In the following report, Hanover Research analyzes best practices for distributing leadership within schools and school districts.
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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

In this report, Hanover Research reviews distributed leadership—a practice in which leadership is viewed as the interaction among actors within an organization and decision-making authority is distributed among multiple parties rather than concentrated in a single leader. The practice of distributed leadership empowers leaders at the district and school level to collaboratively develop solutions to problems and improve overall student outcomes. This report aims to identify strategies for districts to distribute leadership and maintain an effective balance of autonomy and responsibility among leaders at the school and district level. This report includes the following sections:

- **Section I** reviews the secondary literature on distributed leadership, with a focus on the role of the principal in a distributed leadership framework. Section I also includes research specific to distributed leadership in the K-12 sector, including academic research on distributed leadership and research by school-reform advocacy organizations.

- **Section II** profiles five school districts that have implemented distributed leadership practices. In two of these districts, Fairfax County Public Schools and the School District of Philadelphia, distributed leadership was embraced as part of an initiative to prepare teacher leaders to serve in administrative positions. Long Beach Unified School District implemented distributed leadership as part of a grant-funded initiative to develop career pathways for high school students, while Kingsport City Schools and Douglas County School District implemented distributed leadership in order to support schools more equitably and efficiently.

KEY FINDINGS

- **Experts suggest that school districts should allocate greater decision-making power to school leaders, in particular with regard to school staffing issues and budgets.** For example, RAND argues that decentralized decision making in all key governance areas, including staffing and budget decisions, is necessary for schools to exercise autonomy due to the interconnectedness of governance decisions. Douglas County School District, profiled in Section II of this report, uses site-based budgeting, a process in which individual schools receive a budget allocation based on a per-student formula which they can spend at their discretion. Kingsport City Schools uses a similar budget process, in which schools receive funding for broad categories such as professional development or instructional materials that can be spent at their discretion.

- **Many school districts with distributed leadership continue to maintain a common curriculum and set of learning standards.** A review of high-achieving high schools in California recommends that schools establish a common curriculum and diagnostic tests across classrooms to ensure that the same content is covered in similar
courses. Both Kingsport City Schools and Douglas County School District use a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum in which learning standards and the pace of instruction are the same across district schools. Both of these districts developed their curricula through a collaborative process that included input from teachers and allow teachers substantial autonomy in the instructional methods they use to deliver the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum.

- **School districts embracing distributed leadership often provide substantial professional development to school principals and assistant principals as well as teacher leaders.** A survey of school principals conducted by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute found that principals desired more professional development focused on effective data use, communication, development of a supportive school community, and evaluation and accountability systems. The School District of Philadelphia, profiled in Section II of this report, partnered with local universities to offer professional development, including leadership coaching for leadership teams, as part of the Distributed Leadership Program. Similarly, Long Beach Unified School District offers professional development to both principals and instructional leadership teams as part of the Linked Learning District Initiative.

- **Central office staff members in school districts with distributed leadership programs often spend a substantial amount of time working directly with principals and other leaders in schools.** The Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) recommends that school districts redesign the roles of central office staff to directly support schools, including frequent visits to individual schools. For example, central office staff members in Kingsport City Schools work in cross-department teams that support individual schools through volunteering and focused professional development. Likewise, Long Beach Unified School District employs a staff member to serve as a liaison for the Linked Learning District Initiative, and the Assistant Superintendent for High Schools meets with principals on a monthly basis to discuss operational and reform issues.
SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

In this section, Hanover Research reviews existing literature on distributed leadership, including research on distributed leadership in K-12 school districts, as well as relevant research from other sectors. This section begins with a general overview of distributed leadership before discussing strategies for distributing leadership effectively, including the Improvement Kata. This section goes on to discuss the role of principals within a distributed leadership framework in greater detail.

OVERVIEW OF DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP

A 2008 article in the journal Management in Education defines distributed leadership as a leadership model that “focuses on the interactions, rather than the actions, of those in formal and informal leadership roles.” In this model, responsibility and autonomy are distributed among multiple actors within an organization rather than concentrated in a single leader.\(^1\) Leadership consists of the interactions among leaders within a school or district, rather than the characteristics, skills, or activities of a single leader. Distributed leadership can also be referred to as shared leadership, team leadership, or democratic leadership.\(^2\) Distributed leadership developed in the business sector during the 1990s as a result of increasing reliance on cross-functional teams, job complexity, and availability of information combined with global interdependence and a desire for more diversity and inclusion in decision-making processes.\(^3\)

Distributed leadership has grown increasingly popular in the K-12 education sector in recent years, as the expansion of leadership duties due to increased demands on schools and districts led schools to restructure responsibilities to emphasize leadership teams over individual leaders.\(^4\) Distributed leadership also allows various actors within schools to contribute their expertise to leadership decisions.\(^5\) In addition, because distributed leadership reflects a more democratic and collaborative decision-making process, some proponents of the practice make a normative argument that distributed leadership promotes more effective and engaging decisions. However, other theorists of distributed leadership argue that distributed leadership can be implemented without embracing shared or democratic decision-making processes.\(^6\)

