

Relational Trust, Social Connections, and Improving Principal Practice: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals

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BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
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Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

RELATIONAL TRUST, SOCIAL CONNECTIONS,
AND IMPROVING PRINCIPAL PRACTICE:

ONE DISTRICT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS
MODEL SYSTEM FOR EDUCATOR EVALUATION TO SUPPORT
THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS

Dissertation in Practice

By

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SYSTEM FOR EDUCATOR EVALUATION TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND
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by

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Father Joseph O'Keefe, Dissertation Chair

Abstract

Using social capital theory as a conceptual framework, this qualitative study of one Massachusetts district analyzed how principals' relational trust and interconnectedness with central office administrators (COAs) correlated with their perceptions of district efforts to support their growth and development. Data included interviews with principals and COAs and document analyses. Findings revealed a decided split among principals, with some reporting high trust levels and close connections with COAs and others reporting distrust and isolation. Of the district's five major initiatives designed to support principals, two were perceived positively by most principals, two received mixed reactions with connected principals more favorable than isolated principals, and one received widespread negative perceptions. District initiatives widely perceived to be effective mirrored principal goals, provided opportunities for COA direct assistance, and were structured to facilitate the development of professional assistance relationships. Conversely, the initiatives with mixed or negative perceptions lacked such relationship-building opportunities.

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CHAPTER 1 – PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW¹

Statement of Problem

In the present era of standards-based accountability, the principal's role has evolved from being a school building manager to an instructional leader who can significantly impact student learning outcomes (Hallinger, 1992; Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2007). Current research highlights this shift to instructional leadership by showing principals' impact on student achievement as second only to teachers' (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010). Thus, principals as instructional leaders are finding themselves central to educational reform (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goodwin, Cunningham & Childress, 2003; Portin, Feldman & Knapp, 2006; National Association of Elementary School Principals (NAESP), 2008).

In light of this evolution, it is incumbent upon central office administrators (COAs) to support the growth and development of principals. However, central office structures, roles, and responsibilities have not evolved as quickly as those of principals, and there often remains an emphasis on operations, management, and compliance at the district level (Honig, Lorton and Copland, 2010). Therefore, COAs must often overcome organizational obstacles to effectively support principals in the important work of teaching and learning.

Many district level principal evaluation systems reflect this dissonance caused by rapidly changing job expectations for principals and COAs alike. In recent years,

¹ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Christine A. Copeland, Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, Alexandra Montes McNeil, and AC Sevelius.

researchers and policy makers criticized locally developed principal evaluation systems for lacking standardization, rigorous processes, a reliance on compliance-driven site visits, a misuse of student achievement data, and a focus on outdated skills and proficiencies (Hart, 1992; Goldring, Cravens, Murphy, Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2008; Murphy, Goldring & Porter, 2014; Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators (MA Task Force), 2011). Furthermore, Davis and Hensley (1999) observed that the lack of consistency and transparency in principal evaluation led many principals to believe their evaluations reflected local politics rather than their job performance. With these critiques and a growing understanding of the principal's role in improving student outcomes, researchers and policy makers focused on evaluation as an essential tool. With President Obama's 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, the U.S. Department of Education required states to develop comprehensive evaluation systems for consistency and coherency across districts within each state (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE), 2012).

As one of the first winners of RTTT, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations in June of 2011. A premiere feature of the new evaluation regulations was the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE). MMSEE effectively standardized performance expectations and evaluation practices for all educators, including principals, throughout the Commonwealth. Furthermore, these regulations were designed to support the growth and development of educators and to determine their effectiveness based on multiple measures of student achievement data (MA ESE, 2012).

In terms of principal supervision and evaluation, the intent of MMSEE was to standardize evaluation practices and provide COAs tools to improve principal practice consistently throughout the state (MA Task Force, 2011; Chester, 2011a; MA ESE, 2012). However, district implementation of MMSEE posed a challenge for both COAs and principals, as standardization of a new system necessitates a substantial change in district culture and practice (Jacques, Clifford & Hornung, 2012). MMSEE's designers recognized this challenge and knew that many Massachusetts districts would undergo a significant paradigm shift with the implementation of MMSEE (MA Task Force, 2011).

Successful implementation of MMSEE for principals demands that COAs interpret and communicate the new regulations, develop productive professional relationships, provide effective feedback to improve practice, support instructional leadership and the practices principals view as central to their role as school leaders. Making these shifts in practice is critical to the success of establishing highly effective schools, as schools need high-quality principals who can manage both instructional and operational demands (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goodwin et al., 2003). Therefore, leadership matters at both the central office and school levels in increasing academic achievement for all students (Honig et al., 2010; Fullan, 2007).

Purpose of the Study

Since MMSEE is a new policy, research on its effectiveness is limited. Therefore, the overarching purpose of this study is to examine how COAs in one district use MMSEE to support the growth and development of principals. As such, the members of the research team addressed this central focus through six individual studies, each using a

conceptual framework and lens through which to view district practice. The six studies are outlined in Table 1.1:

Table 1.1
Individual Studies

| Author | Title | Purpose | Conceptual Framework | Research Questions |
|------------------------------|---|--|--------------------------------|---|
| AC Sevelius | Promoting Organizational Learning Through Policy Interpretation | To understand how, when faced with an externally driven policy, COAs work as an internal team to interpret mandates, match mandates to current needs, and reorient the organization | Organizational Learning Theory | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE? 2. What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE? 3. How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations? |
| Christine A. Copeland | How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations of MMSEE to Principals | To explore how COAs make sense of MMSEE and how they communicate their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals | Sensemaking | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How do COAs and principals make sense of the evaluation process with the new MMSEE standards? 2. When communicating with principals, how do central office administrators frame their understanding of MMSEE? |
| James A. Carter | Relational Trust, Social Connections, and Improving Principal Practice | To explore how the professional assistance relationships among EPS central office supervisors and school principals both affect and are affected by district efforts to support and develop principals | Social Capital Theory | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How does the central office team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development? 2. How does each principal's relational trust and connectedness toward central office administrators correlate to his or her perception of district efforts to promote principal growth and development? |

| Author | Title | Purpose | Conceptual Framework | Research Questions |
|--------------------------------|--|--|-----------------------------|---|
| Alexandra Montes McNeil | Supporting Principal Professional Practice through Evaluative Feedback | To examine how COAs in a district use evaluative feedback to promote principals' professional practice | Adult Learning Theory | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors? 2. What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback? 3. How closely is the feedback tied to the work principals' view as central to their practice? |
| Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom | Supporting Principals with the Shift to Instructional Leadership | To examine how COAs support principals in meeting the performance goals of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of the Massachusetts School Level Administrator Rubric | Adult Learning Theory | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal? 2. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs have for principals? 3. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals? |
| Leah Blake McKetty | Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office Support | To examine how principals perceive central office support of their leadership practices | Distributed Leadership | <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What leadership practices do principals view as the most useful? 2. How are these assessed by the MMSEE? 3. How are these practices supported by COAs? |

Note: The Adult Learning Theory was an appropriate conceptual framework for two individual studies: 1) as best suited to discuss how the principal develops as a learner through the use of feedback, and 2) to use in examining how COAs support principals with instructional leadership because it suggests effective strategies of supporting adult learners.

As Table 1.1 indicates, the studies examined differing, but overlapping aspects of the district's implementation of MMSEE. With a rich tapestry of perspectives, conceptual frameworks, and modes of analysis, the research team expected that each individual study would complement the others and, when taken together, they would allow the team to

observe, interpret, and analyze central office support of principals through the use of MMSEE in a comprehensive manner.

Significance

Since this is the first time Massachusetts has created a comprehensive mandated evaluation system for principals, studying MMSEE in one district – from interpretation to impact – is timely, relevant and significant. Studying how COAs use MMSEE to support the growth and development of principals is paramount to the success of students (Honig et al., 2010; Fullan, 2007). Additionally, the findings of this study are relevant to district, state and national conversations, as many state departments of education across the nation are implementing new principal evaluation systems (Jacques et al., 2012; Clifford, Hansen, & Wraight, 2012), and to date, the research on principal evaluation has been inconsistent (Goldring et al., 2008). Studying MMSEE as an example of a state mandated system provides input into state and national conversations about principal evaluation and offers insight as to the interpretation of policy and its implementation.

The findings highlighted the successes and challenges of the interpretation and implementation of MMSEE. The individual studies provided the lens through which the work was completed; in particular, the team examined the interpretation and communication of policy, the impact on professional relationships, the use of feedback, the support of instructional leadership, and ways to support principals' leadership practices. Research through the aforementioned lenses enabled the team to provide deeper insight into improving the use of MMSEE to achieve its intended outcomes of impacting principals' professional practice and student achievement in the Commonwealth.

Literature Review

Research into principals' impact on student learning, COAs' support of principals, and effective principal evaluation systems provided the context for this dissertation in practice. The first section, "The Principal's Influence on Student Learning", discusses research that shows how principals have a significant, but indirect impact on student outcomes. Since principals make a difference as instructional leaders, many scholars, policy-makers and practitioners point to central office leadership as a primary source for principal support. Section two, "COAs Supporting Principals," outlines the development and best practices of this support. A primary tool for COAs to support principals as instructional leaders is the principal evaluation system, and section three, "Effective Principal Evaluation," describes the current thinking of how evaluation can best support educators. Section four, "The National Discussion About Principal Evaluation," documents how district level principal evaluation systems evolved to be more standardized and comprehensive. Section five, "The Development of the Massachusetts Model System for Principal Evaluation," chronicles how Massachusetts policy-makers devised MMSEE, examines the reasoning behind MMSEE's design, and, finally, unpacks the components of MMSEE for Principals.

The Principal's Influence on Student Learning

Although the principals' role in student achievement is indirect, the influence nevertheless is quite impactful. In a meta-analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies that measured principal impact on student achievement, Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) found a significant correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. The study indicated that if principal quality is increased by one standard

deviation, student achievement would rise ten percentile points. In a subsequent meta-analysis, Leithwood (2010) concurred that principal leadership is the second most influential factor to improve student performance.

