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## Improving Leadership for Learning



### Overview

# Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support



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ctp

**Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy**  
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# The Leadership Issue Project

## *State-of-the-Field Reports: Improving Leadership for Learning*

This report is one of a series produced by a research team at the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, a national research consortium home-based at the University of Washington. Developed with support from The Wallace Foundation during the early stages of an initiative that explores central issues in the exercise of educational leadership, the reports synthesize studies, conceptual work, and examples of current and emerging practice.

The reports are intended to clarify each leadership issue, while assembling what is known from empirical studies. The information in these reports lays the groundwork for further study and practical experimentation by leaders and reformers in states, districts, and schools.

The first report offers an overview of leadership and leadership support in relation to the overarching goal of improving learning. The remaining six explore in more detail particular issues within that terrain.



### **Overview**

#### **Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support**

By Michael S. Knapp, Bradley S. Portin, Michael A. Copland, and Margaret L. Plecki.



### **Data-Informed Leadership**

#### **Data-Informed Leadership in Education**

By Michael S. Knapp, Juli Ann Swinnerton, Michael A. Copland, and Jack Monpas-Huber



### **Resource Allocation**

#### **Allocating Resources and Creating Incentives to Improve Teaching and Learning**

By Margaret L. Plecki, Christopher R. Alejano, Michael S. Knapp, and Chad Lochmiller



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#### **Redefining Roles, Responsibilities, and Authority of School Leaders**

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### **Leadership Assessment**

#### **Purposes, Uses, and Practices of Leadership Assessment in Education**

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### **High School Transformation**

#### **Leadership for Transforming High Schools**

By Michael A. Copland and Elizabeth Boatright

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## Preface

This document is the work of a research team, home-based at the University of Washington in the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy (CTP), which has been commissioned by The Wallace Foundation to design and conduct research related to an unfolding leadership improvement initiative. This initiative represents the most recent in a series of steps taken by the Foundation over the last five years to stimulate improvements in the quality of leadership and public education in the United States through demonstration projects, scholarship, and other activities.

The Foundation's leadership improvement efforts are taking place at a time of intense scrutiny of public education in the United States and of the quality of leadership in particular. Converging trends and historical events have set great expectations for schools and schooling, while placing new and difficult demands on the educators who are there to meet those expectations. The situation underscores the central role that educational leaders do and can play, while raising questions about whether and how they will be able to meet the heavy responsibilities placed on them.

In this context, The Wallace Foundation has convened six "Leadership Issue Groups" in collaboration with three national organizations—the Council of Chief State School Officers, the Education Commission of the States, and the National Governors Association—to answer some of these questions. Each Leadership Issue Group [see boxed insert] is exploring "break-through solutions" to central challenges facing educational leaders at the state and local level who wish to improve the quality of teaching and learning—in particular, state and local policymakers (including school board members), central office administrators (superintendents and others with prominent leadership roles), school principals or assistant principals, teacher leaders, and coaches offering regular operational or instructional guidance. Members of each Leadership Issue Group have identified particular projects that will shed light on promising practices within their respective areas of concern, and they are meeting over a three-year period, to share ideas and conduct these projects.

The work of the research team parallels that of the Leadership Issue Groups in several ways. First, the team is developing plans for research that will inform the exercise of leadership and the support of leaders' work in some of the same areas that the Groups are exploring. In due course, the team will carry out these studies and offer the findings as an independent perspective on the improvement of leadership and leadership support, alongside whatever products emerge from the Groups' efforts. Second, to set the stage for that work and also to inform the ongoing Foundation initiative, the research team has developed a series of "state-of-the-field" reports related to areas of leadership practice in which each Leadership Issue Group's work resides (see the inside cover for a list of these reports).

This report is a companion to the six "state-of-the-field" reports. It offers an integrative framework, based on insights from scholarly literature, related theory, and practical activity—much of it summarized in the six reports—that can inform efforts to improve the quality of leadership and

### *The Wallace Foundation's Leadership Issue Group Project*

The six Issue Group domains represent central, inter-related challenges and opportunities facing educational leaders and policymakers at the state and local levels. Proactive responses to all six, in the Foundation's view, will create conditions that administrators and teachers need to improve the quality of instruction in schools. The six issues concern:

1. *The use of data and evidence to guide leadership:* Using data effectively to improve leadership, policies, practices, and ultimately teaching and learning.
2. *The (re)allocation of resources and creation of incentives to support instructional improvement:* Developing methods of allocating or reallocating resources and changing incentives to encourage effective leadership and teaching.
3. *The roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders:* Redefining school leaders' roles and responsibilities, and ensuring they have the authority to get the job done.
4. *The assessment of leadership performance:* Developing ways to assess leadership behavior and improve leaders' performance.
5. *Improvement of school boards and district governance:* Redefining roles and responsibilities of school boards and improving district governance.
6. *Leadership for transforming high schools:* Identifying and fostering leadership skills and strategies for transforming high school leadership and results.

leadership support. The framework also presents a way of understanding how the different aspects of leadership and leadership support activity that fall within the areas addressed by the six Leadership Issue Groups connect to one another. Without a clear sense of these interconnections, efforts to improve leadership are at great risk of fixing the parts, but not the whole, of the leadership act. The ultimate goal of the paper is to stimulate thinking and inform ongoing attempts to improve the quality of leadership practice, and thereby the quality of teaching and learning in the nation's public schools.

In framing this overview report as well as the six state-of-the-field reports, we have made the assumption that, above all else, educational leadership is ultimately concerned with learning. Efforts to improve leadership practice, therefore, imply helping leaders—and anything done to support or guide leaders' work—to more effectively address questions of learning improvement. In this respect, we are building on a line of thinking that we and others have been engaged in over the last five years in which the connections between leadership activity and learning events have been more systematically conceptualized and empirically studied.<sup>1</sup> In this report, we extend that thinking by clarifying certain aspects of the exercise of leadership that seem essential to the productive connections between leadership and learning improvement and by painting a more specific picture of conditions and activities that affect leaders' work. Here, we make the further assumption that these conditions and activities occur at various levels of the educational system, especially at state, district, and school levels, and that their *joint influence* is what matters most to the exercise of leadership. We also make the assumption that effective leadership is intimately connected to a specific local and state context, and that broad principles can guide the leaders' work only up to a point. From there on, the matter rests with local politics, site-specific relationships, and the leaders' responsiveness to the particulars of the communities they serve.

The paper is intended for a wide audience of practitioners, policymakers, and others who are focused on the quality of leadership in the nation's schools and school systems. Hence, the audiences for this report include (1) practicing educational leaders at multiple levels of the educational system; (2) state and local policymakers whose efforts target the improvement of leadership or create conditions that affect leaders' work; and (3) others—for example, in professional associations, universities, regional educational units, or reform support organizations—who are in positions of supporting or guiding

what leaders do and learn to do in schools, districts, or state agencies. For all of these audiences (and we count ourselves among them), there is much to learn about exercising leadership that can make a difference in educating the nation's young people and about creating the conditions that enable this to happen.

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Exploring a topic as complex as the one addressed in this report depends on the thinking of many individuals. To begin with, we would like to acknowledge especially all the members of the research team, whose diligent groundwork in various literatures, critical insights, and good thinking have helped shape the substance and form of this report: Christopher Alejandro, Beth Boatright, Sue Feldman, Chad Lochmiller, Liz Marzolf, Julie McCleery, Jack Monpas-Huber, Sylvia Soholt, and Juli Swinnerton.

Along the way, a larger number of other individuals have been instrumental in prodding or guiding our thinking in developing this summary document as well as the six state-of-the-field reports on which it draws, and to them we are deeply indebted: Shellwyn Badger, Bruce Bivins, Bill Boyd, Monte Bridges, Peter Bylsma, Andrew Cain, Tammy Campbell, Carol Cohen, Paula Cordeiro, Gary Crow, Michael Dantley, Maria Luisa Gonzalez, Ellen Goldring, Ron Heck, Paul Hill, Meredith Honig, Mike Kirst, Rick Lear, Bill Mathis, Terry Orr, Traci Pierce, Leslie Siskin, Roger Soder, Randy Stocker, Karen Seashore, Jeffrey Wayman, and Jan Zuber.

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## Summary: Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support

It is a difficult, yet exciting, time to be an educational leader. So much is expected of school leaders, district officials, school board members, or even teachers who are assuming formal or informal leadership responsibilities. State educational leaders operating at some distance from the classroom face the same high expectations, along with the demands of guiding an entire educational system toward improved performance. The climate of high accountability underscores the weight of the expectations facing all these leaders. The stakes are high.

The biggest challenge lies in visualizing how to connect leadership practice with student learning, and then mobilizing others' energies and commitment accordingly. This challenge implicates not only individual leaders, operating from their respective vantage points in a complicated system, but all of them together. *How are they to bring their collective efforts to bear on the task of improving learning for all students?* And it also implicates a larger cast of characters whose actions guide or support leadership

practice. *How do they create conditions that prompt and enable leaders to constructively influence learning outcomes?*

This report summary, and the longer report of which it is a part, offer answers to these questions. We do so by mapping out, in broad strokes, the leadership activities and supporting conditions that enable learning-focused leadership to happen, while suggesting entry points whereby leaders who wish to pursue learning improvement agendas may do so. The report accompanies a series of six others that delve more deeply into particular dimensions of this broad territory.

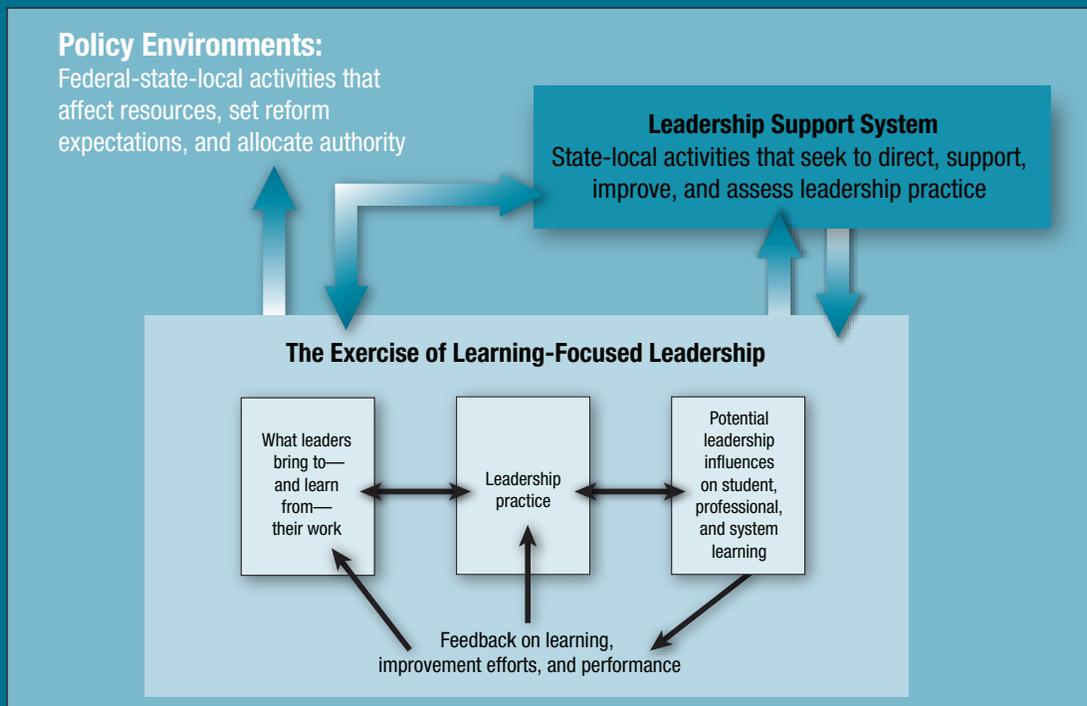
The report rests on scholarship and practical experimentation that reflect an emerging understanding of the kinds of leadership and leadership support which meet this challenge. This view presumes that more than student learning is involved. Active learning on the part of teachers and administrators and on the part of the system as a whole can reinforce the process and outcomes of improving student learning. In schools certain kinds of leadership

action are likely to enhance the prospects for learning improvement, and evidence is emerging that comparable leadership actions at the school district level can make a difference in learning outcomes. But the fine detail of learning-focused leadership action and the corresponding leadership support systems have yet to be described and studied in ways that inform practice. This report begins to address that need.

### Activities and Conditions that Prompt and Support Learning-Focused Leadership

A productive way to think about this challenge highlights three layers of activity that prompt and support leaders' efforts to improve the learning in public schools. First, some of these activities are embedded in the exercise of leadership itself, a second layer seeks to guide or support leadership practice, while a third layer sets broader policies not targeted

**Figure S-1. Activities and Conditions that Shape Learning-Focused Leadership**



to leadership per se, yet which can powerfully affect leadership practice. Separately and together, these activities create conditions that shape and support what leaders do, think to do, and are able to do, in relation to learning improvement, schematically suggested in Figure S-1.

The starting point is leaders' persistent and public commitment to focus the school, district, or state educational system on the quality of learning for all students. At first glance, standards-based reform policies may appear to do just that, but interpreted too literally, these reforms can easily push educators to become preoccupied with achievement score measures, rather than with a broader concept of learning and learning improvement. Caught up in a compliance mentality, educators can easily lose sight of the professional learning and "system learning" that sustainable learning improvement under standards-based reform implies.

*Activities embedded in the exercise of leadership itself.* Given the intent to exercise learning-focused leadership, particular kinds of activities are implicated in any learning improvement strategy—

- *Redefining leadership roles and responsibilities.* School and district leaders reconstruct

or assume redesigned leadership roles that keep matters of learning improvement in the foreground as a central, collective responsibility.

- *Using data, evidence, and feedback.* Leaders at all levels generate, access, and use information that helps them pinpoint learning needs, imagine solutions, describe the operation of programs, and assess performance. Of particular importance are various forms of *feedback* to leaders concerning their own and others' efforts to address learning agendas.
- *Focusing resources on learning.* Local and state leaders allocate—which often means *reallocating*—resources that directly support the learning of students, teachers, and others, while managing the politics of (re)allocation accordingly. In addition, rather than treating resources as fixed quantities, they pay particular attention to *developing* resources, especially the human resources—the teaching staff and instructional support personnel who are in a position to serve the full range of students' learning needs.