Some evidence suggests that distributed leadership practices may improve educational outcomes. For example, school reforms implemented through a distributed leadership framework may be more sustainable than reforms implemented at the direction of a single leader. Distributed leadership creates systems and teams that can sustain reforms after the change agent responsible for their initial implementation has left the school or district. For example, a study of Grade 3 students in a sample of 195 elementary schools examined the effect of distributed leadership on students’ scores on a statewide standardized mathematics test. Distributed leadership was measured by a survey of teachers’ perceptions of administrative practices that promoted collaborative decision-making, emphasized empowering school governance, and shared accountability for learning. This study found that the degree to which distributed leadership was practiced in a school had a significant positive impact on the growth in test scores over a three year period.

However, some experts have criticized the emphasis on distributed leadership in educational policy, noting that empirical evidence of a positive impact of distributed leadership on student achievement is limited and that distributed leadership as actually practiced may not necessarily impact the quality of leadership. For example, a qualitative study of six teacher leaders in a Southwestern elementary school found that teacher leaders faced challenges related to conflict avoidance and competing priorities. Teacher leaders went out of their way to avoid conflict with their mentees, and often failed to provide constructive feedback and overlooked their mentees’ failure to follow through on feedback. In addition, teacher leaders had to negotiate multiple organizational agendas, such as service on committees or completing district or grant-mandated reports, and felt that they had limited influence on other teachers in the school. As a result, the teacher leaders felt frustrated with their role and that they had less impact on learning outcomes than they would have without assuming a leadership position.

SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT

In addition to distributing leadership within schools, school districts can distribute leadership through site-based management. Site-based management reflects changes in corporate practices during the latter half of the 20th Century, in which management was decentralized so that decisions were made at the closest possible level to where key services were provided. In school districts using site-based management, decisions are...
made at the school level, often by site-based councils including school leaders, teachers, and other stakeholders such as parents and students.\(^{11}\)

Site-based management in the K-12 educational context developed in the 1970s and 1980s with the creation of school councils, which developed school improvement plans based on constituent input. Some site-based councils gradually took on increased authority in an effort to improve student achievement, including the suspension of central office mandates related to class size and the length of the school day.\(^{12}\) Site-based management is relatively common among schools in the United States, and five states currently require schools to adopt site-based management. However, initial research on site-based management found limited impacts on student achievement.\(^{13}\) A 2005 RAND Corporation study attributes the failure of site-based management during the 1990s to insufficient decentralization of authority and decentralization plans motivated by political concerns rather than improving student achievement.\(^{14}\)

**STRATEGIES FOR DISTRIBUTING LEADERSHIP**

Successfully implementing a distributed leadership or site-based management structure may require a substantial delegation of authority to the school level. According to the RAND Corporation’s 2005 report on site-based management, decentralization should be the primary reform effort of a school district, and include “the full range of decisions about authority over instructional matters,” including those outlined in Figure 1.1 on the following page. Decentralization that does not address each category in Figure 1.1 may not ultimately increase the autonomy of schools, because decisions made in one category constrain decisions in other categories.

**Figure 1.1: Key Education Governance Decisions**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>DECISION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Budget Decisions</td>
<td>Amount budgeted for salaries and benefits</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Amount budgeted for educational supplies and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allocation of funds for educational supplies and materials among accounts and departments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personnel Decisions</td>
<td>Size of the teaching staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Allocation of personnel among teaching positions</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of teachers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Evaluation of teachers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum and Instructional Decisions</td>
<td>Selection of textbooks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Selection of supplementary texts and materials</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Choice of teaching method and pedagogic style</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### Category: General Operational and Administrative Decisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Decision</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addition of a new course to the school’s curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elimination of a course from the school’s curriculum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scheduling of classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Length of the school year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The decision to suspend a student</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The decision to expel a student</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: The RAND Corporation

However, a 2005 review of high-achieving high schools in California recommends that schools establish a common curriculum and diagnostic tests to ensure that the same content is covered in similar courses, while allowing teachers to exercise creativity in their own instructional methods. Kingsport City Schools and Douglas County School District, profiled in Section II of this report, developed a common curriculum while still allowing teachers input in the decision-making process by incorporating teacher leaders in the development of a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, which is consistent across schools.

School districts implementing distributed leadership may wish to redesign central office functions to directly support schools. For example, Kingsport City Schools has renamed its central office the Administrative Support Center, and tasked central office staff with directly supporting schools. Based on this reform, central office staff may proctor tests or manage the cafeteria during school-wide training sessions. The SREB recommends the following strategies to develop district-wide conditions that support school improvement:

- **Establish a clear focus and a strategic plan for improving student achievement.** The SREB suggests that districts work collaboratively with schools and community stakeholders to articulate a clear vision and goals for all students. The district can demonstrate commitment to this vision by identifying poor performance and evidence-based strategies for instructional performance within a reform framework that includes:
  - Specific goals for improvement in student outcomes,
  - Research-based improvement strategies and district strategies to help each school create and implement a plan for continuous improvement, and
  - An accountability system that aligns assessments with state standards, includes multiples sources of data, and offers incentives for achieving goals.