Additionally, researchers have been able to identify the specific principal practices influencing student outcomes. These practices include: having a clear vision and mission centered on student learning with high expectations for both students and faculty (Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Harris & Hopkins, 2008); inspiring individuals through confidence building and motivation (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005); positively promoting a supportive school culture by creating a safe learning environment and opening lines of communication (Elmore, 2005); providing collaborative opportunities and managing resources effectively (Ladd, 2009; Leithwood et al., 2004; Leithwood, Patten, & Jantzi, 2010); focusing on research-based teaching practices (Marks & Printy, 2003; May & Supovitz, 2011; Dodman, 2014); and influencing teacher quality through hiring, feedback, professional development, supervision, and evaluation (Marks & Nance, 2007). In addition, May and Sipovitz (2010) found that the more a principal engages in instructional leadership approaches, the more instructional change happens among teachers. Moreover, principal quality is the greatest factor for attracting and retaining good teachers (Milanowski, Longwell-Grice, Saffold, Schomisch, Jones & Odden, 2009).

The impact of a principal's instructional leadership can determine the overall success of a school; therefore, principals need central office support to meet the demands of their changing roles from managers to instructional leaders in this time of high-stakes accountability (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005; Stewart, 2013).

Central Office Administrators Supporting Principals

Since the passage of NCLB, there has been greater scholarly attention on educational reform efforts at the school and principal level than at the district and superintendent level. One reason for this was an underlying assumption that schools, not districts, were the primary agents of change (Anderson, 2003). Many researchers looked at the poor track record of large, urban school systems and considered central offices as anachronistic impediments to improvement (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth, Luppescu & Easton, 2010). After all, a number of districts remain highly bureaucratic and emphasize management and compliance at the expense of dynamic innovation (Chhuon, Gilkey, Gonzalez, Daly & Chrispeels, 2008). COAs are further removed from the instructional core than school leaders and often isolate themselves from the schools they serve through weak, hierarchical, asymmetrical connections (Kochanek, 2005). Following this school of thought, many large school districts undertook major decentralization efforts, weakening central office authority and empowering school leaders to drive school reform using a bottom-up approach (Bryk et al., 2010).

Other scholars, however, argued that a large number of schools could not meet reform expectations on their own and emphasized the role of the district as the primary driver of top-down change (Hightower, Knapp, Marsh & McLaughlin, 2002). Elmore and Burney's (1998) landmark analysis of New York City's District Two's transformation to one of the highest performing districts in the city presented an example of strong district-level impact on student learning. A meta-analysis of 27 studies by Waters and Marzano (2006) showed a significant correlation between superintendent leadership and student outcomes when superintendents established a collaborative goal setting process resulting

in non-negotiable action items that were closely monitored and supported through resource allocation.

Four years later, Leithwood (2010) conducted another meta-analysis of 31 studies that examined the characteristics of school districts that were successful in closing achievement gaps. COAs in these districts developed a widely-shared vision of student achievement, established a coherent set of performance standards and instructional practices, formulated efficient ways professional teams could effectively access and analyze student achievement data, and invested in developing instructional leadership among teachers, principals, and other school-based administrators.

Recent studies on reform have shifted away from choosing between a decentralized, bottom up, school-centered approach or a top-down, district-centered method. Instead, there is a shift towards the important roles of both schools and districts. Louis and Robinson (2012) explored how district and school leaders react to external accountability initiatives. They found that while most districts were not able to effectively translate state accountability measures to improved student outcomes, some were able to do so under the right conditions. The authors found that when state policies align with the educational values of both school and district leaders and when these same leaders feel they have substantial support from both their colleagues and supervisors to implement the policies, districts were able to leverage external policy mandates successfully. According to Elmore (2003), it is precisely these coherent connections between school and district leaders that creates an environment of “internal accountability” that can respond positively to external accountability demands.

In her analysis of the changing roles of COAs, Honig (2008) found, “in recent decades, various policy initiatives have called on district central offices to shift the work practices of their own central staff from the limited or managerial functions of the past to the support of teaching and learning for all students” (p. 2). Subsequently, Copland and Honig (2010) reaffirmed that COAs are not only charged with supporting principals in the operational aspects of their jobs, they are also tasked with being instructional leaders themselves.

In examining school districts that are making progress, one emerging theme is the vital role COAs play in supporting schools’ academic improvement. More specifically, successful districts are “reorganizing and reculturing central office units to support partnership between central office and principals” (Knapp, Copland, Honig, Plecki & Portin, 2010, p. 26). More effective districts are using a set of clear initiatives to support school principals’ emergence as effective instructional leaders (Honig, 2012). Honig described how impactful COAs are when they focus on joint work, model their expectations for principal learning, develop and use tools, engage in talk that challenges practice, broker relationships, and create and sustain social engagement (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). Many of these practices can be incorporated in an effective principal evaluation system.

Effective Principal Evaluation

Since building principal performance is vital to the growth of students and teachers, greater emphasis has been placed on evaluation systems to improve principal practice. A publication of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2012) claimed that with the increased interest in principal performance in the age of

RTTT, “the U.S. Department of Education [now] equates the effectiveness of school principals to student achievement outcomes” (p. 7) and that a coherent, consistent evaluation system is essential to assure principal quality. In crafting standards for evaluation, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (2010), suggested that principal evaluation systems should, at minimum, involve principals in evaluation design, be connected to principal support systems, be aligned with teacher evaluation, include multiple rating categories, use multiple measures, communicate results to principals transparently, and include support and training of principal evaluators. Furthermore, Catano and Stronge (2007) stated: “Evaluation instruments are a powerful tool for influencing the behaviour of principals, reinforcing the adage ‘what gets measured is what gets done’” (p. 394).

Evaluation systems should be manageable, targeted, and well-designed and give opportunities to guide practitioners towards meeting the shared goals of the community (Marshall, 2009; Saphier, Gower, Haley-Speca, & Platt, 2008). Additionally, the system should engender a climate that promotes formative feedback essential for improving practice, as summative evaluation is only a small component of the learning process (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2009). Danielson (1996) suggested that when evaluating educators, supervisors should look closely at how students learn, specifically how they engage in meaningful work, connect to a community of learners, meet high expectations, shared responsibility, and deepen their understanding of the work at hand. Furthermore, quality supervision and evaluation has the potential to message what the shared agreements in any school system are, how those agreements are manifested, and how to combat practices that are not in service of student gains. Formative evaluation can

shift the focus to the student, ensuring that student achievement, rather than compliance, becomes the driver of adult learning (Saphier et al., 2008).

Empirical research supports the notion that evaluation, when done well, should not be unidirectional, but allow for COAs and principals to interact with one another. “Principal assessment should be easy to administer, can capture the essence of the role of a school principal, and should provide valid and reliable data for purposes such as professional development and performance evaluation” (Goldring et al., 2008, p. 2). Spillane (2004) agreed, sharing that when COAs and principals together are allowed to grapple with changing their practice and engage in new understandings of prior misinterpretations, sense-making is put center stage and shared understandings emerge, deepening the work being done in schools on behalf of students.

The vehicle for these pointed, sustained, and accountability-based conversations in Massachusetts is MMSEE. Looking beyond accountability and compliance, principal evaluation under MMSEE has the potential to assist professionals at all levels in honing their craft. The MA ESE Commissioner, Dr. Mitchell Chester, agreed, stating that the intent of MMSEE is to “promote professional learning” (MA ESE, 2012, p. 1). Chester’s comments reflected the ongoing national dialogue over principal evaluation.

The Development of National Principal Evaluation Standards

One of the first sets of standards for principal evaluation was developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). These ISLLC standards, developed in 1996 and updated in 2008, and currently under review and revision by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), have become the central criteria for many principal evaluation systems across the nation (Council of Chief

State School Officers, 2008). In 2006, another principal assessment, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) was developed by Porter, Murphy, Goldring, and Elliott from 2008 to 2012 through funding by the Wallace Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. This instrument, aligned to the ISLLC standards, contains evidence-based assessments that evaluate principals' leadership behaviors and is widely used in different states (Porter, Murphy, Goldring & Elliott, 2008).

ISLLC educational leadership policy standards focus on six areas that help define leadership through themes for educational leaders to promote student achievement. Likewise, VAL-ED standards prioritize core components and key processes that illustrate leadership behaviors to improve academic and social outcomes for all students (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). The ISLLC and VAL-ED standards were then adopted by many states as guidelines for district principal evaluation systems. Massachusetts was one such state that incorporated ISLLC and VAL-ED standards as principal evaluation guidelines for local districts (MA ESE, 2012).

By 2009, there was a broad and growing consensus at the national level among educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners that principal evaluation needed to be more consistently implemented across school districts, aligned to a more rigorous codification of leadership standards, and focused more on student and school outcomes (Portin et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2014). Dovetailing with this was the increased recognition of the principal's critical role both in the school improvement process and in student outcomes, which resulted in a focus on principal training programs, hiring and retention practices, professional development, and principal evaluation (Babo & Villaverde, 2013).

This national discussion about principal evaluation culminated with the Obama administration’s 2009 RTTT federal funding initiative under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. Under RTTT, states competed for over four billion dollars of federal discretionary spending by proposing reforms in the areas of promoting standards and accountability, developing data systems, improving workforce quality, and turning around underperforming schools. One RTTT expectation for states was to develop next-generation evaluation systems using multiple measures, including student growth (US Department of Education, 2009). In response to RTTT, 35 states and the District of Columbia passed legislation requiring adoption of new statewide principal evaluation systems between 2009 and 2012 (Jacques et al., 2012). Massachusetts was one of those states.

The Development of the Massachusetts Model System for Principal Evaluation

In 2010, MA ESE applied for and won 250 million dollars of federal RTTT money, and concurrently started the process of developing a framework for educator evaluation that fit RTTT guidelines. Table 1.2 outlines the timeline of MMSEE development from its beginnings to district implementation.

