correspondence with Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), May 30, 2017.

[32]*Brief on Branstad-Reynolds Administration Recommendations for World-Class Schools* (Des Moines: Iowa Department of Education, January 6, 2012), https://www.educateiowa.gov/sites/files/ed/documents/World-Class%20Schools%20Updated.pdf.

[33]Conversation with Carol Lensing (SAM coordinator (retired), School Administrators of Iowa), January 12, 2017.

[34]E-mail correspondence with Carol Lensing (SAM coordinator (retired), School Administrators of Iowa), May 30, 2017; Iowa Board of Educational Examiners, "Requirements for Licenses," 2017, http://www.boee.iowa.gov/require.html; Iowa Legislature, Iowa Code 282—22.7(272) *School Administration Manager Authorization*, 2015, https://www.legis.iowa.gov/docs/iac/rule/11-11-2015.282.22.7.pdf.

[35]Fitchburg, MA, "Visitors: Quick Facts About Fitchburg," 2017, http://www.ci.fitchburg.ma.us/464/Visitors.

[36]In FPS, walkthroughs are informational observations of the classroom by the principal, while learning walks and instructional rounds entail a group of teachers, administrators, and/or coaches visiting classrooms looking for evidence of a pre-identified skill or strategy which will be debriefed in a post-visit discussion. Instructional rounds typically include administrators and may be more comprehensive than learning walks (they include looking at additional data, such as discipline, attendance, grades, etc.). Learning walks can be performed by other teachers, and be more informal.

Conversation with Fitchburg Public Schools' Paula Giaquinto (assistant superintendent), Rowan Demanche (director, pupil services), and Alicia Berrospe (director, special education), March 9, 2017; conversation with Andre Ravenelle (superintendent), May 2, 2017; e-mail correspondence with Rick Zeena (administrator, human resources), June 6, 2017.

[37]FPS teacher focus group discussion, March 8, 2017; The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Department of Education, "Re: Onsite Follow-up Monitoring Report: Coordinated Program Review Corrective Action Plan Verification and Special Education Mid-cycle Review," 2005, http://www.doe.mass.edu/pqa/review/cpr/reports/2005/followup/0097.docx.

[38]Conversation with FPS' Paula Giaquinto (assistant superintendent), Rowan Demanche (director, pupil services), and Alicia Berrospe (director, special education), March 9, 2017.

[39]In each of the districts studied, the school administration team was viewed as the principal, assistant principal (where applicable), and typically the new school leader (the exception was CBCSD). School or building leadership teams were defined more broadly, and often included grade-level chairs, department chairs, and/or school-based instructional coaches, among others.

[40]Massachusetts' state accountability system rates schools and districts on a five-level scale, with the highest performing ranking in Level 1 and lowest performing in Level 5 (see Commonwealth of Massachusetts, "Accountability and Assistance System Overview," Executive Office of Education, 2017, http://www.mass.gov/edu/government/departments-and-boards/ese/programs/accountability/accountability-and-assistance-system-overview.html); conversation with FPS' Paula Giaquinto (assistant superintendent), Rowan Demanche (director, pupil services), and Alicia Berrospe (director, special education), March 9, 2010.

[41]National Institute for School Leadership, "Proven Results," 2017, http://www.nisl.org/proven-results/summary-of-key-results/.

[42]Fitchburg's high school does not have a literacy coach, according to conversation with Superintendent Andre Ravenelle, May 2, 2017.

[43]DCPS had roughly the same time use as the other traditional public school district studied. See Education Resource Strategies, *A New Vision for Teacher Professional*

Growth and Support, 27, https://www.erstrategies.org/cms/files/3418-a-new-vision-for-teacher-professional-growth-and-support-updated-20170208.pdf.

[44]For a portion of the period covered in DCPS' district profile (2013–15), Thompson's role was deputy chief of human capital for teacher effectiveness. His title changed when DCPS reorganized its central office in 2015 which eliminated the Office of Human Capital and created the Office of Instructional Practice.

[45]Conversation with Scott Thompson (deputy chief, innovation and design, Office of Instructional Practice, DCPS), December 15, 2016.

[46]A review of the MSL and DSL job descriptions shared by DCPS shows the MSL has a nearly identical job description to the DSL with two exceptions: only three years of experience are required, and supervising and evaluating operations staff is only a requirement in schools with fewer than 400 students and no DSL.

[47]Conversation with Vashaunta Harris (manager, school strategy & logistics, Office of the Chief Operating Officer, DCPS), April 18, 2017.

[48]Conversation with Scott Thompson (deputy chief, innovation and design, Office of Instructional Practice, DCPS), December 15, 2016.

[49]Per DSL and MSL job descriptions. Supervising and evaluating operations staff is only a requirement for MSLs in schools with fewer than 400 students and no DSL.