- **Organize and engage the district office in supporting each school to create and implement a customized school improvement agenda within a district improvement framework.** The SREB suggests that school districts redefine the roles of central office administrators to one of support for schools. Central office staff should work directly in schools to support the strategic plan through coaching, staff

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development, and technical assistance, and develop collaborative relationships with principals. In addition, the SREB recommends that evaluations for central office staff focus on their contribution to improving instructional practices and student outcomes.

- **Provide instructional coherence by establishing a vision of effective instructional practice; aligning curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the vision and to state and national standards; and creating the context for meaningful learning experiences.** The SREB recommends that school districts develop an explicit vision of effective instruction aligned with college and career-readiness standards that includes rigorous classroom work, student and teacher activities, and classroom norms. Districts should support this vision by supporting principals in establishing professional development related to the curriculum and providing resources for teachers to create lesson plans, assignments, and classroom assessments.

- **Invest heavily in instruction-related professional learning for principals and teachers that is aligned with the district and school-specific improvement agendas.** The SREB recommends that school districts include high-quality professional development for teachers and principals as part of their strategic plan, including embedded professional development such as on-site coaching. In addition, the SREB recommends that school districts provide training focused specifically on data analysis and the use of the district’s specific data system.

- **Provide high-quality data that link student achievement to school and classroom practices and assist schools to use data effectively.** The SREB recommends that districts develop a data infrastructure that provides stakeholders with the information needed to improve student performance and align resources. Data should include student testing information as well as additional performance data that can be used to inform instructional decisions. The SREB also recommends that school districts support central office staff members, principals, and teachers in interpreting and using data by providing time to analyze data, presenting data in an easily understood format, and including data literacy in professional development.

- **Optimize human, financial, and other resources to provide a level of support that is sufficient for schools to produce specified student performance results.** The SREB recommends that districts ensure that individual schools have sufficient resources in terms of money, human capital, and time to develop and implement effective school improvement strategies. To do so, districts need to shift from the allocation of resources based on traditional formulas such as student to teacher ratios to a system which accounts for student learning needs, the effectiveness of current programs, emerging conditions, and the effects of previous investments.

- **Use open, credible processes to involve progressive school and community leaders in school improvement.** The SREB recommends that school districts work with the broader community by developing formal policies and processes for soliciting stakeholder input and community support. These policies may include establishing school councils composed of parents and community leaders, mentoring opportunities for high school students, and partnering with businesses,
postsecondary institutions, and community leaders to provide experiential learning opportunities for students.\(^{17}\)

**THE IMPROVEMENT KATA**

The Improvement Kata provides a method for making decisions and driving continuous improvement within a distributed leadership framework. The Improvement Kata was developed by Mike Rother, a professor at the University of Michigan from management practices used at Toyota Motor Corporation, and is sometimes referred to as the Toyota Kata.\(^{18}\)

The Improvement Kata focuses on developing human capital in order to develop sustainable solutions to problems and promote innovation.\(^{19}\) Leadership teams located close to the source of the problem identify and implement a solution or improvement strategy using the process outlined in Figure 1.2 on the following page. Each step in the process includes a series of practiced routines, referred to as starter kata, that help the leadership team address the problem scientifically.\(^{20}\)

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\(^{19}\) Video: IK/CK Background. 2015. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GrI1UCMNqM&feature=youtube_gdata_player

Leadership teams develop proficiency in the Improvement Kata through the Coaching Kata, a practice routine for leadership coaching in the effective use of starter kata. The Coaching Kata employs a five-question dialogue to guide the learner through the steps of the Improvement Kata. Over time, repeated practice of the Improvement Kata creates an organizational culture focused on improvement, adaptation, and innovation. Managers serve as teachers in this framework, and continuously develop the skills of their colleagues.

**Strategies for Distributing Leadership at the School Level**

School leaders can develop the capacity for distributed leadership through collaborative and inquiry-based professional development activities such as professional learning communities (PLCs). These activities allow individual teachers to participate in school-wide decision making and shift their instructional focus from their own classroom to the school as a whole. In this framework, the principal initiates the movement towards PLCs within a school and supports the conditions needed for PLCs to function effectively, but allows teams of teachers to work independently. Administrators should support decisions made by PLCs and support the exploration of alternative strategies for implementing school reforms.

According to a 2013 article in the journal *School Leadership Today*, the successful distribution of leadership within a school requires a culture of trust. This article suggests that the level of trust within a school reflects an interaction between the personal beliefs and dispositions of leaders and the structure and climate of the school setting, and that school leaders can progressively distribute trust through the process outlined in Figure 1.3 below. In this process, school leaders take actions which earn the trust of actors in the school, initially developing personal or relational trust in the leader, which allows school members to experience success and develop organizational trust in the school. A study of leadership distribution in schools in England found that school leaders who followed this process developed a culture of trust that allowed for the gradual distribution.