Table 1.2
Timeline of MMSEE Development and Implementation

| Date | Event |
|---------------|---|
| July, 2009 | President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan announce the Race to the Top Funding competition under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. |
| January, 2010 | Massachusetts submits its RTTT application. Included in the application is a promise to develop a new educator evaluation system that includes student learning outcomes as a significant measure of teacher and administrator performance. |

| Date | Event |
|-----------------|---|
| May, 2010 | The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education passed a motion to establish the Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators, charged with reviewing existing regulations for educator evaluation and make recommendations to the board in the winter of 2011. |
| August, 2010 | MA ESE wins 250 million dollars in federal RTTT funds. |
| March, 2011 | The Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators completes its work and submits its proposal for an educator evaluation system to Commissioner Chester and the general public. MA ESE board discusses the proposal in its March 22, 2011 meeting. |
| April, 2011 | Commissioner Chester submits first a set of draft regulations and then a set of revised draft regulations to the board. The board voted to send the revised draft regulations for public comment until June, 2011. |
| June, 2011 | The proposed regulations were revised again in response to the public comments, and on June 28th, the board voted 9-2 to pass the final regulations. |
| January, 2012 | MA ESE publishes the first components of the model system, which include district implementation guides for district-level planning, school-level planning, the superintendent, administrator and teacher rubrics, model district-level contract language, principal evaluation, and superintendent evaluation. |
| Spring, 2012 | RTTT districts begin the collective bargaining process to adopt or adapt the model system, or to revise existing systems to comply with new regulations. |
| June, 2012 | MA ESE publishes the seventh district implementation guide on rating educator impact on student learning using standardized tests and district-determined measures. |
| Summer, 2012 | RTTT districts begin training evaluators and develop processes to create district-determined measures. |
| September, 2012 | RTTT districts submit their proposed educator evaluation systems to MA ESE for review and begin implementation of educator evaluation for superintendents, administrators and teachers. |
| January, 2013 | All remaining districts begin the collective bargaining process to adopt or adapt the model system, or to revise existing systems to comply with new regulations. Remaining districts begin training evaluators and develop processes to create district-determined measures. |
| June, 2013 | MA ESE publishes the eighth district implementation guide on collecting and using staff and student feedback for administrator and teacher evaluation. |
| September, 2013 | Remaining districts submit their proposed educator evaluation systems to MA ESE for review and begin implementation of educator evaluation for superintendents, administrators and teachers. All districts submit to MA ESE plans for using standardized testing and district-determined measures to rate educators' impact on student learning. All districts submit to MA ESE plans for using student and staff feedback. All districts are implementing the educator evaluation framework consistent with regulations. |

The Massachusetts Task Force led the first phase in development, proposing a framework to the commissioner and the public in March 2011. At the proposal's core was the use of multiple measures of student learning, observations, and artifacts measured across four standards of professional practice, and a five-step evaluation cycle (MA Task Force, 2011). After strengthening language about the use of student performance data, MA ESE Commissioner Chester proposed regulations recommended by the Task Force on June 21, 2011 (Chester, 2011a; Chester, 2011b). Six months later, MA ESE presented implementation guides of MMSEE for school districts (MA ESE, 2012). Districts receiving RTTT funding were to plan their new evaluation systems in the spring and summer of 2012 for a launch in the 2012-13 school year. Districts not receiving RTTT funding had to implement their evaluation systems in 2013-14 (MA ESE, 2012).

MMSEE goals. The Massachusetts Task Force (2011) outlined its challenges in its executive summary:

National and statewide evidence is clear – educator evaluation does not currently serve students, educators or society well. In its present state, educator evaluation in Massachusetts is not achieving its purposes of promoting student learning and growth, providing educators with adequate feedback for improvement, professional growth and leadership, and ensuring educator effectiveness and overall system accountability (p. 5).

The fact that MMSEE specifically identified professional growth as a primary goal was relatively rare. According to Jacques et al., (2012), Massachusetts was only one of five states whose principal evaluation system explicitly identified professional growth as a goal in its legislation. Additionally, Commissioner Chester publicly espoused using

MMSEE to promote professional learning. In his letter introducing MMSEE’s training guides (MA ESE, 2012), he wrote, “I am excited by the promise of Massachusetts’ new regulations. Thoughtfully and strategically implemented they will improve student learning by supporting analytical conversation about teaching and leading that will strengthen professional practice” (p. 1). Embedded in each stage of MMSEE’s five-step evaluation process are multiple opportunities for professional feedback.

MMSEE design. Because educator evaluation is governed by a combination of state statutes and regulations, district performance standards, and local collective bargaining agreements, the Massachusetts Task Force (2011) designed a model system that districts could adopt, adapt, or revise to comply with state regulations (MA ESE, 2012). The Massachusetts Task Force (2011) explained this decision in terms of what it termed the “loose-tight” question:

On one hand, both teachers and administrators on the Task Force want a substantial measure of freedom to set a locally appropriate agenda, and to preserve the bargaining and decision-making rights reserved to them in the current statute. On the other hand, almost all Task Force members agree that the lack of statewide consistency, comparability, and calibration are major flaws in the current framework (p. 12).

In reality, however, 95 percent of Massachusetts districts decided either to adopt or adapt MMSEE, and not revise their own frameworks to comply with the new regulations (Dowley & Kaplan, 2014). With the vast majority of districts using MMSEE at least as a starting place, district evaluation systems across the state have become quite similar to one another. Some areas that have the most variance among districts are the practices of

making unannounced observations, constructing improvement plans, using district-determined measures to rate educator effectiveness, and recognizing exemplary educators (Dowley & Kaplan, 2014).

Not only is evaluation similar across school districts, it is similar within each district with all types of educators. The Massachusetts Task Force elected to use a simultaneous design process for teacher, principal and superintendent evaluation by using consistent evaluation procedures for all educators so that school committees evaluate superintendents, superintendents evaluate principals, and principals evaluate teachers all in parallel. Simultaneous design has the potential to provide systematic coordination of communication, implementation, and timelines (Clifford et al., 2012). However, teachers, principals and superintendents have very different professional responsibilities and jobs, and an evaluation system like MMSEE that tries to incorporate all levels of educators has the danger of oversimplifying the complexity of administrators' responsibilities. Furthermore, the simultaneous implementation of both administrator and teacher evaluation can overwhelm school districts (Clifford et al., 2012).

The Massachusetts Task Force members decided to use three categories of evidence for educator evaluation: multiple measures of student learning; judgments based on observations and artifacts; and the collection of additional evidence. The Massachusetts Task Force's consensus was that student outcomes should play a significant, but supplementary role in the measurement of principal performance, and that measurement of student outcomes should never "mechanistically override the professional judgment of trained evaluators and supervisors, or create an over-reliance of one set of assessments" (MA Task Force, 2011, p. 12). Task Force members did not want

standardized assessments to be overly influential in the evaluation process, and thus proposed that districts create district-determined measures in all subject areas in all grade levels so that student growth can be assessed broadly through multiple measures (MA ESE, 2012).

Through its insistence on the use of multiple measures, the Massachusetts Task Force prioritized comprehensiveness over feasibility; however, as Commissioner Chester noted in his June 21 memo (2011b), MMSEE incorporates a number of processes designed to streamline the evaluator's work. These include educators' generated self-assessment plans; short, unannounced observations with minimal written feedback; and teaming around common goals. Nevertheless, under MMSEE, both COAs and principals were generally required to spend considerably more time and energy on evaluation than they had done under their previous evaluation systems.

The Massachusetts Task Force understood the complexities of implementing MMSEE and exhorted ESE to provide ample support for school districts. "MA ESE must be willing and able to guide, support and monitor effective implementation at the district and school level. MA ESE has to put an unprecedented amount of time, thought and resources into this effort" (MA Task Force, 2011, p. 24). The Massachusetts Task Force recommended that with the development of MMSEE, MA ESE would need to help school districts engage stakeholders and gain their feedback, develop alternative models to help districts with their adopt/adapt decisions, support districts as they train evaluators, help districts develop effective assessments that can be used as district-determined measures, assist districts as they set up data systems that support evaluation, and

periodically revise MMSEE based on implementation lessons learned in the field (MA Task Force, 2011).

MMSEE components. In order to best understand the new evaluation system and the challenges that its implementation may pose, it is necessary for practitioners to have an understanding of the tool’s components. MMSEE is composed of four sections: standards, indicators, rubric, and rating; the five-step cycle of improvement; goals for student learning, professional practice and school improvement; and rating the principal’s impact on student learning (MA ESE, 2012).

Standards, indicators, rubric, and rating. The four standards are: Instructional Leadership, Management and Operations, Family and Community Engagement, and Professional Culture, described in Table 1.3. Each standard has indicators organized into a rubric with elements that describe the indicators at four performance levels. The performance levels are unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient, and advanced. Of the four standards, Instructional Leadership, has preeminent status; no administrator can be considered proficient unless his or her rating on this standard is proficient (MA ESE, 2012).

Table 1.3
Principal Standards of Evaluation

| Standards | Explanation |
|------------------|---|
| Standard I | <i>Instructional Leadership.</i> The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by cultivating a shared vision that makes powerful teaching and learning the central focus of schooling. |
| Standard II | <i>Management and Operations.</i> Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, using resources to implement appropriate curriculum, staffing, and scheduling. |
| Standard III | <i>Family and Community Engagement.</i> Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff through effective partnerships with families, community organizations, and other stakeholders that support the mission of the school and district. |

| Standards | Explanation |
|-------------|---|
| Standard IV | Professional Culture. Promotes success for all students by nurturing and sustaining a school culture of reflective practice, high expectations, and continuous learning for staff. |

Five-step cycle. Since the goal of MMSEE is to improve professional practice, the Task Force developed a five-step cycle of continuous improvement (MA ESE, 2012).

Figure 1.1 describes the cycle that is central to the evaluation process.