*Activities that seek to guide or support leadership practice.*

One step removed, other activities at the state and local level take aim at the way leaders think about and approach their work, thereby guiding or supporting leaders toward more learning-focused forms of practice, by—

- *Developing future leadership capacity.* As part of formal preparation programs, recruitment initiatives, or “home-grown” leadership development arrangements inside school districts, a new generation of teacher leaders, school administrators, district officials, instructional improvement coaches, or an agency’s leadership cadre can be identified and nurtured, who take learning improvement seriously and understand what it means.
- *Providing direction or models for leaders’ daily work.* Certain state and local policies and practices communicate what is expected for leaders’ work—e.g., through widely promulgated leadership standards, specifications for leadership positions, and arrangements for administrator supervision. Though they often don’t, these

communications about leaders’ work can speak clearly and forcefully about learning-focused leadership practice.

- *Supporting the ongoing professional learning of practicing leaders.* Arrangements of many kinds, from individual mentoring or coaching to formal professional development sessions, teach individuals or leadership teams what it might mean to focus energy more centrally on learning improvement.
- *Establishing leadership assessment systems.* Arrangements for generating evaluative data about leadership performance, either as formative guidance for the leaders’ growth or summative judgments about their accomplishments and capacity, can generate data about the learning-focused aspects of leaders’ practice.

*Activities that set broader policies not targeted to leadership per se, yet which powerfully affect leadership practice.* Finally, other activities in federal, state, and local policy environments address facets of the educational system that have important implications for leaders’ work, even though they are not pri-

marily aimed at leadership practice. These activities occur in—

- *The authorizing environment*, generated by governance arrangements (at all levels), collective bargaining and the contractual agreements it produces, and the interaction among educational stakeholders within and around these arrangements.
- *The resource environment*, including the sources of funds and human resources, and also the infrastructure for gathering information on and for the schools, as well as rules governing the use of these resources.
- *The reform policy environment*, comprising the forces and conditions created by state and federal policies aimed at enhancing the quality of schooling, such as standards-based reform policies.

In numerous ways, these actions in the policy environments invite or command the attention of educational leaders. While the particular policies that come to the fore reflect many interests, a concern for the quality of learning may be infused into the debate and interplay

that produces these policies. At a minimum, participants can look hard at what these policies might mean for leaders' ability to focus their energies on learning improvement; at best, participants in policy environments can coalesce around actions that will make leaders' jobs easier.

### **What It Looks Like in Practice**

These broad categories of activity beg questions about what people or groups located in different positions within states, districts, or schools actually do in attempting to guide or support leadership practice that focuses on learning improvement. Some examples, developed further in the full report and the accompanying six reports, follow.

In schools, a relatively small number of educators are implicated in the leadership of the school, but more than the formal administrators (principal, assistant principal) may participate in activities that broaden the concept of "leadership" and focus it on matters of teaching and learning in classrooms, as illustrated by the activities in Table 1.

**Table 1. Illustrative Activities at the School Level that Prompt or Support Learning-focused Leadership**

Embedded in the exercise of learning-focused leadership itself	Aimed at guiding or supporting leadership practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Role redefinition:</i> Establishing teams within the school which take on instructional leadership responsibilities</li> <li>• <i>Information use:</i> Setting up systems for teachers to examine student work in relation to grade-level expectations and state standards</li> <li>• <i>Resource reallocation:</i> Reallocating time so that teachers can work together on instructional planning</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Leadership development:</i> Identifying teachers with leadership potential and nurturing their growth as a future instructional leadership cadre</li> <li>• <i>Direction for leaders' daily work:</i> Adopting school-specific statements about what is expected of all who exercise leadership</li> <li>• <i>Support for leaders' professional learning:</i> Creating regular occasions for leaders in the school to engage in new learning about high-quality teaching</li> <li>• <i>Leadership assessment systems:</i> Developing a 360-system for gaining regular feedback on the principal's and other leaders' effectiveness</li> </ul>

**Table 2. Illustrative Activities at the District Level that Prompt or Support Learning-focused Leadership**

Embedded in the exercise of learning-focused leadership itself	Aimed at guiding or supporting leadership practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Role redefinition:</i> Creating managerial support roles to remove some aspects of the routine work of the principalship and enable more of a learning focus</li> <li>• <i>Information use:</i> Creating or locating informational tools for school leaders</li> <li>• <i>Resource reallocation:</i> Making teacher professional development, linked to identified learning agendas, a resource priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Leadership development:</i> Developing a “leadership pipeline” strategy for the district, in conjunction with a local provider, that seeks to “grow” personnel through various stages of leadership careers</li> <li>• <i>Direction for leaders' daily work:</i> Adapting state leadership standards in ways that reflect local learning improvement priorities</li> <li>• <i>Support for leaders' professional learning:</i> Creating a local leadership induction/mentoring program, parallel to teacher induction and mentoring</li> <li>• <i>Leadership assessment systems:</i> Creating learning-focused criteria to guide leadership assessment within the district</li> </ul>

At the district level, a different set of individuals come into play, who occupy positions that are generally defined in terms of administrative functions—personnel, budget, transportation, community relations, school administrator supervision, and so on—only some of which are formally related to teaching and learning. Left to their own devices, their work will often have little to do with learning improvement, but through intentional action by leaders strategically placed within the central office—often the superintendent and administrative cabinet, but other mid-level staff as well—district central offices can develop new ways of relating to schools, implied by the activities shown in Table 2, that concentrate effort and attention on learning improvement goals.

A more dispersed set of actors participate in the state policy environments that affect local educational leaders' work. The organizational and political cleavages between State Education Department, governor's office, legislature (both houses), State Board of Education, and other players (e.g., professional Standards Board) will often mean that common

ground is hard, or even impossible, to find. Yet separately and, when possible, together, these players have the capacity to make a focus on learning and the ramifications for leadership support central to their respective contributions to the mix of policies aimed at schools, as Table 3 suggests.

Not shown in any one of these tables is the potentially reinforcing effect that activities in one area and at one level of the system can have on each other. The enduring challenge is one of finding coherent, sustainable ways to join forces across jurisdictional or positional boundaries, and across levels in the system, in the service of learning-focused leadership and leadership support.

**Table 3. Illustrative Activities in the State Policy Environment that Affect Leaders' Ability to Focus on Learning Improvement**

Aimed at guiding or supporting leadership practice	Aimed at broader policy, not specific to leadership, yet with major implications for learning-focused practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Leadership development</i>: Ensuring that principal licensure standards are keyed to learning improvement goals</li> <li>• <i>Direction for leaders' daily work</i>: Publicly promoting instructional leadership and related aspects of learning-focused leadership as a central responsibility of local educational leaders</li> <li>• <i>Support for leaders' professional learning</i>: Investing state dollars in periodic professional development for practicing leaders (e.g., to promote instructional leadership), especially for school leaders in their first three years</li> <li>• <i>Leadership assessment systems</i>: Linking leadership assessment to explicit, learning-focused standards for leadership practice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Authorizing environment</i>: State governing bodies creating occasions for cross-department conversation about learning goals</li> <li>• <i>Resource environment</i>: Creating incentives that encourage the relocation of staff to better serve unmet student needs</li> <li>• <i>Reform policy environment</i>: Allowing districts flexibility in defining the indicators of success in achieving state standards-based reform goals</li> </ul>

### Entry Points

Emerging practices and some more established ones, in educational systems that show signs of improvement (at least, as indicated by test score performance), suggest the following six entry points in the process of nudging educational systems toward a greater and better supported focus on learning improvement:

1. *Establishing a clear and public focus on learning improvement priorities for students, professionals, and the system as a whole.* Here, leaders are in a position to put all of these learning agendas on the table

and to encourage action that creates mutual reinforcement among them.

2. *Reconceiving leadership roles so that they emphasize learning improvement, take full advantage of the collective capacity of staff, and still manage basic operational needs of schools and districts.* Here, working together, district and school staff have numerous ways to distribute responsibility for important tasks such as instructional leadership. They can do so differently at elementary,

middle, and high school levels, if attention is paid to the level-specific meaning of these leadership roles.

3. *Informing leadership action with data and inquiry that relates to learning needs, performance, and conditions supporting learning.* Here, state and local leaders can do much more to prompt “cycles of inquiry” in schools, district central offices, and state agencies and as they do so encourage “cultures of inquiry” in these settings. Building robust data infrastructures and investing in efforts to help leaders develop “data literacy,” broadly construed, will help support these cycles of inquiry.
4. *Aligning people, money, and time as closely as possible with learning improvement priorities.* Because funds, staff, and time do not always bear a close relation to learning improvement priorities, there are many opportunities to bring them more into line, though doing so will often generate active political resistance or simply have to work against the weight of tradi-
- tional practice. Reallocating funds and staffing incentives to support high-needs schools is especially important, as is the configuration of time that will support joint planning and professional learning.
5. *Providing leaders with regular feedback about their work in relation to learning improvement priorities, combined with regular opportunities to learn about and from their work.* In a much more fine-grained way than annual assessments of student learning provide, leaders in a variety of school and district positions can benefit from assessment feedback, both formal and informal, that helps them know how to improve their practice. The goal of improving leadership practice is more likely to be achieved when the feedback is tied to opportunities for further professional learning in the context of daily work (e.g., through mentoring systems).
6. *Combining clear guidance for leaders with sufficient room to exercise discretion over matters related to learning improvement.* State and local

governing bodies and others who define what educational leaders are expected to do have substantial opportunities to communicate more explicitly the centrality of learning improvement in leaders' work. But the message needs to be accompanied by attention to the degree of discretion leaders need to carry out this responsibility.

These entry points are only illustrative, and they are not based on a complete and irrefutable evidence base about the development and ultimate effectiveness of learning-focused practice. There is much we have yet to learn about how to encourage and support these leadership practices, yet the logic is clear and compelling, and emerging evidence and images of possibility suggest that the logic is sound.

We close with a hope and a caution. The hope is that these ideas prompt further efforts to connect different leaders' efforts with one another, especially across levels in the system, in pursuit of a more coherent web of support for strong, learning-focused leadership in schools and school districts. The caution is that we avoid placing

unrealistic expectations on educational leaders, as if they were solely responsible for the learning of the nation's young people. And we also caution that partial solutions—that attend to one kind of supportive condition while ignoring another—may set the stage for leaders and the educators they lead to fail. Information without resources, new roles without authority to act, learning-focused leadership activity without feedback on it—all may fall short of the promise that lies in the attempt to renew and refocus leadership practice in education.

## Introduction

For most of the last century, views of what constituted high-quality educational leadership centered mainly on time-tested ideas about *managing* organizations, often through generic exhortations reminiscent of those found in private-sector management literature. Applying such conceptions to education arguably served a purpose in the development of schooling as an enterprise in the United States, fostering bureaucracies that efficiently made routine many of the conditions that surround teaching and learning.

But history is evolving, with profound implications for the exercise of educational leadership and how we think about it. To put the matter bluntly, the leadership we have had in public P–12 education is not helping us attain what matters most to the current constituents for public education: that all children, regardless of race, ethnicity, language background, or family circumstances, learn challenging content and habits of mind that equip them equitably for fulfilling intellectual, occupational, and civic futures. Though examples of inspired leadership in schools and school districts exist and always have, the basic premises on which many educational leaders' work is based and their typical enactment in schools have failed to produce education that routinely delivers on this foundational promise of schooling in the United States.

Finding ways to deliver on the central promise of schooling has properly preoccupied reformers for decades. Yet, despite two decades of state and federal education policy instituting learning standards and accountability measures, accompanied by rhetoric advocating a high-quality equitable education for all students, *the quality of educational leadership writ large is neither uniformly high, nor focused to a great extent on learning.*<sup>2</sup> This state of affairs is understandable. Expectations of leadership practice have often been unrealistically high, too low, or simply mixed and confusing. The variety of individuals who do or can share responsibility for the direction of schooling—state and local policymakers (including school board members), central office administrators (superintendents and others with prominent leadership roles), school principals or assistant principals, teacher leaders—have often been poorly prepared for their roles, and not well supported once in them.

This state of affairs can be changed. But change implies more than standards, accountability, and rhetoric. It means understanding in detail how leaders and leadership teams bring effective influence to bear on teaching and learning issues while developing coherent *conditions of support* for leadership practice that takes improvement of learning as its central goal. Drawing on what is known from existing research, theory, and practical experimentation, this paper identifies the activities and events that create such conditions. Our appraisal of the current educational landscape is that in many states and districts steps are being taken, or could be taken, to guide or support leaders more effectively. But often these efforts do not work in concert with each other nor do they emphasize learning as the central responsibility of educational leadership.

The report fulfills its purpose, first, by offering a scenario that reveals opportunities for exercising and for supporting leadership focused on learning improvement. Following that, we describe the nature of these opportunities in the exercise of learning-focused leadership, in efforts that seek to guide and support it, and in the policy environments that surround it. Next, we take a practical look at these same elements, noting the kinds of activities that leaders at different levels of the educational system can take to bring influence to bear more directly on learning. Finally, we revisit the initial scenario, characterizing what it might look like if efforts were more coherently directed to learning improvement agendas.

## Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support in Hector's School

Creating conditions that guide and support leaders who wish to improve the quality of learning implies clarity about what constitutes the actual work of learning-focused leadership. This is no small task, as the work is complex and takes place in an active social and political context which both enables and constrains what leaders can do. We start with an example of a school, similar to many, in which leadership as well as the support and guidance for leadership practice have yet to focus coherently on the improvement of learning. At the outset, the story is one of constraints and missed opportunities, but in it lie the seeds of more potent leadership and learning outcomes.

The scenario we sketch below builds on one we created in an earlier effort to identify how leadership can affect learning in schools and school districts.<sup>2</sup> The earlier scenario related the story of a young middle school student named Hector who was struggling in mathematics, and his teacher, Mr. G, who had little idea how to help Hector, let alone a diverse classroom of students, learn the beginning steps in algebra (see Appendix A). The school in which they worked served a student population divided almost equally between Latino and white youngsters, with two thirds of the student population coming from low-income homes. We used this vignette to surface central dimensions of the puzzle confronting school as well as district leaders, among them, the challenges associated with:

- “Seeing” what is happening in particular classrooms and across a school or district, as students and teachers interact over content,
- Helping struggling students and teachers gain mastery of challenging curricula,
- Creating incentives and supports for improving performance,
- Motivating and supporting the professional learning of both teachers and administrators, alongside student learning, and
- Addressing these matters equitably, so that all students have access to high-quality learning opportunities.