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21 Chart contents taken with minor alterations from: Ibid.
THE ROLE OF PRINCIPALS IN A DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK

Distributed leadership across schools requires deliberate planning on the part of principals to foster a collaborative work environment and develop the leadership skills of teacher leaders. A 2009 survey of teachers who participated in a teacher leadership program in southeastern Michigan found that respondents expressed a desire for greater support from their administrators, including providing opportunities to exercise leadership, supporting authentic professional learning communities, and working collaboratively with teacher leaders.27

In order to drive instructional improvement, principals need support and autonomy from central office administration. A 2009 review of principal working conditions in high schools conducted by the SREB recommends expanding the authority of principals through decentralized decision-making processes and developing collaborative partnerships among principals, school staff, and central office administrators.28

Existing school district structures may deny principals the autonomy needed to improve instruction. A 2007 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Institute, a politically

26 Chart taken directly from: Ibid., p. 72.
A conservative education policy think tank, interviewed 33 public and charter elementary school principals and discovered a substantial “autonomy gap” between the degree of independence principals felt was necessarily to enable them to lead effectively and the amount of autonomy they actually enjoyed. In particular, principals at public schools reported insufficient autonomy in staffing decisions such as discharging unsuitable teachers or determining the appropriate number of faculty and staff positions in their schools. A 2011 report on successful school turnarounds prepared by researchers at the University of Virginia for the school reform organization Public Impact recommends that school districts allow principals autonomy in decisions over operational issues such as staffing, scheduling, and budgeting.

In order to allow principals to focus on supporting instruction, school districts may need to reduce demands on principals’ time. A 2005 report on the effects of school district policies on classroom practices in Milwaukee, Seattle, and Chicago found that administrative duties force principals to adopt a “dual focus” in which they attempt to respond to external mandates related to teaching practices and test scores while supporting teachers and developing instructional programs that meet the unique needs of their students. The Cross City Campaign for Urban School reform recommends that school districts substantially reduce the central office demands on school staff and redesign central office policies with a focus on supporting teachers and principals to improve student outcomes.

In addition to increasing the autonomy of principals and school leaders, school districts may wish to increase investments in professional development for school leaders. For example, the University of Virginia’s School Turnaround Specialist Program (STSP) provides new principals in turnaround schools under the U.S. Department of Education’s School Improvement Grants (SIG) program with two years of site-based coaching along with suggestions for additional professional development and collaboratively analyzing data with teachers. Respondents interviewed in the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and Institute report expressed a desire for increased training in:

- Managing and analyzing data,
- Effective external communication,
- Using data to inform decision-making,
- Developing a supportive school community focused on learning,
- Developing an effective performance accountability system,

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• Evaluating teachers, and
• Designing and evaluating a curriculum.\(^{34}\)
SECTION II: DISTRICT PROFILES

In this section, Hanover Research profiles five school districts with distributed leadership or site-based management policies. These districts include Douglas County School District, Fairfax County Public Schools, Philadelphia School District, Long Beach Unified School District, and Kingsport City Schools.

Douglas County School District uses site-based budgeting, an approach in which schools receive an overall funding allocation based on enrollment, and can spend this allocation however they see fit. Likewise, Kingsport City Schools allocates funding for broad areas such as professional development or instructional technology, within which school leadership teams can determine the most effective use of money for their particular needs. However, both Douglas County School District and Kingsport City Schools use a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum in which learning standards and pacing are the same across schools, with room for schools and classroom teachers to exercise creativity in the delivery of the curriculum. In Kingsport City Schools, district-wide decisions are usually made by a district leadership team through a shared leadership process, while Douglas County School District appears to use a more traditional leadership process.

Fairfax County Public Schools and the Philadelphia School District have adopted distributed leadership at the school level in order to address human capital needs. Fairfax County Public Schools’ teacher leadership program extends the reach, sustainability, and persuasion of district initiatives through school-level teacher leaders, while the Learning, Empowering, Assessing, and Developing (LEAD) program prepares teacher leaders to assume administrative positions. The Philadelphia School District’s Distributed Leadership Program aims to reduce turnover among school leaders and prepare teacher leaders to fill administrative positions. Long Beach Unified School District implemented distributed leadership to implement the Linked Learning District Initiative, a program that provides career pathways for high school students.

KINGSPORT CITY SCHOOLS

Kingsport City Schools, located in Tennessee, has been recognized as a District of Distinction by District Administration for its reorganization of central office staff to directly support schools. In addition, Kingsport City Schools received the 2014 State Collaborative on Reforming Education (SCORE) Prize, awarded to a school district in Tennessee with strong student achievement gains. Kingsport City Schools was a finalist for the SCORE Prize in 2013. Figure 2.1 shows background information for Kingsport City Schools, taken from the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) Common Core of Data.