Figure 1.1 Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement

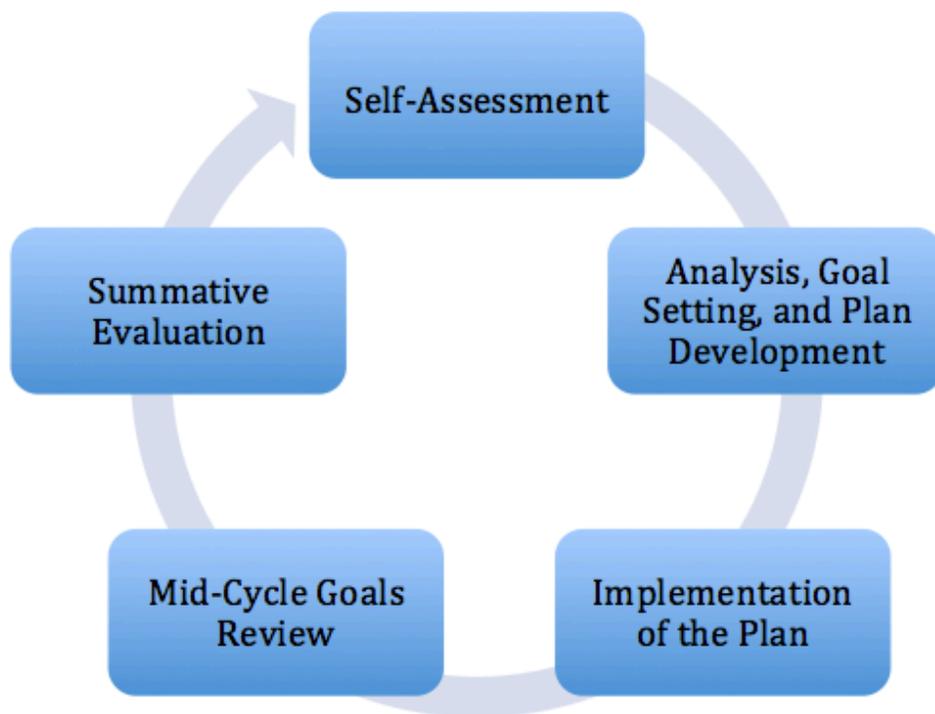


Figure 1.1. This cycle of improvement is meant to be continuous. The summative evaluation completes the cycle and then is incorporated into the next evaluation plan as part of the self-assessment. Adapted from “MMSEE Part V: School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide,” by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, p. 7.

Educators and evaluators are expected to be in regular communication throughout the cycle in order to receive feedback and reflect on their practice. Before the beginning of the school year, the principal uses the rubric to create a self-assessment and sets goals with his or her supervisor. Once the goals are agreed upon, the principal implements the

plan. The supervisor monitors progress both informally and formally through a mid-cycle review and a summative evaluation.

Goals for student learning, professional practice, and school improvement. All principals are expected to set goals throughout the evaluation cycle: a student learning goal, a professional practice goal, and minimum of two other school improvement goals (MA ESE, 2012). The school improvement goals are meant to align and build coherence between school and district goals. The expectation is that the principal will be held accountable for their progress and completion of these goals.

Rating the principal's impact on student learning. The school administrator's evaluation is designed to promote professional growth and development, guide COAs in supporting and building school leaders, foster communication between the evaluator and evaluated, and clarify the expectations by which principals will be held accountable. By developing the Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement MA ESE establishes a thorough set of expectations for principals and guidelines for COAs to improve principal practice and thereby increase student outcomes. While the rating components of the tool are used in concert with the principals' input – in particular, principal artifacts – to determine principals' proficiency rating, the system is designed, at its core, to incorporate feedback between COAs and principal, as well as provide opportunities for principals to improve their practice through professional development. All principals in Massachusetts will also be held accountable for student performance measures on standardized tests based on student growth and, in the case of English language learners, English proficiency ratings and growth, putting student learning at the core of professional conversations.

With the increase in accountability measures, the role of principals has evolved to “leading change on the ground” (Fullan, 2007 p. 156) and the role of COAs to support that change (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). MMSEE has clarified the work, but interpretation, communication, and implementation is determined by districts and COAs. For this reason, the dissertation-in-practice team examined how COAs in one district used MMSEE to promote the growth and development of principals through six individual studies all of which, coordinated together, provide an overall picture. These individual studies focused on six high leverage factors that affect the intent and impact MMSEE had in one district: the interpretation of policy by COAs, the communication of policy to principals, the role of professional assistance relationships, the use of feedback, the support of principals with instructional leadership, and the support of principals’ leadership practices to promote growth and development.

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY²

Design of the Study

The research team conducted a qualitative single-case study to examine how central office administrators (COAs) in the Emerson Public Schools (EPS) implemented principal evaluation under the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE), a system primarily designed to support the growth and development of educators' professional practice. In this dissertation, members of the research team collaborated on one project that consisted of multiple coordinated studies. The six contributing strands were COAs' interpretation of policy, communication of policy, role of professional assistance relationships, utilization of feedback systems, support with instructional leadership, and support of principals' leadership practices.

To ground the study in the overarching focus, each team member utilized a specific conceptual framework for their individual studies; while most team members had unique frameworks, two researchers shared adult learning theory. This allowed research team members to apply a variety of relevant theories to a significant problem of practice. Table 2.1 shows the purpose of each individual study, the conceptual framework through which the purpose was examined, and the overarching focus of the study:

² This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Christine A. Copeland, Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, Alexandra Montes McNeil, and AC Sevelius.

Table 2.1
Individual Studies' Focuses and Conceptual Frameworks

| Overarching Focus: The Use of MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals | | |
|---|--|--------------------------------|
| Author | Individual Study Focus | Conceptual Framework |
| AC Sevelius | Policy Interpretation | Organizational Learning Theory |
| Christine A. Copeland | Policy Communication to Principals | Sensemaking |
| James A. Carter | Help Relationships Among COAs and Principals | Social Capital Theory |
| Alex Montes McNeil | Feedback to Principals on Performance | Adult Learning Theory |
| Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom | Support with Instructional Leadership | Adult Learning Theory |
| Leah Blake McKetty | Principal Perceptions of Needed Supports | Distributive Leadership |

Through the use of multiple conceptual frameworks, the research team's qualitative single-case study provided a nuanced understanding of how EPS is implementing a complex public policy. With the EPS team of COAs and principals as the bounded system and with each of the actors as a unit of analysis, the case study approach revealed a holistic picture of the district's implementation of MMSEE for principals (Yin, 2009).

By using qualitative methods, researchers immersed themselves within the environment to learn from the participants, identify emerging themes, and reframe approaches and questions as understanding emerged (Creswell, 2014). A qualitative case methodology, which allowed for a comprehensive description of the problem through examination and analysis, best addressed the purpose of this study (Yin, 2009). Patton (1990) discusses the necessary elements of this type of methodology here:

First, the qualitative methodologist must get close enough to the people and situation being studied to personally understand in depth the details of what goes on. Second, the qualitative methodologist must aim at capturing what actually takes place and what people actually say: the perceived facts.

Third, qualitative data must include a pure description of people, activities, interactions and settings. Fourth, qualitative data must include direct quotations from people, both what they speak and what they write down (p. 32).

Building on Patton's analysis, Merriam (2009) extends the argument by stating that qualitative research is valued for its ability to capture complex action, perception, and interpretation. For these reasons, qualitative methodology was the best way to answer the proposed research questions because they require exploring a process of understanding.

Research Context

The team specifically sought a district that was small enough that all principals and COAs who directly support principals could be interviewed, and large and diverse enough to provide a rich context representative of a number of Massachusetts's school districts. Therefore, the findings could be applied to many school districts throughout the state.

EPS has a total enrollment of approximately 8,000 students with substantial populations of Latino, black, and Asian students, low-income families, students with disabilities, and English language learners, reflecting wide racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Like many Massachusetts cities, Emerson contains a variety of neighborhoods that vary according to ethnicity and social class. This corresponds to a

wide variety of neighborhood schools, some taking on the characteristics of the wealthy suburban communities surrounding Emerson and others reflecting an urban environment.

Challenges principals face vary according to the demographics of each school community population. Therefore, it is not surprising that MA ESE has designated a wide range of levels based on schools' overall proficiency and growth rates for student performance on standardized tests. In EPS, there are Level 1, 2, and 3 schools, ranging from those Level 1 schools who consistently meet performance targets for all students to Level 3 schools whose students perform below the 20th percentile. A district is defined by its lowest performing school; therefore, EPS is designated as a Level 3 district. Level 3 districts must take action to improve their Level 3 schools, and MA ESE provides resources, professional development, and other forms of targeted assistance to those schools (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE), 2015).

EPS has fourteen school principals and a team of COAs. The leaders who directly support principal practice are the Superintendent, Assistant Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, Director of Curriculum and Staff Development, Director Of Special Education, Director of Bilingual Education, and the Director of Academic Supports. In EPS, the superintendent evaluates the secondary principals, inclusive of all middle and high school principals, and the assistant superintendent evaluates the elementary principals. Until recently, the position of the assistant superintendent was vacant. Given the newness of the assistant superintendent at the time of the study, responses by elementary principals included their experience of evaluation from both the assistant

superintendent and the superintendent, who was their primary evaluator the previous year.

Purposeful sampling. To gather the data necessary to answer the research questions, the research team utilized purposeful sampling. The questions required a focus on specific district roles. The focus was on COAs who are responsible for supporting the work of principals. Maxwell (2009) supports the notion that purposeful sampling is essential to ensure that the researcher is not relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance, but by focusing on individuals who can provide the answers to their research questions.

Research chronology. The dissertation-in-practice team gained permission to conduct research from the EPS superintendent and received clearance from the Boston College Institutional Review Board (IRB) in the spring of 2015. During the summer, team members completed research that laid the groundwork for their individual studies, including writing literature reviews, an examination of available online resources pertaining to EPS, and conducting an initial meeting with EPS superintendent and chief academic officer to see if the proposed research was a good fit for their district. In the fall of 2015, researchers conducted interviews and reviewed documents. Once the team collected data, individuals coded interviews and documents according to their conceptual frameworks and wrote up their findings for their individual studies. Finally the team completed the overall dissertation in practice during the winter of 2016.

Data Sources

In order to address the research questions, the dissertation-in-practice team conducted interviews and reviewed public documents available online or provided by district leaders. The primary source of data used in this study was from interviews of all

fourteen EPS principals and the seven COAs who directly support principal practice. The team reviewed demographic and achievement data, professional development schedules, district and school improvement plans, and any other document district and school leaders provided. Finally, the team attended two sessions of the district's aspiring principal program to build relationships and further understand district context.

Interviews

The primary source of data collection was interviews. The dissertation-in-practice team decided to use a semi-structured protocol to ensure that research questions would be addressed, and allow participants and researchers flexibility to explore ideas, experiences, concepts, and insights as they arose. The thoughtful formulation of questions, development of the interview protocol, and adherence to practices that protect participants led to rich, deep, authentic responses from EPS's principals and COAs. Interviews took place at the school site or office of the interviewee and each lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. By conducting interviews at each practitioner's site, team members were able to see all EPS schools and the offices of all COAs, getting a strong feel for the district and its culture.