### **A Closer Look at Leadership in Hector's School**

To understand these leadership challenges more fully—and to visualize more specifically what it would mean to enable leaders to address them—we pay another visit to Hector's school.

#### **A Glimpse of Leadership in Hector's School**

The place in which Hector is struggling to learn algebra, and Mr. G is struggling to teach him, is itself considered a “struggling school.” This is the second year in which the school is unlikely to meet the Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) targets set for it by the district, and it wasn't even close in the first year. The new principal, Ms. W—the third principal in four years—is facing a puzzling staffing configuration, with seven new teachers, two of whom transferred in from other schools due to seniority arrangements, and five newly hired from teacher preparation programs. Three of the first-year teachers and one veteran transfer (who has “five years left” and no great love of what he is doing) are a big concern. Ms. W has been working overtime to get the “new kids” settled in their teaching roles and to minimize the damage that appears to be happening in the transferred teacher's classroom. Veteran teachers like Mr. G are off this principal's radar screen, and students like Hector, who are not a discipline problem, are hardly noticed, although his low performance in mathematics is one more data point in the less-than-stellar assessment results from the last spring's testing—and a further indication of the systematic differences between different groups of students.

Staff morale is low at present, and it has been low much of the year—since the November meeting at which last year's assessment results were reviewed. That meeting confirmed the stark disparities between achievement scores of Anglo and Latino youngsters, and left many teachers, especially the veterans, shaking their heads. An attempt to convene subject-area discussions around the assessment results went nowhere, and in the intervening months, staff went back to their individual classrooms, each resolving to “do what they could,” but without great hope that this year's assessment results would look much different. Mean-

while the drumbeat of accountability requirements, voiced both by district officials and pronouncements from the state, continues. No one is enjoying much the prospect of the upcoming April assessment period, least of all Ms. W, who senses what it may do to the already-low morale in the building. In moments when she could look ahead, the principal has been trying to figure out how to nudge a meager school discretionary budget to bring in an additional remediation specialist, but is finding that the relevant decisions about both money and people are largely out of her hands. As she is quickly recognizing, the task of “turning around” this school—an explicit charge from her superintendent—is not going to be easy.

This principal is not the only person with a formal leadership role in the school. Ms. W’s leadership team includes an assistant principal, who is fully occupied with disciplinary issues, team leaders responsible for the four academic teaching teams in the building, and individuals who convene subject-area conversations periodically. But Ms. W has found it harder than she expected to get regular substantive conversations going among these individuals about the quality of teaching and learning in the building. Truth to tell, such conversations are not her highest priority at the moment ...<sup>3</sup>

This scenario, perhaps familiar, begins to clarify the picture of Hector’s mathematics learning we painted in earlier documents. The attention and resources that would be needed for the school’s leadership team to notice Hector’s and his teacher’s needs, and to mobilize efforts to address them, have yet to be directed to these needs—and, by extension, to a wide range of student and teacher needs in this school building. Similarly, at the district level, recognizing, diagnosing, and addressing the nature of mathematics teaching for Latino or Anglo students is not an explicit priority, even though everyone would like the math test scores to go up, and the test score gap to go away. Instead, local leaders are preoccupied with immediate symptoms, aggregate measures that hint at deeper problems, while not getting at what lies beneath the surface, nor what might lead to different outcomes.

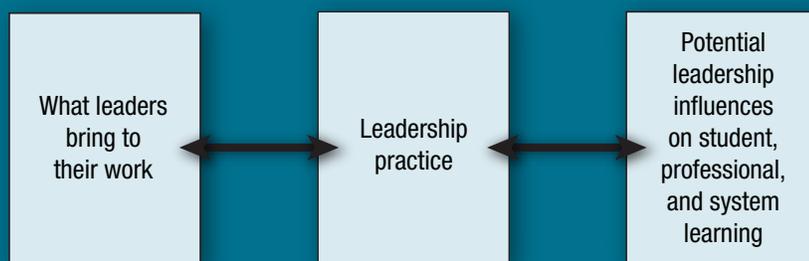
In this case, while leadership is rhetorically being exercised at state, district, and school level to improve the quality of education for all students, Hector included, these efforts risk missing the mark. Ms. W and her leadership team are currently preoccupied with problems other than the teaching and learning of mathematics. The district officials are hoping for a “quick fix,” even though they know that aggregate measures of achievement may not turn around so quickly. Perversely, by drawing attention to the gap in achievement between Latino and white students, the standards-oriented accountability system at work in this state and district may only solidify the impression that Hector and his Latino classmates “don’t have what it takes.”<sup>4</sup> And the more draconian steps of school take-over and reconstitution that lurk on the horizon offer even less appealing prospects for solving the problem.<sup>5</sup> Absent high-quality professional support, which neither the accountability system nor the district provides, it is possible that the state and district pressure will do little more than reinforce an unsatisfying status quo.

### The Lens of Learning-Focused Leadership

The first step in understanding how leaders might address the challenges in this school—and in the larger landscape of educational leadership and leadership support that surrounds it—begins with clarifying the work itself. The notion of “learning-focused leadership,” a concept we have described in detail elsewhere, offers a particular helpful lens for viewing the situation.<sup>6</sup> In the simplest terms, as represented in Figure 1,

this approach to leadership pays close attention to the connections between what educational leaders bring to their work—in particular, their knowledge and skills, their core values, their “theories of action,” and their images of

**Figure 1. The Exercise of Leadership in Relation to Learning**



this approach to leadership pays close attention to the connections between what educational leaders bring to their work—in particular, their knowledge and skills, their core values, their “theories of action,” and their images of

purpose and possibility—their leadership practice itself, and the potential connections between this practice and learning.

This way of thinking about educational leadership presumes that the attempt to improve student learning necessarily involves two other learning agendas: the professional learning of both teachers and administrators and what we have called *system learning*—which we define as “assembling and interpreting information about the system as a whole ... plus developing new policies, practices, and structures that alter and hopefully enhance performance.”<sup>7</sup> What is more, all three learning agendas are potential targets of leadership influence, and if approached coherently, can have reinforcing effects on the learning of young people and adults within an entire educational system—such as a school district or county school system, even a whole state.

Leaders are more likely to address these learning agendas, by this argument, if they have developed “theories of action” and related skill-sets that help them see and realize these connections between leadership and learning. Over time, with careful attention to the organization in which they work, the families and communities they serve, and the policies that impact to their work, these leaders can fashion learning improvement strategies that have good prospects of being achieved.

This set of ideas about leadership in schools and districts affords a starting place for considering what leaders like Ms. W and her district-level counterparts can do to bring influence to bear on the improvement of teaching and learning. Yet this framing leaves unspoken some important practical dimensions of how learning-focused leadership might be exercised, on the one hand, and what might guide or support it, on the other. In particular, this frame does not put leadership in Hector’s school—or any school or district—in the context of a larger set of *conditions that guide and support* learning-focused leadership.

## Enabling and Supporting Learning-focused Leadership

How, then, to go about creating conditions that can produce and serve leaders who would help Hector and his school? Various aspects of the exercise of educational leadership affecting Hector's education, or the ways that leadership is developed and supported, are potentially at play. By sharpening the lens of learning-focused leadership noted earlier, one can see three "layers" of activity that contribute to the current state of affairs and to possible alternative futures:

1. Specific leadership activities in schools and districts that enable educators to focus on, and mobilize efforts toward, the improvement of learning,
2. Related activities that seek to support or guide leadership practice toward greater attention to issues of learning and how to improve it, and
3. The creation of policy environments that affect how, and how well, leaders concentrate effort on learning priorities.

### Activities that Enable the Exercise of Learning-Focused Leadership

A first set of activities, undertaken by school and district leaders especially, directs attention and energy to the three learning agendas noted earlier. Of central importance within them are three kinds of leadership actions, as suggested by Figure 2:

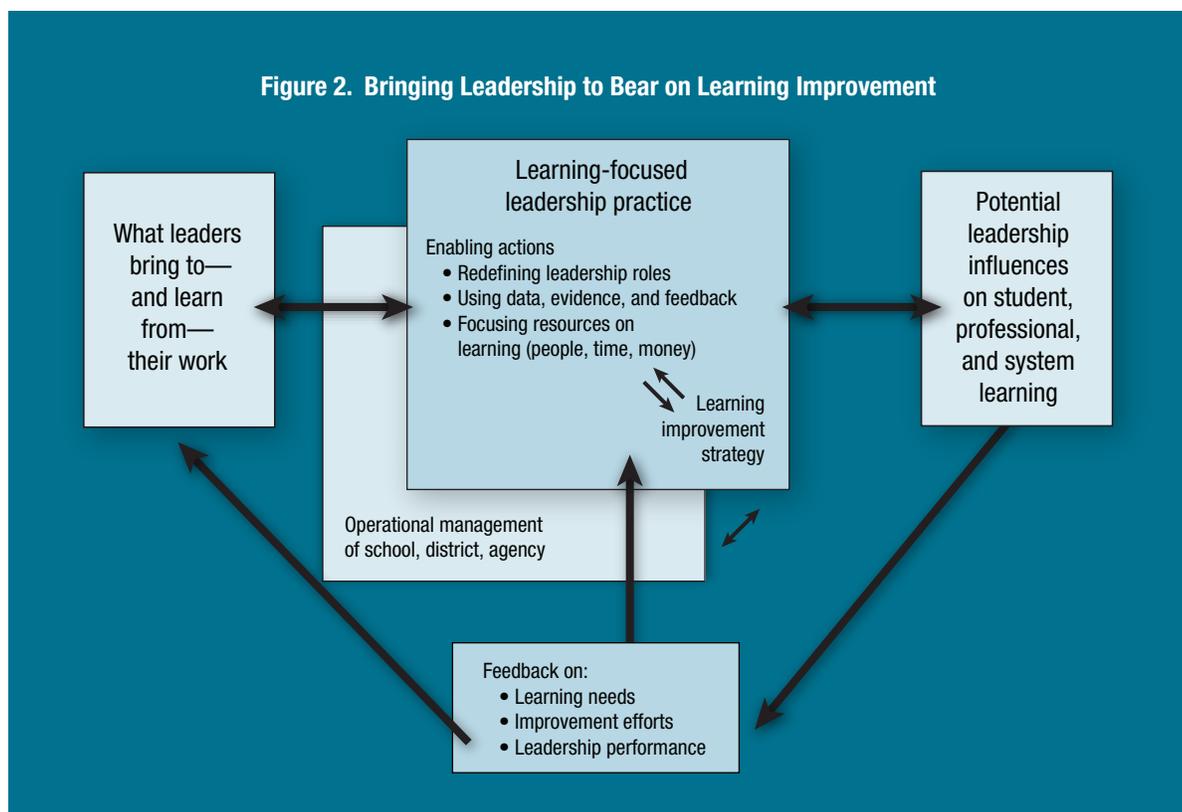
- *Redefining leadership roles and responsibilities:* Making or taking leadership roles that keep matters of learning improvement in the foreground as a central responsibility.
- *Using data, evidence, and feedback:* Generating, accessing, and using information that helps leaders pinpoint learning needs, imagine solutions, describe the operation of programs, and assess performance.

Of particular importance are various forms of *feedback* to leaders concerning their own and others' efforts to address learning agendas.

- *Focusing resources on learning*: Developing and allocating—which often means *reallocating*—resources that directly support the learning of students, teachers, and others.

These three kinds of leadership actions are essential components of the specific *learning improvement strategies* that leaders fashion to address a particular improvement goal, such as strengthening middle school mathematics teaching, introducing balanced literacy instruction in the elementary grades, or incorporating technology into classroom teaching at the high school.

Our prior work on learning-focused leadership gives clues about the specific kinds of things that leaders might be doing in pursuing such a learning improvement strategy.<sup>8</sup> In this regard, school and district leaders or leadership teams who are assuming a learning-focused approach to their work would be taking action in all or most of these areas:



- *Establishing a persistent, public focus on learning*—for example, by regularly visiting classrooms, initiating or guiding conversations about student learning, or communicating frequently about student learning to parents, the community, or the media.
- *Building professional communities in the school and district that place a high priority on learning*—for example, by creating structures for regular staff interaction about learning and teaching issues, and by modeling or facilitating participation in professional communities that value learning.
- *Engaging groups in the external environment that matter for learning*—for example, by creating occasions for regular interaction with parents about learning issues, forming partnerships with relevant neighborhood groups, and seeking out external resource groups that can offer relevant expertise.
- *Developing shared leadership strategies along a variety of pathways that can influence learning*—for example, by selecting “ripe pathways” of activity where significant leverage can be exerted on the pressing problems of practice, and by *distributing* leadership along these pathways.
- *Creating coherence among the various activities that are directed at learning improvement*—for example, by linking disparate activities to common commitments, by making data widely available on a variety of school programs, or by aligning resources across schools or units within the school.

While the specific choices about activity in and across each of these areas will vary with the context, certain dynamics of leadership roles, information use, and resource allocation practices are likely to be common to all. We comment on each of these below.

*Redefining leadership roles and responsibilities.*<sup>9</sup> Leaders in formal or informal leadership roles operate from some understanding of what they are expected or encouraged to do. When these expectations—their own or others’—prioritize learning improvement in relation to other aspects of their roles (such as operational management of a school or district), then they are more

likely to make this aspect of their work more central. But for many, doing so represents a substantial role shift. School leaders' roles, for example, have long been wide-ranging, embracing everything from facilities management and community relations to personnel management and strategic planning.<sup>10</sup> The imperative to spend more time and energy on matters related to teaching and learning can be experienced as adding to an already full plate. Whether constructed by the leaders themselves, or defined by others and subsequently taken, learning-focused leadership roles are likely to embrace a wide range of responsibilities, more than can be comfortably managed by a single individual. In this regard, schools are likely to pursue more distributed arrangements, especially for instructional leadership, whereby various individuals besides the principal (e.g., teacher leaders, coaches, department heads, and team leaders) assume shared responsibility for the leadership of learning. A corresponding distribution of responsibilities can occur at the district central office level.