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**Figure 2.1: Kingsport City Schools Background Information**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>7,044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers (FTE)</td>
<td>481.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>14.63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures per Student, 2010-2011</td>
<td>$9,563</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

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**SHARED LEADERSHIP**

Kingsport City Schools adopts a shared leadership approach in which the central office, known as the Administrative Support Center, directly supports and collaborates with school leadership teams. The district leadership team includes all school principals and key Administrative Support Center staff, and is primarily responsible for decision-making at the district level. The district leadership team makes decisions through a formal process that relies on the district’s Guiding Tenets. These tenets, which were created by the district leadership team in partnership with teacher leaders, consist of Kingsport City Schools’ Vision, Mission, Core Values, System Goals, and Key Practices. District employees apply these Guiding Tenets using a systems approach aligned with the Criteria of the Tennessee Center for Performance Excellence and the Malcolm Balridge Education Criteria for Performance Excellence.

According to Mrs. Dory Creech, Kingsport City Schools’ Assistant Superintendent, “It is imperative to have very strong Guiding Tenets” for shared leadership to function effectively. Guiding Tenets provide a framework for ensuring that decisions made at the school or district level reflect the district’s vision and goals.

Decision-making by the district leadership team follows a process orientation leading to a consensus decision. For example, to identify the best school location for district-wide classrooms for students with emotional and behavioral disorders, the district leadership team visited each school in the district, looked at available space, and brainstormed student needs before reaching a decision. The district leadership team often solicits input and feedback from school leadership teams before reaching a final decision.

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38 Chart contents taken from: “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Kingsport.” National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=kingsport&State=47&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=4702190


40 Creech, Dory. Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum and Instruction, Kingsport City Schools. Telephone Interview. April 21, 2015.

41 Ibid.
School-Level Leadership

Kingsport City Schools works to develop leadership at multiple levels. Each school has a designated teacher leader in literacy and math, who provides professional development and mentoring to his or her colleagues and works with other grades and schools to develop curricula and assessments. Teacher leaders are selected based on demonstrated effectiveness in the classroom and leadership among their colleagues, and receive targeted professional development as shown in the implementation framework in Figure 2.2.

Figure 2.2: Kingsport City Schools Teacher Leadership Implementation Framework

- Application process (early May)
- Interview by selection committee (late May)
- Invitation to join (early June)

- Set goals and meeting dates
- Share clear picture of roles and responsibilities
- Initial professional learning/team building

- Collaborative professional learning sessions/continued professional learning for teacher leaders (bi-monthly)
- Curriculum Mapping (May)
- Create and analyze common assessments (quarterly)
- Design and facilitate professional development sessions (monthly)
- Compile and create instructional support resources (ongoing)
- Serve as model classrooms for teacher observations (ongoing)
- Serve as mentors

Source: Tennessee Department of Education

In addition to teacher leaders, Kingsport City Schools employs associate principals, who perform similar duties to assistant principals while receiving mentoring from their principal. Principals design learning experiences to prepare associate principals for future careers as administrators. Cohorts of associate principals also meet regularly with central office administrators.

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DATA-SHARING AND COMMUNICATION

According to Assistant Superintendent Creech, decision making at all levels in Kingsport City Schools is “very focused on data.” The Director of Performance Excellence gathers data and shares it with stakeholders in the district. Kingsport City Schools holds an annual retreat to discuss system-level data, and holds meetings with principals and school leadership teams to discuss individual schools’ data. Individual schools hold data conferences at the school and grade level, as well as data conferences with individual students to establish learning goals. Kingsport City Schools emphasizes data transparency, and school level data are available to other schools so that “every school knows how another school is doing.” This level of transparency allows schools to support each other in implementing best practices.  

The Administrative Support Center uses several strategies to communicate with schools. The district superintendent sends out a weekly memo to school leaders, as well as a monthly newsletter to all school employees, and maintains profiles on social media sites. Assistant Superintendent Creech describes Kingsport City Schools as “a transparent district,” and principals communicate informally with the Administrative Support Center as needed, for example to request additional support. The Administrative Support Center conducts focus groups during leadership team meetings to gain feedback and suggestions for improvement. In addition, Kingsport City Schools conducts evaluation surveys to assess the degree to which Administrative Support Center staff and school leaders support schools. The results of these surveys are discussed during the evaluation process.

DISTRIBUTION OF AUTHORITY

Decisions made by the district leadership team apply to all schools, and principals support those decisions in their schools. The district retains overall responsibility for curricular decisions, within state standards. Kingsport City Schools ensures a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, so that all schools cover the same material at roughly the same pace, and develops pacing guides and district-wide assessments to ensure that students meet learning goals. The pacing guides and district-wide formative assessments are developed collaboratively by teacher leaders from across the district.

Although the overall curriculum is decided through shared leadership at the district level, decisions on teaching strategies and supplemental materials such as technology supports are made at the school and classroom level. Kingsport City Schools aims to “give teachers flexibility in using their creativity” to design effective instructional strategies. Teachers at each grade level or content area collaboratively plan lessons through PLCs. In addition, Kingsport City Schools brings teachers from across the district together for unit studies at which teachers can share strategies and best practices to support their students in meeting the learning goals of the Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum.