Formulation of questions. The team carefully developed a protocol for the interview questions that addressed each of the six studies within the overarching study. Researchers crafted open-ended and follow-up questions that allowed participants to speak broadly about topics of relevance to multiple studies. These questions allowed for flexibility, fluidity, and rich responses. Furthermore the organization of the questions allowed participants to link responses, build on their own ideas, and tell their own stories. For the detailed protocol, please consult Appendix A.

Before interviewing research participants, the dissertation-in-practice team piloted interview questions with current administrators from other districts to seek feedback about the questions' relevance and bias (Desimone & LeFloch, 2004). In an effort to minimize researcher bias (Maxwell, 2009; Merriam, 2009), vetting the interview protocol became an essential component of the process. The team was particularly sensitive to avoid creating interview questions that betrayed researchers' prejudices, led interviewees towards specific conclusions, placed professional reputations at stake, or included jargon particular to one school district and not another. Before researchers sat with the subjects of their study, the team determined:

whether the instrument measures the construct it purports to measure. An important aspect of validity is that the respondent has a similar understanding of the questions as the survey designers; and that the questions do not omit or misinterpret major ideas, or miss important aspects of the phenomena being examined. (Desimone & Le Floch, 2004, p. 4)

Once the pilot phase was completed, the team refined the interview protocol to minimize or eliminate identified bias. The process helped team members clarify questions, examine potential responses, and identify potential codes for analysis. Researchers were then able to refine the protocol so that EPS participants could more likely interpret the questions in the way that they were designed (Yin, 2009).

Interview protocol. The interviews were conducted face-to-face with two members from the research team. One team member led the interview and the other was responsible for the digital audio recorder. This team member also took notes and asked

follow-up questions as needed. In an effort to collect the most accurate data from participants, each researcher followed the appropriate structured interview protocol. After each interview, both members of the interview team produced an analytic memo. By using analytic memos written early in the process the research team was able to reflect on the interview and formulate initial findings (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). Finally, all recorded interviews were uploaded to an online transcription service, Rev.com. Once they were transcribed, the team reviewed the transcriptions for authenticity and uploaded them to Dedoose.com, an application that facilitates the coding and analysis of qualitative data.

Document Review

In an effort to understand MMSEE implementation in EPS, members of the research team conducted a document review in order to gain context and historical perspective. With the understanding documents might include bias and only represent one side of the implementation story (Yin, 2009), the team reviewed a range of EPS documents. The most helpful documents to this study were school improvements plans, the district improvement plan, professional development agendas and associated materials, the EPS website, and the MA ESE's EPS school and district profile webpage; most of these documents were available online. These documents allowed the research team to match stakeholder perception, as revealed during interviews, with intent, as communicated from central office.

The EPS website served as a reference for the research team. The website displayed EPS district values and mission as well as its commitment to parental engagement in supporting students' academic achievement. The website also contained

practical information such as lists of employees, school site addresses, and meeting notices. By referencing the website, the research team was able to gather basic, publicly accessible information independently with ease. Additionally, the research team studied all of the available documentation on MMSEE that was available to practitioners via MAESE's website. The documents included, but were not limited to, white papers, rubrics, research that led to the creation of MMSEE, and district level planning and implementation guides.

While interviews were the primary source of data, the research team analyzed the documents in an effort to "corroborate and augment the evidence" received during interviews (Yin, 2009, p. 103). Moreover, when interviewees referred directly to or alluded to particular meetings or memos, team members were then able to reference collected evidence, looking specifically at documents referred to during the interview.

Data Analysis

Prior to the data collection process, each researcher developed a preliminary list of coding categories based on the conceptual framework used in each individual study (Creswell, 2014). Data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously. Analyzing data while it was collected gave researchers the opportunity to validate *a priori* codes and test emerging findings (Maxwell 2009). Analytic memos were completed after each interview, observation, and document review, to summarize major findings and capture comments or reflections about the data (Creswell, 2014). This process provided the basis of analysis and continued until the findings were established.

Although each researcher coded the data individually through the lens of his/her conceptual framework, all researchers used a constant comparative method in analyzing the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Merriam, 2009). The codes were grouped for

overarching themes and patterns (Creswell, 2014). To facilitate this process, researchers used Dedoose.com, a qualitative research software package. The software facilitated the coding and analysis of qualitative data and served as a tool for developing themes and patterns. Determining themes was an iterative process and required several passes to organize the data into thematic codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2014). As overarching themes were identified, researchers reviewed findings with colleagues to determine if there were any outstanding questions or incomplete findings. When a gap appeared, researchers reviewed the transcripts and documents and, where possible, sought additional information from the district.

Informed Consent

As an educational research team, the protection of research participants was of utmost importance. All regulations outlined by the IRB were strictly adhered to in order to ensure the rights and welfare of participants of this research. In order to afford participants respect and ethical treatment, specific guidelines were followed: protecting participants that include the right to anonymity in an effort to conceal identification and potential ill consequences as a result of this work; maintaining confidentiality at all times; clarifying with participants the intent of the research; ensuring informed consent; committing to non-discriminatory practices based on race, gender, culture, sexual orientation, age, religion, or any other basis as described in law; respecting participants by being honest, fair, and non-judgmental; and working to minimize any preconceived opinions or biases. These moral agreements were a guide as research was conducted, and there was an ethical obligation as educational professionals to abide by these policies

(American Education Research Association (AERA), 2011). All interviewees had the option of opting out of participation in the study without consequences.

Validity and Reliability

In studying one district through six different lenses, the research team was able to compare and validate their findings. The research team checked evidence, triangulated data from different perspectives, and made meaning of data through individual conceptual frameworks. Since the findings from each individual study complemented one another, this produced an internal validity and reliability to the overall study. As the researchers compared findings, they used several tactics to ensure validity, such as “pattern matching” and “explanation building, addressing rival explanations, and using logic models” aligned to each conceptual framework (Yin, 2009, p. 43). This level of validity allowed the team to craft a specific and detailed narrative from the data.

Additionally, the research team gathered data from all fourteen EPS principals and all seven COAs who directly support principals. There were no EPS COAs or principals who declined to be interviewed; thus, ensuring that there were no missing perspectives or opinions. Therefore, the data collection and analysis processes were consistent and thorough.

The research team maintained a chain of evidence in order to increase the reliability of the information gained from the study (Yin, 2009). Nevertheless, there were several limitations to the study.

Limitations of the Study

Conducting a qualitative, single-case study in one school district on the implementation of MMSEE had limitations. These limitations included the small sample

size of only 21 participants in a single school district, the possibility of eliciting closed or inaccurate participant responses, and the internal bias of the research team, who are practicing administrators themselves and all have perceptions of the MMSEE.

Sample Size

EPS is a midsized urban/suburban school district with a small central office staff and fourteen principals. While the findings from the data gathered may be useful to EPS in particular, they may not be generalized to other school districts. Although the dissertation-in-practice team carefully chose EPS as a representative district, this assumption can be disproven by similar research in other school districts.

Possible Contention

As discussed previously, the research team piloted interview protocols to identify and reduce potential biases. In this effort, the team examined questions that could evoke sensitive or fearful responses. After all, the team researched supervision and evaluation, processes tied directly to professional reputation and personal safety. Even with a piloted and edited protocol in use, COAs and principals could have found the questions to be an indictment of their practice and might have responded with reduced openness and cooperation. Additionally, there were personnel tensions at play in the district that may or may not have been illuminated by the research, influencing how findings were interpreted by researchers. While the team employed a research protocol that promoted honesty, openness, and safety, the data gathered depended on individual's perceptions and thus could potentially be inaccurate or biased.

Internal Bias

All members of the research team are practicing school administrators in Massachusetts. In these professional capacities, each is familiar with, helped to pilot, and has been actively using MMSEE to supervise and evaluate principals and teachers. Thus, all have experienced MMSEE's strengths and weaknesses, and have formed opinions regarding this tool and its implementation. As experienced educational leaders, every researcher has interacted with school and district administrators and supported the growth and development of principals. While this familiarity gives the researchers more insight into EPS's practices, it nevertheless can promote preconceived notions and biases.

CHAPTER 3 – RELATIONAL TRUST, SOCIAL CONNECTIONS, AND IMPROVING PRINCIPAL PRACTICE

This dissertation-in-practice team's purpose was to explore how central office administrators (COAs) in one Massachusetts district, the Emerson Public Schools (EPS), are implementing the MMSEE for school principals to support their growth and development. The members of the dissertation-in-practice team examined district MMSEE implementation for principals through six individual studies, each with different perspectives and conceptual frameworks, with the intent of weaving them together to form a rich description and analysis. This particular study focuses on relationships among EPS COAs and principals and qualitatively explores how the relational trust and social connections among school and district leaders affect central office efforts to support principal growth and development.

Research Questions Addressed in this Individual Study

Since the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, state and federal policy makers have assumed that school districts can seamlessly implement policy changes (Cuban, 2012); however, a growing number of educational scholars have come to the conclusion that local leaders must develop their district's capacity to improve – its internal accountability – before effectively responding to external policy demands (Elmore, 2003; Louis & Robinson, 2012). One important resource that school districts can utilize to ensure implementation fidelity is *social capital*, the trust and connections found among district and school personnel. Social capital theory posits that relationships among COAs and principals matter significantly, especially in the context of organizational change. The presence or lack of relational trust and social connections between central office and

school leaders can determine the success or failure of improvement initiatives, especially when they are complex and originate at the state and federal levels (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Spillane, Gomez & Mesler, 2009; Moolenaar & Daly, 2012).

The MMSEE's framers understood that social relationships within a school system can significantly impact improvement. Within the model system's annual five-step cycle are many varied opportunities – goal-setting meetings, multiple observations and times for feedback, mid-cycle reviews, and summative evaluation meetings – for COAs and principals to connect and discuss leadership practices (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). In effect, the framers designed the MMSEE for principals as a tool to help enhance trust and connectivity between central office and school administrators. Furthermore, Emerson's district leaders designed other initiatives, programs and systems to support the growth and development of principals, and these, too, could further enhance professional assistance relationships between district and school leaders. Thus, it is important to deeply understand from both central office and principal perspectives whether MMSEE implementation and other district initiatives are effective both in promoting trust and interconnectivity and in supporting principal growth and development.