*Using data, evidence, and feedback.*<sup>11</sup> Given roles that emphasize learning improvement, leaders and leadership teams are likely to seek out information of all kinds that will help them locate and define learning-related problems, consider options, and assess whether they are making progress toward solutions. At a minimum, data-informed leadership of this sort features feedback on learning needs and current organizational performance as a basic input to decisions and improvement strategies. Making data integral to leadership practice may also involve the assessment of leadership performance itself, through a variety of means that can be aligned with an emphasis on learning improvement, even though many current assessment systems do not pay much attention to learning.<sup>12</sup>

Educational leaders are not all equally ready for this aspect of their practice. How leaders gather or generate information and how they analyze and use it reflects their own comfort with data, as well as their access to it. The degree of support for data-informed practice among their colleagues reflects the presence of a “culture of inquiry” in the school, district, or agency. This aspect of leadership practice also involves an important shift—from a more intuitive, unreflective, or individualized approach to the leadership challenges in schooling to one in which colleagues work together to figure out how to address these challenges.

*Focusing resources on learning priorities.*<sup>13</sup> Leadership strategies aimed at learning improvement imply the allocation, reallocation, and alignment of

resources (people, time, and money) to pursue improvement goals. Often the attempt to lead for learning raises deep and troubling questions about the equity of current allocations. In such instances, reallocation is more easily said than done when resources are scarce and when existing allocations and commitments emphasize other matters. Furthermore, it may not be clear exactly what funding, time, or other valued resources are being invested in, nor how well these resources are being used (good data may be helpful here). Especially with human resources, which are arguably the most central resources an educational leader has to work with, the real issue may have as much to do with the development of the resource (e.g., in strengthening the teaching capabilities of a hard-to-staff school) as with its allocation or distribution.

These three—leadership roles, information use, and resource (re)allocation practices—work together in potentially powerful ways. As is beginning to emerge from descriptive research on high-performing schools and districts, a basic “inquiry and action cycle” is often in place, whereby leaders and their colleagues (e.g., a principal, several teacher leaders, and an in-house staff developer in a school; a task force connected to the superintendent’s cabinet at the district central office) ask questions about the depth or scope of learning needs, generate and interpret information about those needs, and frame the challenges in potentially productive ways.<sup>14</sup> Subsequent actions based on this framing identify resources of various kinds, and generally seek to redirect these resources to aspects of the learning improvement challenge that the leadership team has identified, with consequent adjustments in the strategy and the ways the challenges are understood. The whole cycle of activity presumes that the participants assume a collective leadership role in which learning improvement—and learning how to make it happen—is the central goal. Needless to say, schools and districts differ greatly in their capacity to engage in this learning, often reflecting internal factors and external conditions.

*Reconsidering the exercise of leadership in Hector’s school.* Considering the roles leaders play, their resource allocation practices, and their use of information, in relation to identified or implied learning needs, sheds light on what is or could be going on in Hector’s school. Though experienced in some respects, Ms. W, the new principal of this school, is also new to the task of “turning around” a struggling school. And though it is very early in her tenure at this school, it is not too soon to wonder:

- Whether Ms. W and other school leaders have developed and shared an explicit theory of action for taking on this complex task,
- How and whether their experience in formal preparation programs (Ms. W and her assistant principal have attained formal administrative credentials) or other, less formal professional development related to school reform matters (there has not been much of this) has equipped them for the work, and
- Whether Ms. W or her colleagues think of their own professional learning, not to mention that of their staff, as a potential target of their efforts to address the school’s poor performance.

It is probably safe to say that the leaders in this school have yet to visualize a set of strategic activities that would engage the whole school staff in support of learning improvement, or even a set of learning targets that go beyond the student test scores with which so many are preoccupied. Such a vision might help her to align her staffing and other resources more purposefully with learning improvement priorities. More familiarity with the basic notion of learning-focused leadership might prompt Ms. W to consider what information would allow her and her staff to inquire into the performance of the school more deeply than their surface knowledge of test score performance, and whether this information was readily available or could be generated quickly. As she did so, she would have begun a process of redefining her role within the school as a proactive problem-solver rather than crisis-manager, as learner and leader all at once.

### **State and Local Activities that Seek to Support and Improve Leadership Practice**

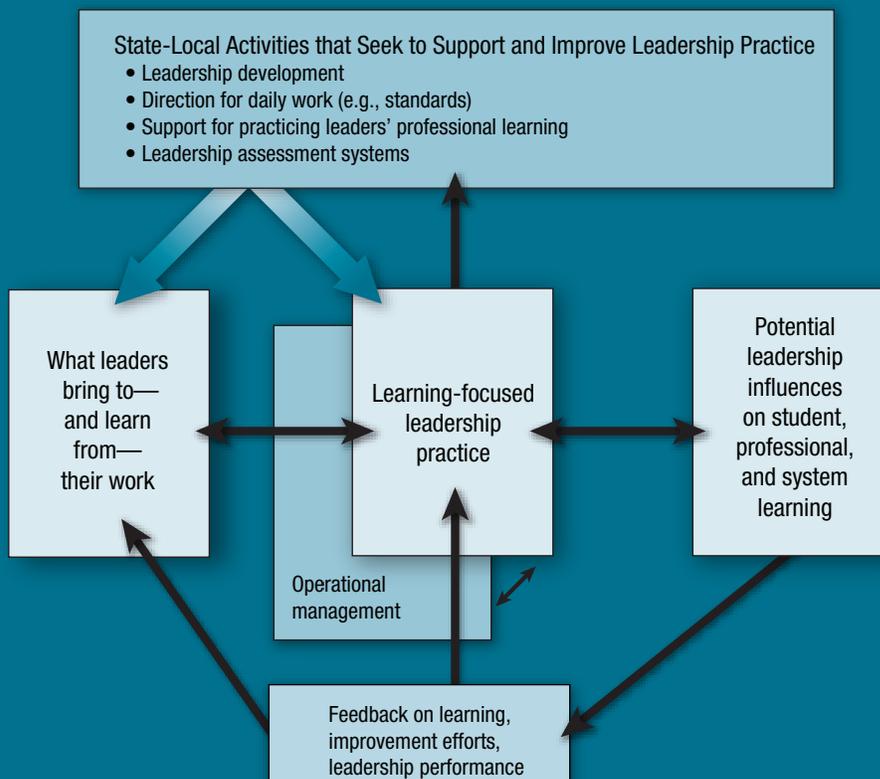
A different set of activities, one step removed from the immediate exercise of leadership in Hector’s school, has equally profound consequences for the prospects of addressing Hector’s learning of math, Mr. G’s math teaching, and Ms. W’s capacity to guide or support teaching and learning. These activities aim instead at leadership practice itself—in this instance, at shaping the ways that Ms. W and her leadership team members go about their daily work. As displayed in Figure 3, these activities at district and state levels include

- *Activities to develop future leadership capacity:* Efforts mounted as part of formal preparation programs, recruitment initiatives, or

“homegrown” leadership development arrangements inside school districts, to identify and nurture the next generation of teacher leaders, school administrators, district officials, instructional improvement coaches, or an agency’s leadership cadre.

- *Activities that provide direction or models for leaders’ daily work:* Explicit communication of expectations for leaders’ work, through such means as widely promulgated leadership standards to leadership position specifications or supervisory expectations.
- *Support for the ongoing professional learning of practicing leaders:* Arrangements of many kinds, from individual mentoring or coaching to formal sessions aimed at teaching groups or teams of leaders new things about their work.

**Figure 3. Activities that Seek to Support and Improve Leadership Practice**



- *Leadership assessment systems:* Arrangements for generating evaluative data about leadership performance, either as formative guidance for the leaders' growth or summative judgments about their accomplishments and capacity.

In principle, these four sets of activities can have much to do with how schools and school systems are led and how that leadership might evolve. Even though, in practice, relatively little may be done to take advantage of them or to connect them with one another, *these activities comprise a potentially powerful set of conditions for guiding and supporting learning-focused leadership practice.*

This second set of leadership support activities can often be intimately connected to the first. Consider, for example, district instructional reform initiatives that target the development of principals' instructional leadership capacity as a central piece of a strategy for improving teaching and learning.<sup>15</sup> In such instances, the medium for improving leadership practice is immersion in the problem of teaching and learning itself. In the view of some observers, such an immersion is the only way to ensure that leaders at all levels of the system gain enough expertise and maintain sufficient "presence" in instructional reform matters to make a difference in the quality of teaching. In such instances, leaders learn by doing and by receiving various degrees of guidance as they do so.

A closer look at these four components of leadership support demonstrates how, separately and together, they might exert influence on leaders to undertake learning improvement agendas.

*Development of aspiring leaders for formal and informal, learning-focused roles.*<sup>16</sup> Leaders move into leadership roles, both formal and informal, through a series of state and local actions that determine who exercises leadership and what they are supposed to know for this purpose. For one thing, recruitment processes, formal preparation, and (re)certification, along with selection, hiring, and assignment arrangements, bring particular individuals into administrative positions in school and district settings. Often reflecting some set of leadership standards, the criteria that operate in these developmental processes may highlight aspects of leadership work, roles, and responsibilities that concern learning improvement.<sup>17</sup> A similar, though less formalized set of processes tends to operate in the development of teacher leaders and other

individuals who assume non-administrative leadership positions, with parallel implications for the distributed exercise of learning-focused leadership.

*Directing leaders' daily work toward learning improvement.* Various actions at state and local levels offer specific direction to practicing leaders and leadership teams. For one thing, explicit leadership standards, increasingly embraced by both states and districts, provide broad statements of desirable practice for leaders.<sup>18</sup> Specific expectations appear in hiring agreements, job descriptions, and collective bargaining contracts, not to mention the directives that occur in the process of leadership supervision (where this function is conceived of as organizational control). In principle, the expectations for leadership practice from all these sources can (though they generally don't) emphasize learning improvement as a central—indeed, *the* central—business of leaders' daily work.

*Support for the ongoing professional learning of practicing leaders.* Given the wide range of demands on contemporary educational leaders, no practicing leader could learn everything he or she needed to know before taking on such roles. While joining forces in distributed leadership arrangements may appear to mitigate this problem, even teams of leaders have lots to learn about effective collective practice aimed at learning improvement.<sup>19</sup> The sources of support for ongoing professional learning—among them, mentoring arrangements, professional development of various kinds, the formative aspects of leadership supervision (where this function is conceived as a supportive activity), feedback from leadership assessment systems (if conceived of as serving a formative purpose), and interactions with networks of peers—take on a great deal of importance. To the extent that these sources offer concrete help with frameworks and techniques for pursuing learning improvement goals, they may encourage or equip many leaders to assume a more learning-focused approach to leadership.

*Assessment of leadership practice.*<sup>20</sup> Without some form of feedback on their work, leaders and leadership teams—not to mention their supervisors or others who oversee leadership practice—are left guessing about the actual effects of leaders' efforts and whether these have anything to do with learning improvement. While astute leaders are likely to be gathering informal feedback all the time, the development of formal leadership assessment systems can offer a systematic way to gauge what leadership activities accomplish and how they might be improved. Traditionally, narrowly conceived performance

evaluation approaches have tended to rate practicing leaders on leadership traits, parents' complaints, or aggregate achievement scores for the school or district. Yet as the sophistication of such systems grows, so does their potential application to the learning-related aspects of leadership.<sup>21</sup> Coupled with an explicit intention to inform leaders' own efforts, such systems are an important complement to the "inquiry and action cycle" described earlier.

Leadership development (both preservice and inservice), direction, support, and assessment are closely related to one another—at least they can be—if leaders at state and local levels try to maximize the synergies among them. Linking leadership standards that explicitly target learning improvement to leadership assessment systems, for example, represents one potentially powerful way that leaders in the state-local system of schooling can begin to encourage more connections between leadership practice and learning outcomes. Coupled with job descriptions that articulate a leader's responsibilities for student, professional, and system learning, and contractual agreements or other ways of codifying and communicating intentions for leaders' work, standards and assessments can begin to weave a reinforcing web of support for learning-focused leadership practice.

*Reconsidering support for improving leadership practice in and around Hector's school.* In principle, what is done to develop, direct, support, and assess leadership comes from many sources—the district central office and board, the state education agency, professional associations, local universities, and external resource organizations, to name a few of the most obvious sources. All of these interact with one another in ways that directly affect whether and how leaders like Ms. W or other leaders in Hector's school focus on improving learning. Once again, we can ask: What was the character of available leadership development opportunities, either in the pipeline that brought Ms. W and her assistant principal to their positions or in their vicinity as they worked in school administrative roles? How much, if at all, did these opportunities sensitize them or other potential leaders to learning-related issues? Did the district central office visualize a role for itself in increasing the leadership capacity of the school? In what ways were leadership standards considered (if at all) by state and local policymakers and, if so, did these standards explicitly highlight the leaders' responsibilities for learning improvement?

In the case of Hector’s school, the answers to these questions are likely to underscore missed opportunities more than roads taken. The principal preparation program in a nearby university which Ms. W attended, for one thing, did little to prepare her for the linguistic diversity her school now faces, nor for using data to pinpoint student learning needs or the school’s progress in meeting these needs. While she had a mentoring relationship with a retired principal during her first principalship six years ago, it was short-lived and it concentrated primarily on the techniques of smooth management of the school building, not on what it meant to concentrate on instructional leadership in a time of high accountability. This district’s concern has long been with the induction of new principals more than the support of more experienced ones. These and other features of this scene reflect a relatively weak, and sometimes nonexistent, system of support for the improvement of leadership practice.