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46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Kingsport City Schools allocates funding for salaries and some major purchases at the district level. In addition, each school receives allocations based on overall enrollment for expenditure categories such as professional development or instructional resources. School leadership teams decide how to spend these allocations based on individual school needs. If a school leadership team decides the school needs funding for an expenditure not included in its base allocation, the principal may request additional financial resources during the annual budget process.48

The Administrative Support Center pushes additional resources into schools that demonstrate a need for continued support based on formative assessment data. Assistant Superintendent Creech notes that schools often reach out to the Administrative Support Center proactively. In addition, the district’s data transparency allows schools to see where other schools in the district have made exceptional progress and reach out to them for suggestions and support. Principals may also reach out to the Administrative Support Center to conduct walk-throughs in areas of concern.49

In 2012, the Administrative Support Center created seven cross-departmental teams to directly support schools.50 Each team meets once a month with representatives of two partner schools, which the team directly supports “in whatever way they need,” for example by proctoring assessments or managing the cafeteria during school-wide instructional assistant trainings.51 In addition, each team provides customized support for its partner schools along five dimensions:

- Developing learning-focused partnerships with principals to deepen instructional practice,
- Assisting with central office/principal partnerships,
- Reorganizing central office units to support the partnerships and the learning process,
- Taking stewardship of the overall central office transformation process, and
- Using evidence to support the improvement of work practices and relationships with schools.52

LONG BEACH UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT

Long Beach Unified School District (LBUSD) participates in the California District Initiative for Linked Learning. This program, designed to provide high school students with multiple career pathways, is administered through a distributed leadership framework.

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48 Ibid.
49 Ibid.
### Linked Learning District Initiative

LBUSD embraced distributed leadership as part of the implementation of the Linked Learning District Initiative. The Linked Learning District Initiative distributes leadership among the following staff:

- **Project Director for Smaller Learning Communities and Expanding Pathways**: This staff member serves as the point of contact for the Linked Learning District Initiative within LBUSD.

- **Extended Implementation Team**: This team, which consists of general and career and technical education (CTE) curriculum leaders, a work-based learning coordinator, and a research analyst, ensures alignment of the key components of the Linked Learning District Initiative and provides regular collective input on the direction of the initiative.

- **Executive Team**: This team, which consists of members of the superintendent’s cabinet, works with the Project Director for Smaller Learning Communities and Expanding Pathways to align the Linked Learning District Initiative with district priorities and initiatives.\(^{54}\)

Although the overall framework and requirements for the Linked Learning District Initiative are set by LBUSD’s central office, individual schools have substantial latitude in deciding how to implement the program. Small Learning Communities (SLC) Coordinators at each school are responsible for implementing the Linked Learning District Initiative at the school level. To ensure the alignment of the program with district objectives and accountability for outcomes, LBUSD ensures regular communication between district administrators and SLC coordinators, including monthly formal meetings between SLC coordinators and the Project Director for Smaller Learning Communities and Expanding Pathways, along with a district SLC coach. These meetings focus on shared concerns and

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\(^{53}\) Chart contents taken from: “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Long Beach Unified.” National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. [https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=long+beach&State=06&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=0622500](https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=long+beach&State=06&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=0622500)

developing ownership for elements of the Linked Learning District Initiative. In addition, the Assistant Superintendent for High Schools and Project Director for Smaller Learning Communities and Expanding Pathways conduct key results walk-throughs at each high school twice a year, in which they meet with curriculum leaders, school-level administrators, the SLC Coordinator, department heads, teacher coaches, and teachers to provide feedback and engage in dialogue on strategies to improve student achievement.

Within schools, the Linked Learning District Initiative is led by principals working with Pathway Leadership Teams and the SLC Coordinator. Pathway Leadership Teams include administrators, teachers, and counselors, and lead changes in school policies, structures, and instructional practices such as scheduling and curriculum integration. The SLC Coordinator works with a lead teacher for each career pathway to support the Pathway Leadership Teams and maintain communication.

**PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT FOR DISTRIBUTIVE LEADERSHIP**

LBUSD supports distributive leadership through professional development for teachers and school leaders. The Assistant Superintendent for High Schools meets with principals on a monthly basis to address reform and operational issues. These meetings focus on an annual theme such as data differentiation or aligning school improvement plans with high school office goals. LBUSD offers four professional learning groups for principals that analyze research to develop strategies to improve school climate, culture, and communications, transition strategies for alternative education, interventions to prepare students for the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), and overall school improvement strategies. Professional learning groups also participate in a series of professional development activities, including the Principals’ Partnership series offered by Union Pacific, summer institutes offered by the International Center for Leadership in Education, and career pathways trainings offered by ConnectEd: The California Center for College and Careers and the James Irvine Foundation.