The purpose of this individual study is to explore through qualitative case study methods how the relationships among EPS central office supervisors and school principals both affect and are affected by district efforts to support and develop principals. The two research questions that guide the study are:

1. How does the central office team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development?
2. How does each principal's relational trust and connectedness toward central office administrators correlate to his or her perception of district efforts to promote principal growth and development?

The Development of the Conceptual Framework

Compared to the amount of research that focuses on how districts accomplish the technical work of school reform, there is much less work that examines how positive social relationships can contribute to systemic reform (Moolenaar & Daly, 2012). Nevertheless, a growing number of studies are examining the impact of social capital on district-wide policy implementation (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Chhuon et al., 2008; Spillane, Gomez & Mesler, 2009; Daly, 2010). The following sections explore the research that addresses how interrelationships among educators, defined as social capital, serve to influence system-wide capacity to improve educational outcomes for students. This research additionally suggests actions district leaders can take to harness the power of social capital and create more capacity for positive systemic change. These actions will serve as the basis for the design of the research study's conceptual framework.

Social Capital

One can define social capital as “the relational ties among individuals within a social system” (Coleman, 1990, as cited in Bryk & Schneider, 2002, p. 13) or alternatively, “an instantiated, informal norm that promotes cooperation between two or more individuals” (Fukuyama, 2000, p. 3). Like any other form of capital, social capital

is a resource that can be utilized to facilitate change. Anyone can access, borrow, or leverage social capital for a particular purpose, including influencing information flow, changing patterns of social influence, and applying pressure to individuals and groups (Spillane, Gomez & Mesler, 2009). Although social capital is intangible (Lin, 2001), it can be viewed either on a micro or macro level. On one hand, the development of social capital can be seen through the nature of each individual personal relationship, from merely communicating basic information to developing and articulating shared expectations and standards of practice. Social theorist James Coleman described this as levels of “trustworthiness” (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). On a larger scale, one can measure social capital by mapping the relationships among all the actors within an organization and determining the structure, density, and uniformity of the resulting social network (Moolenaar & Daly, 2012).

Relational Trust

A number of scholars (Bryk and Schneider, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, 2001; Chhuon et al., 2008; Daly, 2009) defined relational trust as “the extent to which one engages in a relationship and is willing to be vulnerable to another (i.e., to assume risk) on the basis of the interaction and the confidence that the latter party will possess benevolence, competence, integrity, openness, reliability, and respect” (Daly, 2009, p. 209). Researchers outside of education have explored how trust affects organizations, and some have concluded that social trust is critical for the nation’s ability to stay economically competitive. Fukuyama (2000) explained that high trust environments reduce social transaction costs and thus make complex systems more flexible and innovative. In one of the first educational studies on trust, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy

(2000) found that “trust is required for many of the reforms taking shape in American schools.” (p. 547).

In their case studies of three Chicago elementary schools undergoing intense decentralized reform, Bryk and Schneider (2002) put forth a compelling argument of how a high level of relational trust is fundamental to school improvement. First, trust can help ameliorate the vulnerability and uncertainty educators experience in the face of systemic reform in an already turbulent environment. Second, trust serves as a “social lubricant” by reducing friction and the energy necessary for information sharing, problem solving, and decentralized decision-making (Spillane, Gomez & Mesler, 2009). Finally, trust enhances commitment to doing what is right for children and creates collective accountability. Bryk and Schneider (2002) concluded, “We view relational trust as creating the social ground for core technical resources (such as standards, assessments, and new curricula) to take root and develop into something of value” (p. 135).

Researchers have found that trust is easier to develop in some environments than others. Repeated social exchanges are most important to building trust; thus, people who are separate from one another, whether physically or socially, will have a more difficult time developing high-trust relationships than those who are in close connection or who are socially similar (Daly, 2010). Additionally, trust is difficult to build when the district’s organization is hierarchical, but loosely connected (Tschannen-Moran, 2003) or when the school system is under stress from possible external sanctions (Daly, 2009).

Networks

On a macro level, one can measure social capital by looking at the number and placement of interactions throughout the social network. Social capital is not distributed

equally throughout a social network; rather, it is dependent on how an individual is situated within the network. Those who occupy a central space and share more connections with others carry more social capital than those on the periphery with few relationships (Moolenaar & Daly, 2012; Daly & Finnigan, 2010). When an actor is positioned with a high degree of interconnectedness, he or she can more ably communicate throughout the organization, collaboratively solve complex problems, and generate coordinated action (Bryk & Schneider, 2002).

Because an organization is socially constructed, existing “in the interrelationship between activities of individuals” (Hubbard, Mehan & Stein, 2006, p. 263), the building blocks of a school system are not individuals, but relationships. Patterns of all relationships are what determine the organization’s structure and culture. Thus, in order for a school district to make meaningful, planned, positive reform, it must focus on creating new or improving existing relationships to provide participants the opportunity to interact with one another extensively. While an outside reform may prescribe a particular response from the school district, it is ultimately the connections among individuals within the district and community that determine the shape and success of any change strategy. This can be done most effectively in dense social networks when there is high interconnectivity between everyone in the system (Spillane, Reiser, & Gomez, 2006; Daly & Finnigan, 2011). On the other hand, those who reside on the periphery of a sparse network receive less information and have fewer opportunities to leverage social capital (Daly and Finnigan, 2011) and may require key individuals to act as brokers to form the necessary connections (Honig, 2006).

Strategies That Promote Trust and Connections Between District and School

Leaders

The few empirical studies that examine the relationship between trust and effective school district leadership confirm that a large part of being an effective leader is to form strong relationships that can then in turn generate social capital. Through a case study analysis of one successful district, Chhuon et al. (2008) analyzed what it takes for district leaders to build trust among school leaders. The authors concluded that district leaders must carve out time for interaction, reliably follow through on their promises, and create an environment of shared decision-making and transparency. Additionally, Daly and Chrispeels (2008) found three core leadership practices, “the inclusion of others,” “the willingness to be vulnerable,” and “the maintenance of high expectations and skills” (p. 53) that correlated very strongly with system-wide trust generation.

Harrison and Rouse (2015) came to similar conclusions when examining how leaders can use feedback to promote trust. The authors contended that effective feedback cannot be one-sided; rather, the best feedback is co-constructed in a reciprocal dialogue between the provider and the receiver. Although often the provider of feedback holds a position of power over the receiver, it is essential that the conversation flows in both directions in a balanced manner. Pollack (2012) characterized this sort of equitable dialogue as “partnering feedback” – as opposed to “gatekeeping feedback” – where both participants consider each other’s needs and jointly learn from each other.

While research on the effects of building trust within individual relationships has been promising, studies that uncover the districts’ networks of relationships have told a more cautionary story. In a series of three social network analysis studies of large,

underperforming school districts, Daly and Finnigan (2010; 2011; 2012) found that even though there were robust communication and knowledge ties among personnel *within* the central office and each school, there were very sparse connections *between* central office and school site leaders. In fact, the more underperforming the school, the fewer connections and the lower the trust levels between school leaders and district leaders (Daly & Finnigan, 2012).

Honig and others offered a compelling argument that in order for COAs to effectively support principals' instructional leadership and sustain system-wide improvement, they must completely transform their roles and responsibilities and overhaul the central office organization (Honig, Lorton & Copland, 2009; Copland & Honig, 2010; Knapp et al., 2010). Front-line COAs must position themselves to broker resources and information across the district and community in order to build connections with principals. These boundary-spanning activities are essential for local implementation of district and state policy (Honig, 2006).

In subsequent studies, Honig and others extended the findings by surveying, interviewing, and observing principals and COAs in a number of large, urban districts (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). They concluded that specific COA practices significantly helped principals' instructional leadership: employing a non-directive teaching orientation, focusing on principals' individual needs, modeling complex thinking, providing tools, brokering resources, and buffering principals from bureaucratic demands. The researchers concluded that COAs who consistently used these strategies were significantly more effective than those who did not.

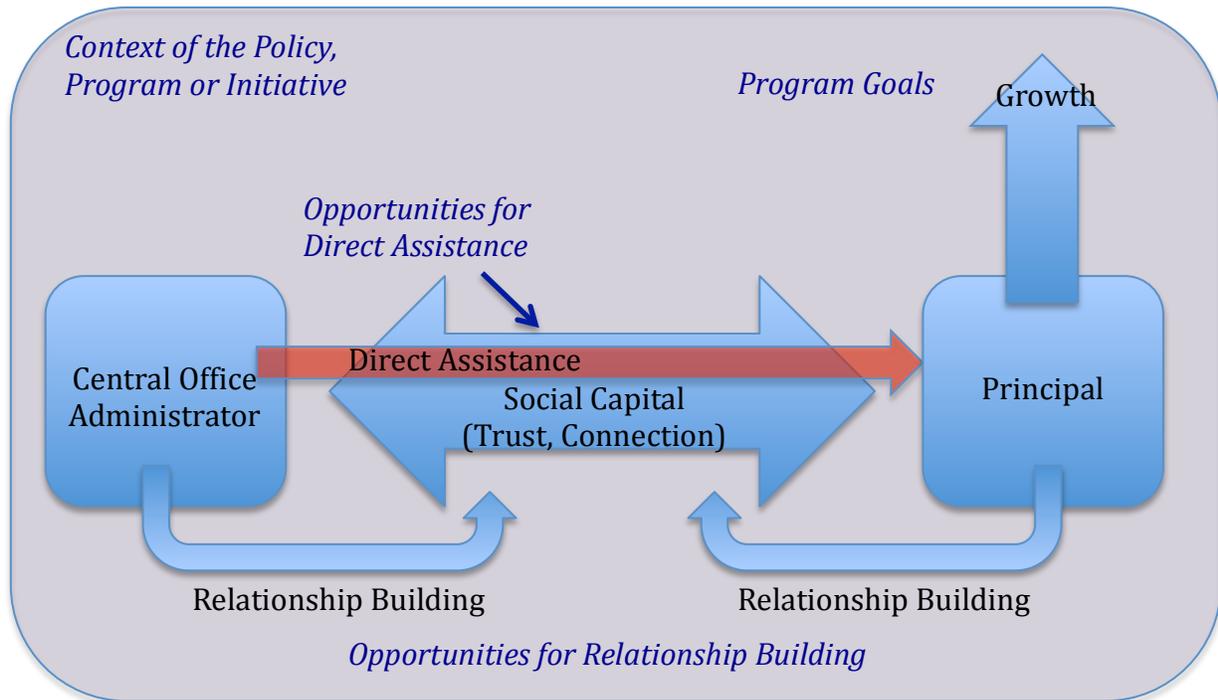
In sum, the literature suggests a number of actions central office leaders can employ that build relational trust and interconnectedness. These approaches include transparently involving others in decision making (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000; Chhuon et al., 2008; Daly & Chrispeels, 2008), competently modeling high skills and expectations (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Honig, 2012), providing feedback in an equitable manner (Pollack, 2012; Harrison & Rouse, 2015), performing joint work in partnership (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Honig & Rainey, 2014), creating cross-boundary connections (Honig, 2006), and buffering principals from perceived pressures (Daly, 2009, Louis & Robinson, 2012).