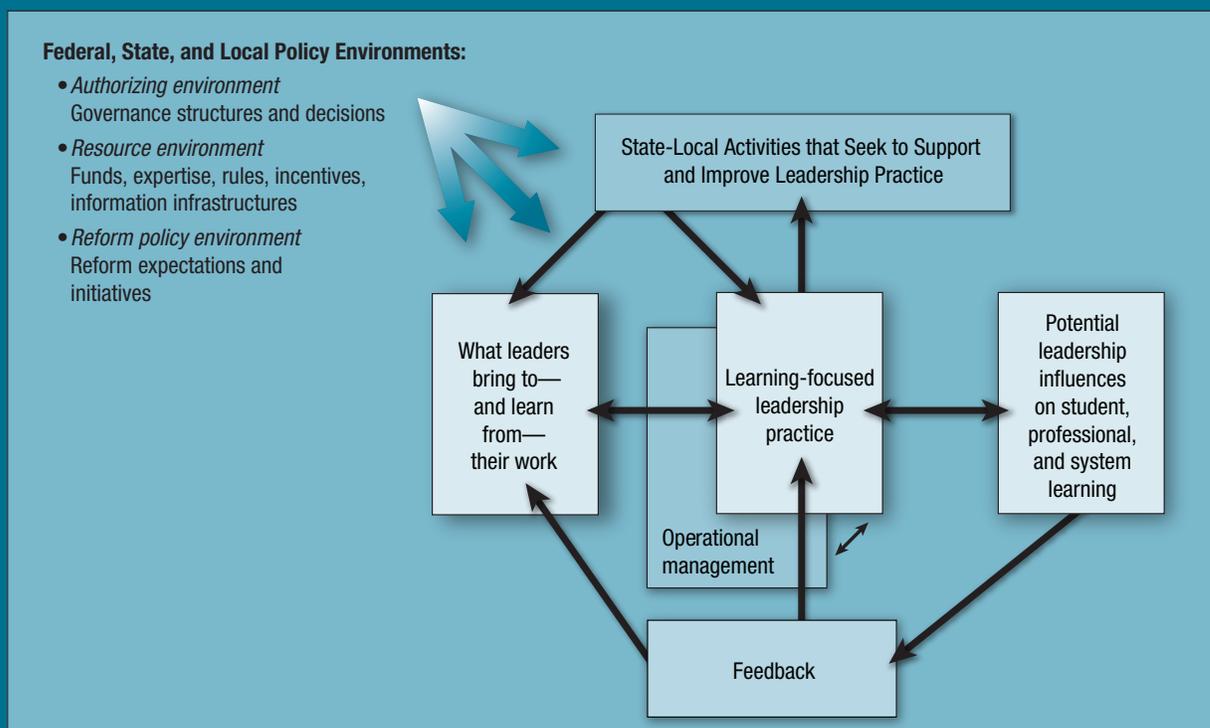
### **Policy Environments that Affect Leadership and Leadership Support**

Beyond what is done to develop, direct, support, or assess leadership practice are other forces and conditions in the policy environment of schools that have substantial influence on leaders’ work. Three environments—or more precisely, dimensions of the federal, state, and local policy environment—displayed in Figure 4, have important implications for whether, and how, school or district leaders focus on learning improvement:

- *The authorizing environment*, generated by governance arrangements (at all levels), collective bargaining and the contractual agreements it produces, and the interaction among educational stakeholders within and around these arrangements.
- *The resource environment*, including the sources of funds and human resources, and also the infrastructure for gathering information on and for the schools, as well as rules governing the use of these resources.
- *The reform policy environment*, comprising the forces and conditions created by state and federal policies aimed at enhancing the quality of schooling.

While these environments may seem static from the vantage point of a school or district leader, they are in fact dynamic and continually *created*

Figure 4. Policy Environments that Affect Leadership and Leadership Support



through intentional actions by leaders and policymakers, as well as by the interaction among many groups, who may or may not agree with one another, all within a broad context of economic, political, and social conditions. In ways that are both overt and subtle, they have great effect on the leaders' desire and ability to pursue learning improvement agendas.

*Authorizing environment.*<sup>22</sup> The structure of governing bodies (e.g., boards of education, professional standards boards) and governance processes at state and local levels set the stage for the work of leaders in schools and districts by representing the pluralistic interests of the public in decisions that govern the affairs of schools. These decisions often translate into specific expectations for leaders' work, as do the results of collective bargaining between school districts and associations representing teachers and administrators. Along with the broader interplay among stakeholder groups—especially those representing the business community and advocacy interests—groups that govern public education can shape many aspects of the leaders' work. Thus, governing bodies may weigh in on the aspects of learning improvement

that count the most (e.g., test scores?), the roles that leaders are expected to play (e.g., compliance monitors or entrepreneurs?), and how much discretion leaders in different positions are supposed to exercise (e.g., authority over budget at the school level?).

*Resource environment.*<sup>23</sup> In addition to revenue from formula and categorical funds or other revenue sources such as philanthropy, the world around the school yields a variety of human and informational resources, all of which can affect the capacity of school leaders to focus effort on learning improvement. Most obviously, funding is in chronic short supply in many of the school districts that serve the most challenging student populations, posing for school and district leaders the challenge of either making do with less than they need or seeking new revenue sources. But as important as the availability of these resources, which varies across settings and time, are the rules that govern access to and use of resources. Here, the evolution of categorical program rules is a case in point, posing for school and district leaders both a constraint and an opportunity affecting instructional services for educationally disadvantaged youngsters. The timing of state-level budgetary information is another feature of the resource environment that affects what leaders can do to plan coherently for local programs. To an extent, these matters (accounting rules, budgetary guidelines) arise in response to political or bureaucratic imperatives, with little regard for their implications for learning improvement efforts. Yet policymakers can make incremental adjustments in the flow of resources or guidance for their use that take learning improvement into account (e.g., through salary incentives to encourage teachers to work in hard-to-staff schools).

*Reform policy environment.* Finally, state and federal standards-based reform policies are a central fact of life for leaders at both the school and district level. By defining learning standards and setting expectations for instruction, creating ways to measure progress toward these standards, and assigning consequences to assessment results, policies such as No Child Left Behind and its counterparts at the state level pervade the daily practice of school and district leadership. Leaders ignore these matters at their peril. Nominally, such policies are often about learning improvement and equity, and in that sense set the stage for learning-focused leadership practice, yet their implementation can be rigid at times, or punitive, and ultimately counterproductive.<sup>24</sup> In short, blind or unthinking adherence to the dictates of standards-

based reform policies may not help leaders serve the specific learning needs of the school's or district's population.

The three policy environments establish basic conditions under which the practice of learning-focused leadership and efforts to guide or support it might take place. While the environments are generally not coordinated with one another in an intentional or rational way, some degree of linkage may be possible. Reform policies, for example, often seek to affect the level or nature of resources invested in the schools, as well as determining rules or incentives affecting the use of resources, and even the allocation of authority to different stakeholders or participants in reform.

*Reconsidering policy environments affecting leadership practice in and around Hector's school.* Attending to authorizing, resource, and reform policy environments adds another way of understanding how leadership in Hector's school and district might be developed, exercised, and supported. Ms. W is quite mindful of these environments in some respects—the specter of annual AYP calculations, the availability of qualified teachers in the district's hiring or transfer pool, and the availability of discretionary money for additional remedial staff, for example, are visible preoccupations. The availability of certain fiscal and human resources, as well, has something to do with how and whether Ms. W addresses her school's improvement needs. And the timing and form of student assessment data, to mention only one aspect of the state and local data infrastructure, leaves much to be desired from the principal's point of view: The data with which she is flooded come in forms that are untimely and hard to query. In short, it is not obvious that state and district leaders have orchestrated informational resources in ways that would help Ms. W focus effort on learning improvement.

## What States, Districts, and Schools Do to Enable and Support Learning-Focused Leadership

The case of leadership in Hector’s school reminds us that a series of important, interacting elements relate to the prospects for learning-focused leadership to be exercised in a school. *Taken together, these elements and their relation to one another constitute both a vital set of conditions under which leadership is exercised and the means for bringing leadership to exert more constructive influence on student, professional, and system learning.* The overarching concern for a given state-local educational system, then, is whether and how coherently these elements can be linked to one another. The pressing concern for individuals and groups within that system is to understand the implications of their own actions for others’, and vice versa, especially across levels in the system. They do so both to align efforts, where it makes sense to do so, or to proceed in a more “adaptive” way when alignment makes little sense or is politically infeasible, given the natural incoherence of most educational systems.

To understand the prospects for such coherence or adaptive behavior, we need to look more specifically at what actors at different levels of the educational system might do to pursue a learning improvement agenda, and how their actions might interact with one another. We do so by considering once again the three layers of activity—the exercise of leadership aimed directly at the improvement of learning in classrooms, activities aimed at supporting and improving leadership practice, and activities within the relevant policy environments—to see what these layers would mean for educators or others located at the state, district, and school level.

### How Leadership Roles, Resources, and Information Enable Learning Improvement

In this section we take a closer look at how leaders assume (or create) leadership roles that are focused on learning, align resources with learning improvement priorities, and use information to guide learning-focused actions. What specific activities in these realms enable leaders to pursue coherent leadership activity at school and district levels? (While the state is also a potential player

in these matters, it exerts its influence primarily through the other two layers of leadership activity, which will be explained later.)

In schools or districts, various leadership actions and conditions, such as those highlighted in Figure 5, allow school leaders to assume or create roles that are focused on learning improvement. The entries in the table are selective rather than exhaustive; they illustrate common and realizable activity for leaders at each level. The arrows in the table convey that the activities have implications for one another, and can be intentionally connected or aligned. Leaders at different levels, or different positions within a level, will find it difficult to act in isolation from one another. Instead, if their goal is to focus energy on the improvement of learning, they are more likely to engage each other across levels and over time, as they address matters related to leadership roles, information use, or resource allocation.

Thus, for school leaders to assign others to take on school management roles to free up their own time for instructional leadership may require permission or other enabling actions at the district level. Such is the case in the School Activities Management (SAM) program, currently underway in Louisville, KY, and several other sites, in which school leadership roles have been formally differentiated into a principal's position, mainly concerned with instructional improvement, and a school management position, mainly concerned with operational, noninstructional matters.<sup>25</sup> The SAM example illustrates one other essential idea, signaled by the horizontal arrows in the table. One area of leadership activity, e.g., role differentiation to maximize leaders' instructional leadership time, implies others, such as the reallocation of funds or human resources necessary to create the new school management positions.<sup>26</sup>

These interconnections across levels and areas of leadership activity are illustrated by a different example, a district that created new management structures aimed at encouraging the use of data in decision making:

**Figure 5. Illustrative Activities that Enable School and District Leaders to Focus on Learning Improvement**

Leadership activity...	Assuming or creating learning-focused leadership roles 	Aligning resources with learning priorities 	Using information to assess needs, fashion strategies, and assess progress
<p>... in schools</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assigning others to take on school management so principals have more time for instructional leadership</li> <li>Scheduling daily blocks of time in classrooms observing and working with teachers</li> <li>Establishing teams within the school who take on instructional leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investing discretionary funds in coaching resources</li> <li>Reallocating time so that teachers can work together on instructional planning</li> <li>Assigning experienced and accomplished teachers to work with classes that have the most needy students</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Disaggregating student performance, attendance, and disciplinary data to pinpoint areas of need</li> <li>Setting up systems for teachers to examine student work in relation to grade-level expectations and state standards</li> <li>Modeling the formative assessment of instruction with walk-throughs</li> </ul>
<p>... in districts</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Granting school leaders authority over hiring (e.g., through school board action) to enable selection of teachers who “fit” with the school’s learning agenda</li> <li>Creating the means for school leaders to differentiate their roles according to the level, size, and needs of their schools, in service of identified learning goals</li> <li>Creating managerial support roles to remove some aspects of the routine work of the principalship and enable more of a learning focus</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating monetary or added support incentives that encourage teachers to seek placements in struggling schools</li> <li>Reallocating resources to particular learning improvement priorities (e.g., the education of ELL students)</li> <li>Aligning the curriculum renewal cycle with state learning standards</li> <li>Making teacher professional development, linked to identified learning agendas, a resource priority</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Providing analytic expertise to schools, on request, to facilitate data-informed instructional planning</li> <li>Conducting formative reviews of district instructional initiatives</li> <li>Prompting and participating in instructionally focused walkthroughs</li> <li>Creating or locating informational tools for school leaders</li> </ul>

### Data-Informed, Distributed Leadership at the District and School Level

[The district designed and supported a] school improvement planning process, teacher-led action research, administrative monitoring of practice, and program evaluation. Under the school improvement process, for example, schools must create Student Focused Action Teams (SFATs) for areas that the data reveal to be problematic. Staff on these teams must conduct research on the problem, collect data, and develop a work plan. The district also requires each school to select at least one in-house data analyst and pays the analyst(s) a stipend. The district's professional development division, in conjunction with a local university, provides these people with three years of data analysis training. Finally, the superintendent offers additional support and uses informal incentives to focus schools' attention on data. For example, although neither the state nor the district identifies low-performing schools, the superintendent assigns district staff to schools performing poorly on the state assessment to help with improvement planning. A principal has also been removed from one of these sites ...

The principal and chair of the school improvement team in another Title I school have enthusiastically embraced the data-oriented philosophy. Although new district policy does not mandate full staff involvement, this principal requires all of his teachers to be involved in one of the SFATs in order to nurture a professional community committed to data and research. In addition, the school moves beyond the analysis of student achievement data and other information collected by local or state officials to research its own problems and develop solutions ...<sup>27</sup>

Here, a data-informed school improvement planning process is set in motion by district actions that direct energy and effort to areas where the school's performance is low, as defined by school- or district-supplied data. The district allocates resources to this purpose, and the action teams created in each school are asked to develop work plans, which may encourage further (re)allocation of resources to pursue the learning improvement agendas that arise. The whole process implies a new conception of the principal's role, one that includes guiding data-based planning; it may also create opportunities for teachers to assume

leadership in conjunction with the planning teams (unless team members treat the SFATs as an exercise in compliance rather than leadership).

The strategy embraces activity at two levels of the system, which introduces the issue of variability across schools. In schools where principals have already visualized such a role for themselves and have built a culture of inquiry among their staff, this new requirement will be easily met. In other schools, it will take time and significant new learning on the part of all participants, especially the principal, to see how to make the process work.

In these and other instances, the different areas of leadership activity are related to each other in predictable ways:

- *Data use and the leaders' role.* To make extensive use of learning-related data in district- or school-based planning, leaders who guide this activity must visualize this as part of their roles, whether they are administrators or teachers who act in a leadership capacity. Explicit expectations for the work of leaders and leadership teams in this regard are likely to help them engage in such work.
- *Resource (re)allocation and data use.* Aligning resources with learning improvement implies good data about current resource use and availability, potential needs, and alternatives for deployment. Though far from exact science, data concerning funds, time, and staffing can help leaders pinpoint where the resources are needed the most.
- *Resource (re)allocation, leaders' roles, and the authority to act.* Especially at the school level, leaders need to be granted sufficient control over relevant resources, not to mention access to the resources themselves, to make it possible to address significant learning improvement challenges, once those have been identified, and a coherent theory of action developed.

The discussion here does not begin to exhaust the possibilities for coherently linked leadership activities, within and across levels, to influence the quality of student, professional, or system learning. (Readers may explore these matters further in the reports on which this document is based.)<sup>28</sup> And, in particular, the discussion does not yet illuminate the various possible supports for leadership practice itself. To visualize the events, conditions, and activities that might encourage leaders to focus attention effectively on learn-

ing improvement in these or other ways, we need to widen the focus to include attempts by states and districts, universities, professional associations, and external support organizations to guide and support leadership practice.