Principals meet quarterly with district leaders and then develop staff professional development plans with school instructional leadership teams. In addition, LBUSD provides leadership training for members of Pathway Leadership Teams to support teachers as they adopt more formal leadership roles. This training emphasizes the development of a school culture of collaboration and accountability. School-based Instructional Leadership Teams made up of department heads, SLC lead teachers, administrators, counselors, and clerical staff members engage in professional development related to curriculum and instructional methods. Instructional Leadership Teams across the district meet at PLC Institutes twice a year for professional development with a specific theme.

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55 Ibid., p. 3.
DOUGLAS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Douglas County School District, located in Colorado, uses a site-based budgeting model in which individual schools have autonomy over the majority of their own budget allocation. Figure 2.4 shows background information for Douglas County School District, taken from the NCES Common Core of Data.

Figure 2.4: Douglas County School District Background Information

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
<td>64,657</td>
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<tr>
<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Teachers (FTE)</td>
<td>3,102.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>20.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures per Student, 2010-2011</td>
<td>$8,729</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

SITE-BASED BUDGETING

Douglas County School District implemented site-based budgeting beginning in the 2008-2009 Fiscal Year. This decision was made out of a belief that budgeting would be more informed, transparent, and equitable if decisions were made as close as possible to the end user of funds. Each school in the district maintains a School Accountability Committee (SAC), which reports to the District Accountability Committee (DAC). These committees, which are required by law in the state of Colorado, collect stakeholder feedback on spending priorities and report this information to the Board of Education.

Rather than funding being allocated for specific purposes by the school district, each school receives a Site Based Budget Pupil Allocation for each student enrolled in the school. This allocation is distributed at the principal’s discretion, although principals typically develop school budgets in partnership with School Accountability Committees (SACs). Schools also receive non-discretionary allocations for mandated expenditures such as special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Further, schools receive a Close the Gap allocation based on the number of at-risk students enrolled in the school, which is spent at the principal’s discretion on services to close achievement gaps between at-risk students and their peers.

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61 Chart contents taken from: “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Douglas County School District, NO. Re 1.” National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=douglas+county&State=08&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&id2=0803450


64 “Site Based Budget (SBB),” Op. cit.
DISTRICT-LEVEL SUPPORT FOR SCHOOLS

Although budget decisions in Douglas County School District are made at the individual school level, curricular decisions appear to be made at the district level. In 2012, Douglas County School District established the World Class Outcomes, which integrate state and national curricular standards with higher-order thinking skills and skills desired by employers.65 These standards were developed by teachers working with the district’s Chief Academic Officer over a two year period. The World Class Outcomes inform a Guaranteed and Viable Curriculum, which specifies learning outcomes for each grade level that are consistent across schools in the district.66 In addition, schools are evaluated by a standard set of criteria and evaluation tools. However, each school is able to choose the learning model that meets its individual needs within these criteria.67

Douglas County School District also appears to offer professional development at the district level, through the Center for Professional Development. Professional development activities integrate district priorities, such as an instructional focus on Communication, Critical thinking, Collaboration, and Creativity (the 4 Cs) into learning activities.68 Professional development activities are differentiated based on teachers’ level of experience and individual needs, and the Center for Professional Development appears to work with site-based personnel in developing and differentiating professional development activities. Some activities consist of teams of teachers within schools developing products aligned with the district’s professional development curriculum.69 Douglas County School District’s Learning and Leadership Team provides professional development for principals, including daily school visits that focus on the implementation of the district’s strategic plan.70

FAIRFAX COUNTY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Fairfax County Public Schools (FCPS), located in Virginia, uses professional development programs to promote teacher leadership and prepare teachers to assume administrative roles. Figure 2.5 shows background information for Fairfax County Public Schools, taken from the Common Core of Data.

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Figure 2.5: Background Information for Fairfax County Public Schools

<table>
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<tr>
<th>CATEGORY</th>
<th>INDICATOR</th>
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<tr>
<td>Total Students</td>
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<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>219</td>
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<td>Classroom Teachers (FTE)</td>
<td>14,247.29</td>
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<tr>
<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>12.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures per Student, 2010-2011</td>
<td>$14,162</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

FCPS promotes teacher leadership through the Office of Professional Learning and Accountability. This office provides schools with research supporting the benefits of teacher leadership and suggests strategies for promoting teacher leadership in individual schools. According to the Office of Professional Learning and Accountability, teacher leadership provides three major benefits to continuous improvement efforts:

- **Reach**: Continuous improvement effort require support from a large number of teachers to work with other teachers, administrators, students, and the broader community.
- **Persuasion**: Experienced and effective teacher leaders are well positioned to act as agents of change because they are respected by their colleagues.
- **Sustainability**: Teacher leaders can support capacity building and organizational learning within individual schools to sustain improvement initiatives beyond initial funding or training.

FCPS recruits teacher leaders from within the district to fill administrative positions. Beginning in 1999, FCPS participated in the Learning, Empowering, Assessing, and Developing (LEAD) grant program funded by the Wallace Foundation. This program aimed to develop school leaders within the district, initially to replace principals retiring after a period of rapid population growth in the 1960s and 1970s.