A Model of the Conceptual Framework

When looking at professional assistance relationships using a social capital lens, it is clear that no matter how a district leader supports a principal – whether through feedback, joint work, modeling, connecting, or buffering – the direct assistance is always mediated within the context of the overall relationship. According to social capital theory, a COA and principal in a close, trusting relationship can utilize the high social capital to bolster professional support. Conversely, a COA and principal in a low social capital relationship are significantly hamstrung when giving and receiving assistance. Thus, it is essential that district leaders simultaneously build and grow trusting, connected relationships as they provide direct assistance to principals, and principals must contribute toward strengthening these relationships as well. Because this relationship building and support happens in the context of district program implementation, one can surmise that district initiatives which provide ample opportunities for both relationship-building and direct professional assistance would be more effective than those that do

not. Figure 3.1 illustrates the interplay between social capital, relationship building, direct support and assistance, and principal growth in the context of district programming.

Figure 3.1 *The Dynamics of a Professional Assistance Relationship Between COA and Principal Using a Social Capital Conceptual Framework*



Coding and Analysis Methods

This study was conducted with components of the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 3.1 in mind. First, it was important to understand how the central office was organized to support principals and what programs and practices were being implemented to foster principal growth and development. Second, gauge how COAs themselves thought they supported principals, both formally (through the MMSEE and other district initiatives) and informally. Third, shifting to the principals' perspectives, determine where principals placed themselves within the district's social network and the relative amount of social capital principals perceived they carried with key central office supervisors. Finally, aim to understand how principals perceived their own supervision, evaluation, and support through the MMSEE and other district

initiatives. With this information, the study attempted to find correlations between principal trust and connections with COAs – their social capital – and their perceptions of district efforts to promote their growth and development.

Unlike a number of trust and social networking theory studies that used quantitative survey methods in very large districts to measure social capital (Daly & Chrispeels, 2008; Daly & Finnigan, 2010, 2011, 2012; Moolenar & Daly, 2012), this single case study employed qualitative interview data in a relatively small district with significantly fewer participants. According to Merriam (2009), “Qualitative researchers are interested in the meaning people have constructed, that is, how people make sense of their world and the experiences they have in the world” (p. 13). The study aimed to illuminate how COAs and principals made sense of their professional assistance relationships in the context of district efforts to support principal growth and development. Professional assistance relationships are often complex and nuanced, and it was important to explore how and why some professional assistance relationships are effectively cultivated in a climate of organizational change, while others are not. By employing a narrow lens and methods that generated more contextualized data, the study uncovered and analyzed the interplay between high-quality professional assistance relationships and effective program implementation.

Coding

The 21 interviews of EPS principals and central office leaders conducted by the dissertation-in-practice team provided much information for this individual study. Although a number of interview questions were tailored for colleagues’ studies, many answers to those questions applied to this individual study as well. Additionally, the review of district

documentation connected with MMSEE supervision and evaluation and school improvement plan (SIP) development gave important context to the interviewees' responses.

Analyzing the data began with a search for COA leadership traits and actions that research has shown to build relational trust. These attributes included responsiveness, competence, consistency, transparency, follow-through, collaborative decision-making, joint work, constructive feedback, providing leadership tools, modeling complex thinking, creating cross-boundary connections, and buffering from bureaucratic demands. Additionally, the search included leadership traits and actions that could break trust, such as unresponsiveness, incompetence, unpredictability, lack of follow-through, communication breakdown, fear of repercussions, job stressors, and administrator turnover. The second step was to code perceptions of how the MMSEE was implemented in Emerson, including the self-reflection and goal setting process, observations and feedback, and summative evaluation reports and meetings. In a similar vein, the third step was to code perceptions of how district efforts to support principals were implemented, including weekly administrative meetings, principal professional development activities, school improvement plan development, and other forms of state-level assistance.

Criteria for Analysis

After the review of the coded interview data came a compilation and sorting of interview evidence for each principal's perceptions of trust and connectivity to other members of the organization and for each principal's perceptions of the effectiveness of five distinct district efforts to support principal growth and development. Principal responses were categorized into four color-coded groups according to the rubric outlined in Table 3.1:

Table 3.1

Rubric Used to Divide Principals and Into Four Categories: Level of Social Capital and Perceptions of District Efforts to Support Principal Growth and Development

| Measure | Highly Connected / Very Positive (red) | Moderately Connected / Slightly Positive (orange) | Moderately Isolated / Slightly Negative (green) | Highly Isolated / Very Negative (blue) |
|--|---|---|--|---|
| Perceptions of trust and connectivity to other members of the organization. (Level of social capital.) | <p>-- Emphatically states high levels of trust and connectivity</p> <p>-- Identifies many strong professional assistance relationships</p> <p>-- Identifies no people he or she distrusts or isolates self from</p> | <p>-- Moderately satisfied with level of trust and connectivity</p> <p>-- Identifies a few strong professional assistance relationships or many moderate ones</p> <p>-- May identify a person he or she distrusts or isolates self from</p> | <p>-- Moderately dissatisfied with level of trust and may feel slightly isolated</p> <p>-- Identifies a few weak to moderate professional assistance relationships</p> <p>-- Identifies one or more people he or she distrusts or isolates self from</p> | <p>-- Emphatically states high levels of distrust and isolation</p> <p>-- Identifies zero to, at most, a very few weak professional assistance relationships</p> <p>-- Identifies many people he or she distrusts or isolates self from</p> |
| Perceptions of the effectiveness of district efforts to support principal growth and development | <p>-- Very positive comments about the initiative</p> <p>-- Provides many strong examples of how the initiative is supporting individual practice</p> | <p>-- Moderately positive comments about the initiative</p> <p>-- Provides a few examples of how the initiative is supporting individual practice</p> | <p>-- Mixed to moderately negative comments about the initiative</p> <p>-- Mixed examples of how the initiative is supporting individual practice</p> | <p>-- Very negative comments about the initiative</p> <p>-- Provides many strong examples of how the initiative does not support or even undermines individual practice</p> |

Using the four color-coded categories was very helpful when looking for patterns and correlations between social capital levels and perceptions of program effectiveness, which are described in the following findings section.

Findings

The research questions in this case study aimed to explore how trust, interconnectivity and central office support are interrelated from perspectives of both district and school leaders.

The first part is a focus on COAs, a determination of how central office was organized to support

principals, and description of the programs they were implementing to promote the growth and development of principals. Second is a shift to principal perspectives, an examination of the relationships principals perceived they have with COAs, and where principals saw themselves within the overall social network. Finally is an exploration of correlations between principal trust and connections with COAs – their social capital – and their perceptions of district efforts to promote their growth and development.

Trust, Connections, and Principal Support: The Central Office Perspective

Before delving into how central office leaders supported the growth and development of principals, it was important to outline the organizational context of Emerson Public Schools' central office. Many administrators described central office as having an upper or lower tier or an inner and outer circle, depending whether they were thinking about the organization as a hierarchy or as a network. One principal described central office “as different layers. It’s the superintendent, assistant superintendent, chief academic officer. They’re the inner circle ... There’s a number of other central office people ... They’re not considered to be the power brokers.” The superintendent, assistant superintendent, and chief academic officer together are responsible for the supervision and evaluation of all central office directors and school principals. The superintendent supervises the assistant superintendent, the chief academic officer, and the secondary principals, the assistant superintendent supervises the elementary school principals, and the chief academic officer supervises central office directors in the areas of academics and student support services.

Since the superintendent’s arrival, the number of central office leadership positions has grown substantially. To respond to a lack of curricular coherence within the district, the superintendent created a new central office department called “Ed-Ops.” Likewise, on the

student services side, the superintendent has added more staffing under the special education director and the director of bilingual education. This, in effect, has created three departments within the central office's outer circle: operations, academics or "Ed-ops," and student support services. Three out of the seven central office administrators interviewed commented that they see this new central office structure as too "siloes," and that there is less connectivity than there could be among the central office departments.

Central office support for principals. All seven central office leaders interviewed indicated that they were highly committed to supporting the growth and development of principals and emphasized the importance of developing high levels of trust. COAs portrayed themselves as people who are always available to principals, who listen to them, and who frequently collaborate with them to solve the strategic, instructional and operational problems found in schools. One central office leader emphasized the importance of forming close partnerships: "I always approach it from a sense of trust and collaboration. We're all in this together and just because my role is a different role ... I think there's a certain sense of believing what I say and that they can trust me, that I'm on their side."

COAs acknowledge that these relationships operate in both directions and that principals share the responsibility of forming close, trusting relationships. The chief academic officer emphasized that principals need to "recognize that they are not an island" and "that they don't run fiefdoms." Likewise, the superintendent affirmed that principals needed to report, discuss, and collaborate on serious problems:

The least obvious [attribute that I look for in principals], but to me the most important one, is the importance for leaders to be able to manage up ... That

particularly means that they have the ability to understand what their supervisor needs to know if they're in trouble.