### **How States and Districts Guide and Support Leadership Practice**

Schools, districts, states, and other institutions (like universities or regional education units) are all potentially implicated in the development, direction, support, and assessment of leadership. All focus explicitly on leadership practice, though they may also aim simultaneously at learning improvement issues. Consider what is happening in the following district:

#### **A District Leadership Development and Support System**

The superintendent of a district serving a suburban population of approximately 16,000 students has invested in the development of his leadership cadre extensively over the ten years of his tenure. First, he personally selects individuals who he believes have leadership potential and then nurtures their growth into leadership roles. Having developed a relationship with a local university, he encourages and partially funds these individuals' participation in a principal preparation program, and subsequently (for those he sees as having central office potential) to a doctoral program emphasizing system-level leadership roles. His leadership development efforts are not restricted to school and district administrators. Over the past five years he has aggressively supported teachers' attempts to attain National Board Certification, and by now well over 80 of his teachers have done so and are engaged in a variety of teacher leadership activities. Reflecting a philosophy that emphasizes the principal's role in instructional leadership, he mandates that they spend two hours a day or more in classrooms and conduct at least 90 observation and feedback cycles in a school year, far more than the traditional once-a-year supervisory evaluation of teachers' work. This radical alteration of the principal's job description is coupled with several forms of ongoing professional development for the school leaders, some of it achieved through support for an active peer network among members of the principal cadre and some of it through formal

workshops and continuing education, once again guided by the university. An informal leadership evaluation system generates regular feedback to the principal cadre regarding their work. Overarching all of these activities is a clear theory of action concerning the improvement of teaching and learning, built around the development of an ambitious, uniform curriculum for the district, and coupled with proactive forms of professional development for all involved.<sup>29</sup>

This brief vignette highlights one way of connecting leadership development efforts, directives that define (instructional) school leadership roles, opportunities to get feedback on leadership practice, and support for ongoing professional development of leaders. These activities create an integrated and coherent set of conditions guiding leadership practice within the district. Other ways of doing so could also be imagined, less tied to a single curriculum specified by the district office. However configured, the set of supportive conditions guide leaders to put energy into learning improvement, and as they do so, to assume a different kind of school leadership role, consider relevant data, and redirect time and human resources.

The example above highlights the relationship between a district and schools, and features activities set in motion by the district's leader. The state can also be a consequential player in the leadership support system, for example, through policies, incentives, the bully pulpit, standards development, certification guidelines, licensure assessments, and the investment of resources in leadership support, as suggested in Figure 6. Furthermore, these different dimensions of state leadership support activity are potentially linked to one another. Not all of the activities would be feasible or desirable in a given state, but they represent possibilities that state policymakers might consider. Beyond regulating programs in the pipeline preparing individuals for formal leadership positions, which all states do, states could undertake a wider array of actions to prompt or encourage local efforts to support current leadership practice. And in cases such as the district described above, where an elaborate array of leadership support activities is already in place, state activity in this realm could have a validating or reinforcing effect.

**Figure 6. Illustrative Activities at the State Level that Target the Improvement of Leadership Practice**

Dimension of the leadership support system	Illustrative activities by state actors (e. g., legislatures, agency policymakers, professional associations)
Development of aspiring leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reconsidering accreditation standards for programs that prepare educational leaders, to emphasize learning improvement</li> <li>• Creating further leadership categories (e.g., Master Principal) in a continuum of growth stages for practicing leaders</li> <li>• Linking “leadership pipeline” programs to explicit standards for leadership practice that emphasize learning improvement</li> <li>• Ensuring that licensure standards are keyed to learning improvement goals</li> </ul>
Direction of leaders’ daily work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adopting, adapting, or developing explicit leadership standards that highlight learning improvement</li> <li>• Publicly promoting instructional leadership and related aspects of learning-focused leadership as a central responsibility of local educational leaders</li> </ul>
Support for leaders’ ongoing professional learning	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Enabling local leadership induction or mentoring programs, parallel to teacher induction and mentoring</li> <li>• Investing state dollars in periodic professional development for practicing leaders (e.g., to promote instructional leadership)</li> </ul>
Assessment of leadership performance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating leadership assessment systems keyed to learning improvement and mandating their use by districts and schools</li> <li>• Establishing criteria for locally developed leadership assessment systems</li> <li>• Including leadership assessment data of some kind in accountability system (e.g., school “report cards”)</li> <li>• Linking leadership assessment to explicit standards for leadership practice</li> </ul>

Looking across levels in the leadership support system, one can see a number of ways that state and local efforts can stimulate or reinforce each other. For example:

- *Conscious attention to the leadership pipeline.* Starting with teacher leadership roles and onward through roles with ever-widening leadership responsibilities, steps can be taken to broaden the definition of leadership and who can exercise it, identify individuals who have potential to fill newly conceived leadership roles (both formal and informal), select individuals who might assume these roles, and create staged systems of leadership development that help individuals continually expand their horizons. Here, state-level requirements and resources interact with district efforts to develop the pipeline.

- *Specification of leaders' work.* Leaders occupying a variety of formal and informal leadership positions, as well as leadership teams, can benefit from explicit statements of desirable practice (such as leadership standards offer) and clear expectations for what they are to accomplish (as in job descriptions and performance goals). Here state standards may stimulate districts to adopt these standards and generate their own, while offering general guidelines for more specific local formulations of leaders' work.
- *Focused attention to leaders' learning, often guided by explicit teaching or coaching* to help them master aspects of their work. This happens in a variety of ways and implicates actors at various levels, among them, peers in parallel administrative roles, individuals in the district central office, state training specialists, and external collaborators. State and local resources can combine to support such coaching systems.
- *Creation and use of leadership assessment and feedback systems.* Assessment systems can help pinpoint where leaders or leadership teams could improve their work. The existence of such systems augments the kinds of information potentially available to leaders for decision making about school and district programs, while at the same time informing questions of administrator assignment, professional development, compensation, and the like. States can be instrumental in underwriting the substantial costs of developing valid assessment systems and encouraging their use, while districts fine-tune or adapt these systems to their own local needs.

Once again, the different areas of leadership support activity have many potential connections with one another. Consider the intricately linked activities that support leaders' professional learning—and ultimately their work with teachers or administrative subordinates—in a district described below that serves a diverse and underperforming urban student population of 16,000. In this setting, in response to the district's efforts to develop the instructional support capabilities of its leadership cadre, one can see district leaders struggling to learn how to support instructional reform effectively at the same time that they are leading the reform effort.

### Supporting District Leaders' Learning about Systemwide Instructional Improvement

In this urban district, now in partnership with an external resource organization and a local university, central office leaders are regularly involved in a series of intensive professional learning experiences that are meant to sharpen the leaders' capacity for instructional leadership, a role that is relatively unfamiliar. Through an intensive ongoing seminar, regular work with consultants in schools observing teachers and debriefing what they saw, and the construction of regular "instructional advice letters" to principals, these individuals are engaged in repeated cycles of "learning while leading." The work proceeds from the premise that "You can't lead what you don't know" (or are struggling to know). The five-person central office leadership team (directors of elementary and secondary education, assistant superintendent for instruction, and a professional development coordinator), now in the third year of this work, is becoming more knowledgeable about the nature of excellent instruction and already showing confidence in its work with others. The team has formed into a tight professional community that provokes and supports continual learning.

The central office leaders' learning parallels, and is closely linked to, a set of activities involving school principals. These school leaders are expected to devote a larger proportion of their time to instructional leadership, once again a role that not all felt comfortable with when the district embarked on this renewal initiative. Principals have found their diet of professional guidance and support activities to be a good source of new learning regarding what excellent literacy teaching looks like. They experience, frequent modeling of excellent instruction and associated coaching, make regular classroom walkthroughs with district leaders and consultants, and write letters offering instructional advice to the school staff in much the same way as their district leaders write memos to them. Among other things, these activities provide the school leaders with a regular source of feedback on their own perceptions and ideas about working with teachers—in other words a form of regular, informal leadership assessment.<sup>30</sup>

This example illustrates a multilevel leadership support system that aggressively promotes ideas about what is considered powerful, learning-focused leadership. It places the improvement of teaching and learning center stage in the working lives of participating school leaders, offers concrete guidance to district and school leaders, and provides regular feedback on and support for their efforts to put into practice what they are learning. The vignette is also reflective of some purposeful attempts undertaken by a superintendent to recruit and select individuals for the central office who would be predisposed to learning about and assuming an active instructional leadership role at district level.

### **How Policy Environments Affect Leaders' Efforts and Capacity to Improve Learning**

Different activities undertaken within the state and local policy environments surrounding leaders' work have important implications for what leaders do and think. For example, reform-minded legislators pass laws that affect professional certification of teachers or graduation requirements for high school students. The State Education Agency reinterprets federal accountability legislation and sets new targets for annual school improvement. Annual state and local budgets are passed that bolster some programs while zeroing out others. The local school board creates new district-wide policies on student promotion and retention as part of an accountability system keyed to state standards. In a separate action, the local board establishes guidelines for school improvement planning. Unlike those discussed in a previous section, these activities do not focus on leadership practice per se, but they still create conditions that are of central importance to leaders' work. In particular, these conditions influence

- Learning improvement priorities.
- The availability of resources and how they are used.
- The kinds of information to which leaders have access.
- The “allocation of authority” to school and district leaders that determines their range of discretion.

These conditions can guide, enable, or constrain leaders' efforts to pursue a learning improvement agenda.

Here, once again we can identify particular activities in the policy environments at each level of the system that are likely to affect leaders' ability and motivation to concentrate their efforts on learning improvement. Take, for example, activities within the state-local resource environment, as shown in Figure 7. These activities can occur simultaneously at both the state and local levels, not necessarily taking each other into account. However, potential connections exist between the state and local levels and among the different kinds of activities, signaled by the horizontal and vertical arrows—connections that may or may not be recognized or exploited by participants in a given state-local system of education.

**Figure 7. Illustrative State and Local Activities Within the Resource Environment for Learning-focused Leadership**

Level of policy activity ...	Activities related to the availability and use of fiscal resources	Activities related to the deployment of staff and allocation of time	Activities related to the availability of data for leaders' decision making
... in states	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating discretionary funding sources related to professional development, coaching, and other means to enhance leaders' professional learning (as well as teachers')</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating incentives that encourage the relocation of staff to better serve unmet student needs</li> <li>• Designating (and funding) days for professional development of leaders (and teachers)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Developing data infrastructures that enable leaders at all levels to inquire about organizational performance</li> <li>• Creating unified student databases which enable flexible, relational analyses</li> <li>• Connecting databases concerned with students and teachers</li> </ul>
... in districts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating student-weighted funding formulas to equalize resources across the district's schools</li> <li>• Generating new external funding sources earmarked for specific teaching and learning improvement work</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Changing the rules that guide how school staff can use staff resources, to enable more flexibility in assignment to particular student needs</li> <li>• Changing school and district calendars to enable leaders and staff to work together on pressing issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Augmenting state databases with locally collected data elements, pertinent to local learning improvement priorities</li> <li>• Building partnerships with external groups that can augment the districts' expertise with data</li> </ul>

One can quickly see the implications of these activities for the exercise of learning-focused leadership. Unified student databases at the state level which are readily accessible to local leaders, for example, give these leaders a new resource for considering student needs, accomplishments, and issues. State-funded professional development days, to take another example, represent a minimum investment in professional development, giving districts the incentive and the wherewithal to address the professional learning needs of their staffs. The state actions may or may not have been conceived with a clear focus on learning, yet they still can have profound effects on what leaders are able to do in relation to learning improvement.

A similar display of activities at different levels could be constructed for the reform policy environment and the authorizing environment. Each environment, and all three together, present leaders with conditions that shape leaders' range of discretion, what they have to work with, and even what they imagine doing, to address learning improvement needs. Take the range of strategies for altering, and hopefully improving, the governance of school districts. In some instances, changes in governance might be attempted by altering board composition or scope of responsibilities, in other instances, by seeking to bolster the expertise of board members. Another option is to reallocate decision making authority to governing entities at a different level in the educational system.<sup>31</sup> Among such strategies, mayoral takeovers of the school board have tended to generate the most attention, but with mixed success. More radical interventions, as in the system-wide delegation of decision making authority to the school site in Chicago or the combination of state and private sector takeover of the Philadelphia school system, have the potential to alter the learning improvement priorities substantially at the same time that they introduce new dimensions to leaders' work.<sup>32</sup> Other less radical attempts to change the authorizing environment can also change the resource picture in consequential ways, as in this district:

The superintendent educated the school board about the achievement gap in the district by teaching the board to ask critical questions of student achievement data. The board, in turn, created a policy to differentiate funding in favor of equitable outcomes while allocating resources unequally to schools. The board also chose to focus on literacy and differentiated funding for liter-

acy with the expectation that all schools would concentrate on improving literacy for all students. Student performance has been improving in this site.

The experience in Kentucky is also instructive. There, school-based decision making was introduced as part of Kentucky's standards-based reform in the early 1990's, orchestrated by a wide-reaching state restructuring initiative. In the early years of this governance reform, though the arrangement did not necessarily succeed in addressing curriculum and instructional issues, it fundamentally changed the way school leaders in particular approached their jobs—especially, the way they attended to teachers' and parents' concerns and the way they sought to address learning-related matters.<sup>33</sup>

The authorizing environment can also be the scene of a new set of interactions among educational stakeholders, as is happening in many states associated with the State Action for Educational Leadership Project (SAELP) funded by The Wallace Foundation.<sup>34</sup> In these states, interaction among traditionally “siloesd” players in the state educational policy community constitutes, in effect, an alternative form of governance deliberation which has made it possible to develop leadership support activities that are more fully aligned with one another. The state of Delaware exemplifies this possibility. There, the interactions among the participants at the state level have supported the development of a more comprehensive leadership assessment system that aligns state policy, leadership preparation, administrator licensure, and in-service administrator assessment.<sup>35</sup> The state has developed a single, comprehensive leadership assessment tool for all to use, but districts select which parts of the tool to use depending on the particular interests of a school leader.