Fairfax County Public Schools used LEAD grant funding to create LEAD Fairfax, a leadership mentorship program in which a cohort of teacher leaders serve as administrative interns in preparation for roles as assistant principals or principals. The application process for administrative interns is selective and includes a portfolio of work, an essay, and an interview process. Participants were required to have a minimum of five years of teaching

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71 Chart contents taken from: “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Fairfax Co Pblc Schs.” National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtsearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=fairfax&State=51&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=5101260

experience, including three years teaching in FCPS, and be within 12 credit hours of completing a credential in education administration.\(^\text{73}\)

Teacher leaders who are selected as interns function as assistant principals mentored by highly qualified principals at two schools over the course of their year-long internships. In addition to real-world experience functioning in an administrative capacity, administrative interns receive job-embedded professional development designed by principals in collaboration with FCPS’ Department of Professional Learning and Accountability’s Office of Leadership Development.\(^\text{74}\) Professional development activities are tailored to the needs of interns preparing for positions as principals or assistant principals and included the following topics:

- Developing Professionally,
- Leading People,
- Leading, Planning, and Assessing Instruction,
- Managing the Business of Education, and
- Community Relations.\(^\text{75}\)

**PHILADELPHIA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

The Philadelphia School District participates in a school-level distributed leadership program affiliated with the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education. Figure 2.6 shows background information on Philadelphia School District.

**Figure 2.6: Philadelphia School District Background Information**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>CATEGORY</th>
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<td>Total Students</td>
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<td>Total Schools</td>
<td>251</td>
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<td>Classroom Teachers (FTE)</td>
<td>8,625.46</td>
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<td>Student/Teacher Ratio</td>
<td>16.68</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expenditures per Student, 2010-2011</td>
<td>$18,907</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: National Center for Education Statistics\(^\text{76}\)

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\(^{76}\) Chart contents taken from: “Search for Public School Districts - District Detail for Philadelphia City Sd.” National Center for Education Statistics Common Core of Data. https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/districtssearch/district_detail.asp?Search=1&details=1&InstName=philadelphia&State=42&DistrictType=1&DistrictType=2&DistrictType=3&DistrictType=4&DistrictType=5&DistrictType=6&DistrictType=7&NumOfStudentsRange=more&NumOfSchoolsRange=more&ID2=4218990
**DISTRIBUTED LEADERSHIP PROGRAM**

The Philadelphia School District participates in the Distributed Leadership Program at the University of Pennsylvania’s Graduate School of Education’s Penn Center for Educational Leadership.\(^77\) The Philadelphia School District faces a number of serious challenges, including a high turnover rate for principals and other school leaders. The Distributed Leadership program was developed in order to reduce turnover among school leaders and develop teacher leaders who could fill administrative vacancies.\(^78\) This program aimed to:

- Develop distributed leadership teams and communities in 16 schools within the district,
- Develop a regional center for targeted professional development and teacher leadership,
- Develop approximately 80 teacher leaders to support new principals in sustaining instructional leadership in participating schools,
- Use additional strategies, including professional learning communities and coaching, to support distributive leadership teams and improve instructional focus and student outcomes at participating schools, and
- Create model distributed leadership agreements with the school district and its unions and partnerships with Temple University and Lehigh University.\(^79\)

The Annenberg Foundation provided $4.9 million in funding for a four year project to develop distributed leadership teams in 16 Philadelphia schools. Teams including three to five teachers and principals from selected schools participated in approximately 100 hours of training designed to create instructional leadership teams.\(^80\) This training incorporated modules based on research conducted by James Spillane at Northwestern University and the University of Pennsylvania’s graduate programs for school leaders. Training was led by outside experts and University of Pennsylvania faculty, and emphasized:

- Developing a shared vision of informed practice and supplemental training in best practices in instruction,
- Developing professional learning communities (focused on instructional improvement) in each building, and
- Developing capacity for analysis and understanding of student work and data.\(^81\)

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\(^77\) “Welcome to The Distributed Leadership Program.” The Distributed Leadership Program at the Penn Center for Educational Leadership Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania. http://pcel.drupalgardens.com/


\(^79\) Bulleted text adapted from: Ibid., p. 6.


\(^81\) Bulleted text taken verbatim from: Ibid., p. 12.
In addition to formal professional development, the Distributed Leadership Program included PLCs and leadership coaching at participating schools. The Distributed Leadership Program included two days of training focused on developing PLCs, and a survey designed to help distributed leadership teams assess current PLCs in their school. Survey results were shared with staff and used to create action plans to improve school quality using PLCs. Based on these survey results, the Distributed Leadership Program identified a need for professional development focused on the use of data to inform decisions, and provided this development through the PLC structure and coaching teams.

Retired principals and school leaders served as leadership coaches for the instructional leadership teams, particularly school leaders and administrators. The coaching process develops metacognitive skills and provides an opportunity for coaches to model leadership skills and reinforce leadership, action plans, and literacy and numeracy practices included in the professional development program. Coaches spent 10 hours each week coaching their team.\(^\text{82}\)

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