[50]Conversation with Vashaunta Harris (manager, school strategy & logistics, Office of the Chief Operating Officer, DCPS), April 18, 2017.

[51]District of Columbia Public Schools, "School Leadership Opportunities," 2017, https://dcps.dc.gov/page/school-leadership-opportunities.

[52]Current TLI teacher leaders receive an annual stipend of $2,500. District of Columbia Public Schools, "Teacher Leadership Innovation (TLI) Teacher Leader Roles," 2017, https://dcps.dc.gov/page/teacher-leadership-innovation-tli-teacher-leader-roles; conversation with Scott Thompson (deputy chief, innovation and design, Office of Instructional Practice, DCPS), April 18, 2017.

[53]District of Columbia Public Schools, "LEAP: Teacher Professional Development," 2017, https://dcps.dc.gov/page/leap-teacher-professional-development;

e-mail correspondence with Scott Thompson (deputy chief, innovation and design, Office of Instructional Practice, DCPS), June 6, 2017; Education Resource Strategies, "Professional Learning Toolkit," 2017, **https://s3.amazonaws.com/ers-cms/system/attachments/3522/original/ELA_Module_1_All_Module_Materials_SY16-17.pdf?1492794544**.

[54]District of Columbia Public Schools, "School Leadership Opportunities," 2017, **https://dcps.dc.gov/page/school-leadership-opportunities**.

[55]District of Columbia Public Schools, "School Leadership Opportunities," 2017, **https://dcps.dc.gov/page/school-leadership-opportunities**.

[56]One exception of a DSL/MSL more directly handling behavior is at a large school that has two MSLs, where one manages "climate operations" and the other the business side of the school.

[57]The focus group moderator did not specifically ask teachers to provide their perspective on what a principal's role as a school's instructional leader should entail.

[58]Center for Educational Leadership, "Download the Principal Support Framework," University of Washington, 2015, **http://info.k-12leadership.org/principal-support-framework**.

[59]While not specifically discussed in the district profiles, teachers in all three districts expressed these sentiments at various points in the focus groups.

[60]For futher reading, see Catherine Fisk Natale, Katherine Bassett, Lynn Gaddis, and Katherine McKnight, *Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Pathways: A 21st Century Imperative* (Arlington, VA: Pearson & National Network of State Teachers of the Year, 2013), **https://www.nnstoy.org/download/career_pathways/Final%20updated%20Research%20Report.pdf**; Julianne A. Wenner and Todd Campbell, "Theoretical and Empirical Basis of Teacher Leadership: A Review of the Literature;" *Review of Educational Research* 87, no. 1 (February 2017): 134–171; Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project: Executive Summary* (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project-Executive-Summary.pdf**.

[61]Karen Seashore Louis, Kenneth Leithwood, Kyla L. Wahlstrom, and Stephen E. Anderson, *Investigating the Links to Improved Student Learning* (Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement at University of Minnesota, July 2010), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Investigating-the-Links-to-Improved-Student-Learning.pdf**.
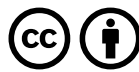
[62]Research on the SAM model found that principal focus on instructional leadership and reduction in hours worked were similar regardless of whether a new full-time staff person or existing staff member took on the role of managing the set of SAM processes. See Brenda J. Turnbull, M. Bruce Haslam, Erickson R. Arcaira, Derek L. Riley, Beth Sinclair, and Stephen Coleman, *Evaluation of the School Administration Manager Project* (Washington, DC: Policy Studies Associates, December 2009), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Evaluation-of-the-School-Administration-Manager-Project.pdf**; Ellen Golding, Jason A. Grissom, Christine M. Neumerski, Joseph Murphy, Richard Blissett, and Andy Porter, *Making Time for Instructional Leadership, Volume 1: The Evolution of the SAM Process* (New York: The Wallace Foundation, 2015), **http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Documents/Making-Time-for-Instructional-Leadership-Vol-1.pdf**; conversation with Mark Shellinger (director, National SAM Innovation Project), November 30, 2016 and e-mail correspondence June 6, 2017.

[63]Christine M. Neumerski, "Rethinking Instructional Leadership, a Review: What Do We Know About Principal, Teacher, and Coach Instructional Leadership, and Where Should We Go from Here?" *Educational Administration Quarterly* 49, no. 2 (2012): 310–347.

[64]Pre-kindergarten and other "generalist" elementary teachers were considered to be teaching core academic subjects for this research. Most teachers were general education teachers, although several taught special education. In DCPS, one teacher taught computer science.

[65]In Fitchburg Public Schools, a focus group was also conducted with SPSAs to better understand this role, which shares some instructional leadership responsibilities with other members of the school administration team.

[66]In addition, the FDR Group conducted three telephone interviews with teachers in DCPS.