Kentucky and Delaware illustrate a set of dynamics in complex systems that are unusual in education, but are not without precedent, as state attempts to address teacher quality have demonstrated.<sup>36</sup> In essence, the political configuration emerges or is orchestrated in such a way that the issue of educational leadership can come to the fore, alongside and in relation to other attempts to improve the quality of teaching and learning. Under such conditions, new forms of support for leadership practice can emerge, as can new expectations of and pressures on educational leaders. The primary caution is that such conditions do not single out school and district leaders, in effect setting them up for blame when ambitious expectations of the schools are not met.

## **Conclusion: Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support**

As the preceding discussion has indicated, leading, learning, and leadership support are intricately connected to one another. The connections are fostered through formal agreements and arrangements at multiple levels of the educational system, and through hundreds of informal interactions among individuals, both those who hold administrative positions and others who participate in leadership. In a sense, a web of activities supporting learning-focused leadership is being created and recreated all the time. The web is fragile, and there are many forces and conditions that threaten it. Yet, given a sufficient number of actors with commitment to learning improvement and a sense of how to get there, there is a real possibility of counteracting these barriers.

### **Learning-Focused Leadership in Hector's District**

The possibilities are illustrated by returning to the district in which Hector is being educated, this time with a different school in view. At the high school level, a series of circumstances has brought resources and reform energy to the task of revitalizing a large comprehensive high school that had been at low ebb for some time. The catalyst has been a grant supporting the conversion of this 1700-student school into a series of five semi-autonomous mini-schools, each with a distinctive thematic character, to which students apply according to their interests:

#### **A Glimpse of Leadership in the High School Hector Will Attend**

Hector is not yet a high school student, but he soon will be (if he does not drop out). What he already knows about the high school from his sister Marita, who is a 10th grader, suggests that it will be different from the school where he now is getting educated. Marita has always been a successful student who has made the most of each level of schooling she has encountered, often in spite of the teaching she has experienced. But now, Hector notices, she comes home enthusiastic from high school every day. He hears from her that she is in Gateway, one of five “learning communi-

ties” or small schools within the old high school building. She talks a lot about the teacher team, instructors she has had for nearly two years now, and she talks excitedly. She has brought home interesting project work from an integrated math and science course investigating pollution in the valley. Last year she was in a small play that she wrote together with some friends. As part of a social studies segment on the Middle East, she has been learning to create slide shows with narrated sound tracks chronicling her journey as a Muslim on a pilgrimage from Damascus to Mecca.

The Gateway teaching team of nine is led by a teacher who is taking on this kind of leadership role for the first time in his career, though he has been a well-known leader of professional development in the district and once considered applying for National Board Certification. He understands his role to be focused on instructional leadership, and he gets a lot of support from the principal, a woman who has done a great deal to nurture the development of leadership across the school. Those attending bi-weekly gatherings of what she calls The Leadership Community, which includes the five small-school leaders plus several others, devote a good deal of time to instructional issues, often focused on evidence of student learning, and sometimes evidence of leadership and program effectiveness. She is particularly proud of her Master Schedule, which she describes as a “collaborative work of art,” that protects significant blocks of time both within and across the small schools for meetings of The Leadership Community and what she calls the “School Community Forums”—weekly gatherings of each small school’s faculty to discuss issues of teaching, learning, and student support. Several of the small schools share a Business Manager, an individual who takes care of a lot of the logistics of managing small school affairs, including the intricate logistics of sharing school-wide resources. The system is not perfect; however, it has allowed the small-school staff to keep their eyes on an ambitious agenda of instructional improvement.

The school's conversion to small schools, now at the end of its third year, has its share of unresolved problems. Not all of the small schools have as cohesive a staff as Gateway, nor are all of the small-school leaders equally adept at instructional leadership. Furthermore, the five schools are not equal in their ability to attract students. State assessment results were distinctly uneven last year, too, though in three of the small schools the differences in test performance between Latino and white students were much less than had been expected, and noticeably reduced from the year before. And staff members are not looking forward to the end of the small school conversion grant, which will significantly reduce some kinds of support that the participants have come to value ... .

Though there is much work to do to address the unevenness in this setting, this small school and the large school complex of which it is a part suggest more possibilities for educating a diverse population than the school Hector now attends. Noticeably, the quality of leadership appears to be a central part of the story. In microcosm, the leadership cadre within the school is focused on instruction, something that is often missing when large high schools are converted to a set of semi-autonomous small schools, given the general preoccupation in such settings with structural changes.<sup>37</sup> Steps have been taken to differentiate leadership roles so that operational management, which could easily distract the small-school leaders from their instructional support function, is taken care of by others. Furthermore, these leaders do not “go it alone”; rather, they are part of a regular within-school support system that nurtures their growth as leaders and acknowledges their need for continued learning in their new roles. Above all, the school is characterized by a new willingness to talk through major issues within and across the small schools (such as last year's issue about racial “segregation” in two of the five schools) in ways that would have been difficult if not impossible five years ago.

The evidence of learning-focused leadership and leadership support within this high school complex and the small schools within it is not yet matched by a parallel set of conditions and supports in the district or the state, and so the viability of the current arrangement over the long term is not yet assured. Despite rhetoric concerning fundamental change in the high school,

neither the district nor the state have yet put significant resources into some of the support functions that are now covered by the conversion grant from a private philanthropic source, albeit temporarily. The funding arrangement therefore raises questions about longer-term resource allocation. The local school board is watching warily, too, its debates over the treatment of Latino students at the high school temporarily on hold as it watches the outcome of the current small school experiment. The superintendent has blessed the experiment and is basically sympathetic to its aims, but he was never involved in any way in the grant development process, nor has the grant involved any of the central office staff. He has no strong opinions on the nature or quality of teaching and learning at the school, although he has been hearing some good things.

The dynamics and possibilities in this scenario differ markedly from the one with which this report began. In the high school conversion scenario, leaders have:

- Established and maintained a persistent focus on the improvement of instruction;
- Constructed leadership roles that embodied this focus on instruction, and filled them with individuals who came with a similar commitment;
- Orchestrated the use of time and human resources so that the participants could work intensively on instructional issues over time; and
- Paid regular attention to data concerning student performance and the nature of high-quality work as they developed their program.

Yet at the same time, clues to the possible demise of these promising changes in the school are evident, especially in the system of leadership support and environmental conditions that surround the school. In both the district office and in relevant state-level bodies, the need for leadership support goes largely unrecognized and a vision of how it might be provided is absent. The district central office, the local university, and the state are largely uninvolved bystanders in this school reform drama. And no one is asking what the implications of this reform story are for possible renewal at elementary and middle school levels. To make this school work over the long term, more players located in different positions within the educational system—not just within the school itself—will need to develop the vision and commitment to address these matters in a more systematic, learning-focused way.

## Entry Points

How might the players in other schools in Hector's district, at the central office, and also the state level start developing the vision and commitment to learning-focused leadership and its support? The scenarios and argument of this report, along with more detailed work in the companion reports, highlight a number of entry points.

These entry points are not an exhaustive list, nor would they all be applicable in a given setting. But they are generative and connect with each other, and they address the different layers of leadership and leadership support activity that can make learning-focused leadership a reality:

1. *Establishing a clear and public focus on particular learning improvement priorities for students, professionals, and the system as a whole.* Learning-focused leadership begins with a declaration by leaders that particular aspects of teaching and learning in the school, district, or state as a whole—middle school science learning, the teaching of writing across the secondary school curriculum, the development of problem-solving skills among students within the primary grades, or whatever—deserve sustained attention.<sup>38</sup> These aspects may or may not be well understood at the outset, but the commitment must be made publicly to address them, and subsequently to explore possibilities for addressing them, frame the nature of the challenge, and start identifying pathways of potential influence on them. It will help if governing bodies as well as positional leaders can be part of the public commitment to learning improvement, even though it is possible to proceed without full or unequivocal support from governing bodies.<sup>39</sup>
2. *Reconceiving leadership roles to emphasize learning improvement, while managing other basic operational needs.*<sup>40</sup> In relation to learning improvement priorities, state and local leaders and their partners in leadership development programs can:
  - *Encourage distribution of leadership responsibilities, e.g., among teacher leaders, especially in areas directly related to the improvement of instructional practice;*

- *Differentiate expectations for leaders' work, and the corresponding arrangements for getting work done* in elementary, middle, and high schools, and for different individuals engaged in distributed leadership arrangements; and
  - *Expand opportunities for alternative, learning-focused leadership roles*, that allow aspiring and practicing leaders to explore or develop alternatives to roles that emphasize operational management.
3. *Informing leadership activity with data and inquiry that relates to learning needs, performance, and conditions supporting learning.*<sup>41</sup> Presuming that leadership roles encourage or even demand a focus on learning improvement, and with particular learning improvement priorities in mind, state and local leaders can:
- *Support or prompt cycles of inquiry* in schools, district central offices, and state agencies, and take steps to develop the organizational cultures that support such inquiry over time;
  - *Help leaders and leadership teams bolster their "data literacy"* through targeted professional development conducted with their own data clearly in view; and
  - *Build robust information infrastructures*, both at the state and local level, that respond to the data needs of local leaders.
4. *Aligning people, time, and money as closely as possible with learning improvement priorities.*<sup>42</sup> Mindful of resource availability, political realities, and state and district policies, legislators, state agency officials, and local administrators can take action to connect resources to learning improvement in various ways. They can also look beyond the allocation of resources to the *development* or strengthening of existing resources, especially human resources. For example, given an attempt to enhance equitable learning opportunities, leaders can:
- *Reallocate funds so that student needs are equitably addressed*, in contrast to many current arrangements that inadvertently allocate more funding to schools serving a more affluent population;

- *Create staffing incentives* designed to attract high-quality teachers into difficult-to-staff schools and subject areas;
  - *Rearrange time so that staff can plan and learn collaboratively*, for example, by granting flexibility in state-level time allocation (e.g., “days” set aside for professional development), district guidance regarding time structures in school, and the arrangement of school master schedules; and
  - *Developing human resources*, through targeted, coordinated investments in supports for the professional learning of both teaching staff and administrators.
5. *Providing leaders with feedback about their work, in relation to learning improvement priorities, combined with regular opportunities to learn from and about their practice.*<sup>43</sup> Through systematic, growth-oriented assessments of organizational and leadership performance and through structures that offer leaders opportunities to learn based on assessment feedback, states and districts in collaboration with external partners can:
- *Define measurable expertise associated with learning-focused leadership roles*, under various conditions, especially instructional leadership expertise, but also other areas of expertise;
  - *Construct or expand leadership assessment systems aligned with learning improvement priorities* and offer leaders regular feedback on their performance;
  - *Connect leadership assessment with leadership growth cycles* and associated learning opportunities.
6. *Combining clear guidance for leaders with sufficient room to exercise discretion over matters related to learning improvement.*<sup>44</sup> To clarify professional and public expectations for leaders’ work, while ensuring sufficient authority to exercise discretion in developing their programs, state-local governing bodies can:

- *Construct explicit agreements about school and district leaders' discretion over matters related to learning improvement, in relation to school board discretion and that of others involved in governance (the central office, unions, state boards);*
- *Support school board members' learning about their roles in relation to the roles of others and their constituents' interests in a context of high accountability.*

In no single state-local system of public education would educators be likely to attempt all or even most of these. The overall challenge to learning-focused leadership, then, is to seize the opportunities afforded by such entry points and to do so in a way that maximizes the connections among different activities in the web of support for learning-focused leadership.

The result of such connections would be greater *coherence* within a leadership support system that, in its natural state, is more likely to be incoherent. Coherence in this instance reflects not only alignment of one element with another, but also alignment with compelling ideas about learning improvement, accompanied by sufficient working consensus among participants so that learning improvement outcomes are likely to result.<sup>45</sup> At the same time, the practical difficulties in attaining alignment, compelling visions, and working consensus are such that the system will need a measure of *resilience* as well. And therefore, the measure of the system's quality may ultimately reside in how resilient and adaptable it is. Given incoherence, unpredictable contingencies, and the fact that a massive educational system is too complex to ever control or fully understand, leaders will do their jobs well if they keep an eye on the ultimate target, keep open to unexpected opportunities and possibilities, and keep learning as they go along. But in many states and local settings it will often be possible to do more: As more leaders and other stakeholders come to visualize what learning-focused leadership entails and how to support it, the prospect of contributing to substantial improvements in learning becomes more real.

## Appendix A

### Hector's Mathematics Lesson—Reprise

For those readers who are unfamiliar with the original vignette to which this report refers, we present below an excerpt from *Leading for Learning: Reflective Tools for School and District Leaders* where the vignette originally appeared.

#### Hector's Mathematics Lesson

It is Friday, and the Period 2 Mathematics class is about to begin. Hector and his classmates, a mixture of Anglo and Latino children, crowd in from the busy hallway, find seats, and fumble for their homework sheets. Some never find them; a few—primarily a handful of boys located at seats around the edge of the room—pay little attention to what is going on. The teacher, Mr. G, appears not to notice (for the moment, the nonparticipants are quiet). Today, Hector is feeling confident; his older sister Marita, who excels at math, spent time at home to help him complete the assignment, the first he has finished this week.

The teacher uses the next 15 minutes to review the 35 assigned problems in solving simple equations with one unknown variable. Mr. G stands in front of the class and asks for the answer to each problem and provides it if no one volunteers promptly. Twice, Hector tentatively raises his hand, as if to offer an answer; the teacher does not recognize him. The students correct their sheets and report how many they got right. The class shifts to a 15-minute presentation by Mr. G at the blackboard on the finer points of solving one-variable algebraic equations. Hector begins to fidget during the explanation; his non-participating classmates are becoming louder and more noticeable. “I’m not very good at math,” he explains in our later conversation, “Maybe Marita will help me.”

The class ends with a period of seatwork—more practice solving for  $x$ . Seated at his desk near the rear of the room, Mr. G enters homework scores into his gradebook. Hector works sporadically at the seatwork task, but appears distracted by the small contingent of nonparticipating boys who spend the time engaged in unrelated talk. Mr. G pays little attention, except to broadcast a general “shh” now and again. At one point, Hector quietly seeks assistance from a nearby classmate, questioning her in Spanish. “No talking, please,” says the teacher. Shortly, Hector and his classmates are headed out the door for Period 3.

This lesson, typical of many in American classrooms, presents the school or district leader with fundamental challenges for improving learning and teaching. While the teacher is experienced and fully certified and most students are engaged in academic tasks, students are not probing deeply into content and some are disengaged from the classwork. A cursory visit to Mr. G’s classroom wouldn’t raise alarms; nearby classrooms reveal more obvious management concerns, and many students appear to be learning to solve math problems by following instructions from the teacher and their textbook. But for Hector, and even for Mr. G, something is missing.

#### Mr. G’s reflection

After school, Mr. G stands near the bus line, his typical Friday afternoon duty. He exchanges friendly barbs with some of the students waiting in line, and wishes each child a “good weekend” as they board. Walking back to the classroom, he reflects on the math lesson that transpired earlier. “Most of that class just doesn’t seem to get it,” he explains. A probe about strategy indicates uncertainty on his part about his game plan for teaching kids to solve for  $x$ . “Repeating the thing till they get it just doesn’t seem to cut it.” When questioned about the progress of the nonparticipating group in the math class, Mr. G intimates that he has tried hard to involve them and they “just don’t respond; they don’t seem to care about learning. I’m puzzled about how you make algebra mean something to them.” But he feels an obligation to “plow ahead”; the state test is only three months away ...

Though personable with most of his students, this teacher's reliance on a drill-and-practice approach to instruction undermines his ability to achieve a high level of math learning among all his students. The content of instruction is a far cry from what the district and state standards call for. However, Mr. G. has few opportunities to learn content and instructional strategies of standards-based mathematics education, nor has he sought them out. He is reluctant to change a career-long teaching repertoire that seems to work for many students. Furthermore, he hasn't yet focused on the instructional challenges posed by the growing population of students who struggle to simultaneously master subject content, language, and school demands.

#### Mr. G's School and District

Administrators in Mr. G's school and district, for the most part, are too preoccupied with other things to take notice what is taking place in his classroom. The school's administrators are trying to work out problems with the new schedule for this year-round school, while attending to the recent arrival of several emergency certified teachers who are struggling. As in many schools, the new teachers and Mr. G operate in isolation from one another, and the year-round structure exacerbates this fact.

The district central office is trying to manage political tensions between the city's large low-income Latino community and the mostly middle-class Anglo community, as well as accountability pressures from the state and from the federal No Child Left Behind policy. District administrators also are negotiating the next teachers' contract, and are finding themselves at odds with the union over a number of issues.

(Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003, pp. 7–8)

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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> See: Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., & Talbert, J. E. (2003). *Leading for learning: Reflective tools for school and district leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington; Knapp, M. S., & Associates (2003). *Leading for learning sourcebook: Concepts and examples*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington; Copland, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Leadership for learning: Reflection, planning, and action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. Our thinking in these reports and book parallel the argument of Stoll, L., Fink, D., & Earl, L. (2003). *It's about learning (and it's about time): What's in it for schools?* London & New York: Routledge Falmer. Some aspects of the connections between leadership and learning outcomes have been studied, for the most part, in investigations of the effects of principal leadership—see reviews of this knowledge base in Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1996). Reassessing the principal's role in school effectiveness: A review of empirical research, 1980–1995. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 32(1), 5–44; Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2003). *What do we already know about successful school leadership?* Chicago: American Educational Research Association; Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning*. New York: The Wallace Foundation. A large-scale study of these matters is now under way, guided by a team from the University of Minnesota and the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE) at the University of Toronto.
- <sup>2</sup> See Appendix A for the original scenario of Hector's mathematics lesson. This scenario was used as a starting point for a discussion of the challenges facing school and district leaders, in Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003, op. cit.
- <sup>3</sup> This scenario is a fictional composite of events that happen in many struggling schools.
- <sup>4</sup> See for example, McNeil, L., & Valenzuela, A. (2001). The harmful impact of the TAAS system of testing on Texas: Behind the accountability rhetoric. In Orfield, G., & Kornhaber, M. (Eds.), *Raising standards or raising barriers? Inequality and high-stakes testing in public education* (pp. 127–150). New York: The Century Foundation Press.
- <sup>5</sup> Malen, B., Croninger, R., Muncy, D., & Redmond-Jones, D. (2002). Reconstituting schools: "Testing" the theory of action. *Educational Evaluation & Policy Analysis*, 24(2), 113–132.
- <sup>6</sup> Knapp, Copland, & Talbert, 2003, op. cit.; Copland & Knapp, 2006, op. cit.
- <sup>7</sup> Knapp & Associates, 2003, p. 16, op. cit.
- <sup>8</sup> In particular, we identified five main areas of strategic action that learning-focused leaders address: (1) establishing a focus on learning; (2) building professional communities that take learning seriously; (3) engaging external environments that matter for learning; (4) acting strategically and collaboratively along "pathways" of activity that aim at different aspects of student, professional, and system learning; and (5) creating coherence. See Knapp & Associates, 2003, op. cit., pp. 19–43, for a full discussion of these five areas.

- <sup>9</sup> See Portin, B., Alejano, C., Knapp, M. S., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, for a more complete discussion, along with examples, of the way leadership roles, responsibilities, and authority enter into this story.
- <sup>10</sup> See Portin, B., Schneider, P., DeArmond, M., & Gundlach, L. (2003). *Making sense of leading schools: A study of the school principalship*. Seattle, WA: Center on Reinventing Public Education, University of Washington.
- <sup>11</sup> A more complete discussion of what we mean by “data-informed leadership,” along with the supporting literature, appears in Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., Swinnerton, J. A., & Monpas-Huber, J. (2006). *Data-informed leadership*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>12</sup> Another report in this series notes connections between data-informed leadership and the assessment of leadership performance: see Portin, B. S., Feldman, S., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Redefining roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>13</sup> See Plecki, M. L., Alejano, C., Lochmiller, C. R., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Reallocating resources and changing incentives to improve leadership and teaching*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington, for an extended discussion of the place of resource allocation practices in learning-focused leadership.
- <sup>14</sup> At the district level, see McLaughlin, M. W., & Talbert, J. E. (2002). Reforming districts. In Hightower, A., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., & McLaughlin, M. W. (Eds.), *School districts and instructional renewal* (pp. 173–192). New York: Teachers College Press; Togneri, W., & Anderson, S. (2003). *Beyond islands of excellence: What districts can do to improve instruction and achievement in all schools*. Washington D.C.: Learning First Alliance. At the school level, see Copland, M. A. (2003). The Bay Area School Reform Collaborative: Building the capacity to lead. In Murphy, J., & Datnow, A. (Eds.), *Leadership lessons from comprehensive school reform* (pp. 159–184). Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press; also Chapter 8 in Copland, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Leadership for learning: Reflection, planning, and action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- <sup>15</sup> New York Community School District 2 exemplified one of the early attempts to mount this kind of capacity building effort aimed at principals: see Fink & Resnick (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82, 598–606. See also, Resnick, L., & Glennan, T. (2002), Leadership for learning: A theory of action for urban school districts. In Hightower et al. (Eds.), 2002, op. cit.
- <sup>16</sup> See Portin, B., Alejano, C., Knapp, M. S., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>17</sup> See Murphy, J. (1992). *The landscape of leadership preparation: Reframing the education of school administrators*. Newbury Park, CA: Corwin Press. See also: Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L. LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *Developing successful principals: A review of research*. Stanford, CA: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.

- <sup>18</sup> Leadership standards may be adopted by state or local government based on widely promulgated standards, such as those of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC), or they may be developed by professional associations as guidance or advice to members of the profession, as in the case of the standards of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP)—see Murphy, J., (2005). Unpacking the foundations of the ISLLC standards and addressing the concerns of the academic community. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 41(1), 154–191; National Association of Elementary School Principals (2002). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do*. Alexandria VA: Author.
- <sup>19</sup> See argument in Portin et al., 2006, op. cit., regarding school leaders' learning; a recent investigation into district-level leaders' learning—while in the midst of exercising leadership—appears in Swinnerton, J. A. (2006), *Learning to lead what you don't (yet) know: District leaders engaged in instructional reform*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Seattle, WA: University of Washington.
- <sup>20</sup> See Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006, op. cit.
- <sup>21</sup> Various elaborated systems are currently being proposed—see Reeves, D. (2004). *Assessing educational leaders*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press. Examples of sophisticated and comprehensive leadership assessment systems now being instituted at state and local levels are described in Portin, Feldman, & Knapp, 2006, op. cit. Developmental work is under way at Vanderbilt University to create a new generation of leadership assessment tools.
- <sup>22</sup> See Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006, op. cit., for a summary of the conceptual and empirical work relating to school boards as the local authorizing environment for leaders' work. Conley, D. (2003), *Who governs our schools? Changing roles and responsibilities*. New York: Teachers College Press, also addresses these matters with both state and local levels in mind.
- <sup>23</sup> See Plecki, M. L., Alejano, C., Lochmiller, C. L., & Knapp, M. S. (2006), *Reallocating resources and changing incentives to improve leadership and teaching*. Seattle, WA: University of Washington/Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, for a review of literature relevant to the resource environment in which leaders work and the ways in which that environment can affect leaders' efforts to pursue learning improvement agendas.
- <sup>24</sup> The tensions between equity and high-stakes accountability are playing out in various states, with evidence that reform policies featuring high accountability are having both productive and counterproductive effects on learning and equitable access to learning opportunities. See, for example, the range of evidence and views in Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J. J. (2004). *Educational equity and accountability: Paradigms, policies, and politics*, New York and London: Routledge Falmer.
- <sup>25</sup> The Jefferson County SAMs program is described in Slusher, S. (2005). Principals switch focus to instruction. *LEAD Kentucky*, 3(2), 13. (Online at: [http://www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/ELAN/TR/KnowledgeCategories/ImprovingConditions/UseOfTime/principals\\_switch\\_focus\\_to\\_instruction.htm](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/ELAN/TR/KnowledgeCategories/ImprovingConditions/UseOfTime/principals_switch_focus_to_instruction.htm).)
- <sup>26</sup> The creation of the differentiated leadership/management model in the SAMs project also drew heavily on an assessment of leadership practices in the school, which suggested ways that leadership roles and responsibilities could be redistributed. See discussion in Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006, op. cit.

- <sup>27</sup> This example is quoted from Massell, D. (2001), pp. 157–158, in The theory and practice of using data to build capacity: State and local strategies and their effects. In S. H. Fuhrman (Ed.), *From the capitol to the classroom: Standards-based reform in the states* (pp. 148–169). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- <sup>28</sup> See extended examples in Copland & Knapp, 2006, op. cit., and related discussion of coherence in learning-focused leadership activities in the case examples.
- <sup>29</sup> This vignette has been constructed from ongoing exploratory research in this district undertaken by researchers from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy. Earlier accounts of the leadership approach in this district offer useful background—see Zuber, J. K. (1999) *Constructing an educational seawall: A study of leadership, organizational dynamics, policy, and purpose*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Seattle, WA: University of Washington; also see Swanson, J., Knapp, M. S., & Meadows, J. (2003). *Dilemmas of centralized investment in professional learning*. Presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association (AERA), Chicago, April 21–25 (see the Mountain Crest case).
- <sup>30</sup> Two recent doctoral dissertations investigated different aspects of leaders’ learning in this case: Swinnerton, J. A. (2006), *Learning to lead what you don’t (yet) know: District leaders engaged in instructional reform*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Seattle, WA: University of Washington; Grubb, S. (2006). *Making sense of reform: Understanding how administrators use instructional letters to improve instruction in a Northwestern district*. Unpublished doctoral dissertation. Seattle, WA: University of Washington. An interim report of research in this district also provides useful background on the case: Gallucci, C., Boatright, B., Lysne, D., & Swinnerton, J. A. (2006, January). *The pedagogy of third-party support for instructional improvement: A partnership between CEL and Highline school district—Interim findings report*. Seattle WA: Center for Educational leadership, University of Washington. (Online at: [http://depts.washington.edu/uwcel/resources/final\\_report.pdf](http://depts.washington.edu/uwcel/resources/final_report.pdf).)
- <sup>31</sup> See extended discussion in Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006, op. cit.
- <sup>32</sup> See Hill, P., & Celio, M. B. (1998). *Fixing urban schools*. Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution press.
- <sup>33</sup> See David, J., (1996). Educators and parents as partners in school governance. In Pankratz, E. R., & Petrosko, J. M., (Eds.), *All children can learn: Lessons from the Kentucky reform experience* (p. 221). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- <sup>34</sup> For a description of the State Action for Educational Leadership Project (SAELP), see <http://www.wallacefoundation.org/WF/GrantsPrograms/FocusAreasPrograms/EducationLeadership/SaelpProgram.htm>.
- <sup>35</sup> Delaware’s leadership assessment system is described in Portin, B. S., Feldman, S., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Purposes, uses, and practice of leadership assessment in education*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>36</sup> See Wilson, S., Darling-Hammond, L., & Berry, B. (2001, February). *A case of successful teaching policy: Connecticut’s long-term efforts to improve teaching and learning*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.

- <sup>37</sup> See for example the discussion in The American Institutes for Research and SRI International (2004). *The evaluation of the national school district and network grants program: Year 2 evaluation report*. Washington, D.C.: American Institutes for Research; also Copland, M. A., & Boatright, E. (2006). *Leadership for transforming high schools*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>38</sup> See Knapp, M. S., Copland, M., & Talbert, J. E. (2003). *Leading for learning: Reflective tools for school and district leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington; Copland, M. A., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Leadership for learning: Reflection, planning, and action*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.
- <sup>39</sup> The need for support for learning-focused leadership from governing bodies raises important questions about the viability of current state and local governing arrangements in whatever setting is at hand, and there may be appropriate adjustments in this setting that could be considered for the long term. This matter is addressed in Plecki, M. L., McCleery, J., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Redefining and improving school district governance*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>40</sup> Portin, B. S., Alejano, C. R., Knapp, M. S., & Marzolf, E. (2006). *Redefining roles, responsibilities, and authority of school leaders*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>41</sup> See Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., Swinnerton, J. A., & Monpas-Huber, J. (2006). *Data-informed leadership*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>42</sup> See Plecki, M. L., Alejano, C., Lochmiller, C. L., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Reallocating resources and changing incentives to improve teaching and learning*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>43</sup> See Portin, B. S., Feldman, S., & Knapp, M. S. (2006). *Purposes, uses, and practice of leadership assessment in education*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.
- <sup>44</sup> See Plecki, McCleery, & Knapp, 2006, op. cit., and also Portin, Alejano, Knapp, & Marzolf, 2006, op. cit.
- <sup>45</sup> See discussion of “coherence” on pp. 39–43 in Knapp, M. S., & Associates (2003). *Leading for learning sourcebook: Concepts and examples*. Seattle, WA: Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy, University of Washington.



## Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy

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