In sum, COAs took their responsibilities to support principals very seriously and, to a person, described their interactions with building leaders as inclusive, supportive, collaborative, transparent, and consistent.

District programming for principal growth and development. COAs discussed a wide range of district initiatives, programs, and professional development opportunities designed specifically to support principals. The following sections describe the two systemic district efforts that principals reported as having the most impact for their growth and development: school improvement plan (SIP) development and professional development on the supervision and evaluation of teachers.

School improvement plan development. Three years ago, central office leadership introduced a comprehensive, rigorous, data-driven process for principals to develop school improvement plans (SIPs) in collaboration with COAs, coaches, teachers, and site councils. The document, which often exceeds fifty pages, contains the school's vision and mission statements, an overview of all programming, and a number of tables, charts and graphs that present data. The second half of the SIP outlines a set of goals, action steps, timetables, and measures of progress for the school to undergo the following year. Developing the school improvement plan is a year-long process for principals, who receive coaching at least once a month from the chief academic officer and other central office directors. Throughout the year, principals engaged their site councils, leadership teams, and data teams to develop the SIP and present it to the school committee.

Six out of the seven central office administrators interviewed considered the SIP development process to be an extremely effective way to support principals. First, it served as a tool that can align individual, school, and district goals together. According to the superintendent, “My interest is that they set goals in conjunction with their school improvement plan ... Those all should be aligned with the district wide goals, and the superintendent's goals for the year. Our goal is to see that through line all the way from the top to the bottom.” Second, the SIP process required principals to think strategically “in a very individual, customized way about their building.” Finally, district leaders believed that school improvement plan development supported principals by allowing them to “articulate their strengths ... and then work into the weaknesses.”

COAs did acknowledge that when the SIP development process was introduced, many principals were upset by the amount of work they had to do. They reported that although the first few years were “difficult,” principals began to understand its effectiveness in determining goals and allocating resources. “Now, principals are used to it,” according to the chief academic officer, “so they know they have to do it.”

There was some disagreement within the inner circle about how SIP development fit in with the overall principal supervision and evaluation process. The chief academic officer believed that SIP development should be separate from principal evaluation while the assistant superintendent expressed his intentions of integrating school improvement goals with principals’ professional goals. However, all central office leaders believed the SIP process serves as a powerful tool that both supports principal development and drives the district toward sustained improvement.

Supervisory professional development for principals. For the past three years, all EPS principals and assistant principals, in cohorts, have been taking intensive courses from Research for Better Teaching (RBT), an outside vendor that provided professional development for principals to better supervise and evaluate teachers using the MMSEE. Components of the courses included identifying best instructional practices, calibrating observations to focus more on student learning and less on teacher performance, and effectively conferencing with teachers and giving them warm and cool feedback. All seven central office administrators acknowledged the importance of this program and felt that principals were greatly benefiting from it. According to the superintendent, one of the first things he needed to do was to train all principals to analyze teaching for student results:

By using Jon Saphier's work, and one of his primary trainers ... we've been able to work on calibrating instructional leadership ... That's been one of the most important things that we've done. It has helped us to build quality of instructional leadership ... in terms of being in the classroom, in terms of managing good observations, and supporting higher quality instruction.

After taking the initial core supervisory course, principals could take electives to further build their knowledge. This particular professional development initiative is coming to an end, as only school administrators new to the district are now taking the course; however, at least two COAs want to keep the momentum going by having the outside vendor help with learning walks and providing courses for teachers.

District use of the MMSEE to supervise and evaluate principals. Although the district has developed programs to support principal growth and development, it has been very slow to implement the MMSEE for principals. EPS central office administrators do not yet use the

MMSEE as a primary tool to promote principal growth and development. Although EPS quickly adopted and rolled out MMSEE for teachers three years ago, this is the first year that department heads, assistant principals and other union affiliated administrators are being evaluated. Central office administrators were quick to admit that they were still in the process of rolling out formal evaluation systems and structures for principals.

For the past two years, the superintendent has been using the MMSEE as a guideline to supervise middle and high school principals in the district, but has not emphasized MMSEE's formal structures when supporting principals. To complicate things further, turnover in the assistant superintendent's position has greatly limited supervision and evaluation for elementary principals. In the previous year, after the assistant superintendent's unexpected departure, the superintendent decided not to fill the position and attempted to supervise and evaluate all fourteen elementary and secondary principals. Because he was not able to meet with them as frequently as he wanted to, he consciously differentiated his support toward principals who were new or who were leading Level 3 schools. As a result, many elementary principals have missed being meaningfully evaluated in the last four years. The newly hired assistant superintendent had just initiated a formal evaluation process for elementary principals at the time of the study.

Some components of the MMSEE's supervisory cycle for principals have received more attention than others. For example, the assistant superintendent worked slowly through self-assessment and goal setting with his elementary principals. He scheduled monthly meetings but hadn't yet conducted any formal observations. The superintendent, on the other hand, did not focus on self-reflection and goal setting, but instead emphasized frequent school visits and walkthroughs as a vehicle to make observations and give feedback for secondary principals.

EPS’s use of the MMSEE for supervision, evaluation and support of principals is a work in progress. Unlike many other Massachusetts districts, where the MMSEE may be the primary means of supporting principal growth and development, EPS has at least two methods for principal support that are much better established. Therefore, when thinking about overall central office supervision of principals, it is important to see MMSEE not as the primary driver, but as only a complementary component of a larger system of support for principals.

Perspectives From Principals: Two Polarized Camps

Unlike COAs, who uniformly reported that they have close working relationships with both district and school leaders, principals were quite divided. Eight principals reported strong working relationships with many district leaders. However, six principals reported that they felt isolated from central office, especially from the inner circle, and there were very few COAs they could go to for assistance. Table 3.2, by organizing principals from most connected to least, shows the big divide between those principals who feel connected to other district and school administrators and those principals who feel isolated.

Table 3.2
EPS Principals’ Perceived Connections to Groups of District Administrators

| Principal | Perceived connection to central office inner circle | Perceived connection to central office outer circle | Perceived connection to other principals |
|--------------------------|--|--|---|
| Principal 1 (Elementary) | Highly connected | Highly connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 2 (Elementary) | Highly connected | Highly connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 3 (Secondary) | Highly connected | Highly connected | Moderately connected |
| Principal 4 (Elementary) | Moderately connected | Highly connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 5 (Secondary) | Moderately connected | Highly connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 6 (Elementary) | Moderately connected | Highly connected | Moderately connected |

| Principal | Perceived connection to central office inner circle | Perceived connection to central office outer circle | Perceived connection to other principals |
|---------------------------|---|---|--|
| Principal 7 (Elementary) | Moderately connected | Moderately connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 8 (Secondary) | Moderately connected | Moderately connected | Highly connected |
| Principal 9 (Elementary) | Highly isolated | Moderately isolated | Moderately connected |
| Principal 10 (Elementary) | Highly isolated | Highly isolated | Moderately connected |
| Principal 11 (Elementary) | Highly isolated | Moderately connected | Highly isolated |
| Principal 12 (Secondary) | Highly isolated | Highly isolated | Moderately isolated |
| Principal 13 (Elementary) | Highly isolated | Moderately isolated | Highly isolated |
| Principal 14 (Elementary) | Highly isolated | Highly isolated | Highly isolated |

The colors in Table 3.2 signify two distinct groups of principals: those who trust and feel largely connected to other administrators and those who do not – or, in other words, those with high and low social capital. The table shows that there is not much middle ground. Most principals report themselves either as highly connected to or highly isolated from other administrators. Additionally, principals who consider themselves as having strong relationships with the inner circle believe that they are tightly connected to the whole network. Likewise, principals with weak inner circle relations are more likely to be isolated from the whole network.

Principal perceptions of district programming. There is a very strong correlation between principals’ social capital within the administrative network and their views on the helpfulness of district initiatives designed to help them grow and develop. Table 3.3 presents principals’ perceptions of the two major district-initiated efforts to support them, the SIP development process and supervisory professional development:

Table 3.3
Principal's Perceptions of the SIP Development Process and Supervisory Professional Development

| Principal | Perception of the SIP Development Process | Perception of Supervisory Professional Development |
|---------------------------|---|--|
| Principal 1 (Elementary) | Very positive | Very positive |
| Principal 2 (Elementary) | Slightly positive | Very positive |
| Principal 3 (Secondary) | Very positive | Very positive |
| Principal 4 (Elementary) | Very positive | Very positive |
| Principal 5 (Secondary) | | Very positive |
| Principal 6 (Elementary) | Very positive | Very positive |
| Principal 7 (Elementary) | Very positive | Very positive |
| Principal 8 (Secondary) | | Slightly negative |
| Principal 9 (Elementary) | Slightly negative | Slightly positive |
| Principal 10 (Elementary) | Very negative | Very positive |
| Principal 11 (Elementary) | Very negative | |
| Principal 12 (Secondary) | Very negative | Slightly positive |
| Principal 13 (Elementary) | Slightly negative | Very positive |
| Principal 14 (Elementary) | Slightly negative | Slightly negative |

Note: Empty table cells denote that the principal did not comment at all about the district initiative.

Overall, principals believed that their supervisory professional development courses were very helpful, but they had split opinions about the SIP development process. Opinions were decidedly more positive among principals feeling connected to central office than those feeling isolated. In the following subsections, I will further explore principal responses to the two major district practices that promote principal growth.

SIP development. Twelve principals were evenly split on their views on school improvement plan development. Opinions about school improvement plans were strongly

correlated with principals' social capital levels, with connected principals happy with the SIP development process and isolated principals unhappy with it. The principals who found the SIP development process beneficial emphasized that the plans are truly data-driven documents created by collaborative teams. They talked passionately about their school goals and what data sets they analyzed to come to those goals. One principal described her SIP as a living document: "I don't sit in a vacuum and develop my school improvement plan because it has to be a living document. And if I'm the one who is developing it, then no one is going to live it. Not even me."

Principals on both sides commented on the nature of central office feedback they received on their school improvement plans. They described the chief academic officer as detail-oriented and opinionated. "Overall, it's been more [than] just check-ins with her. She has some strong opinions of direction of where academics should be. Sometimes we agree, sometimes we don't. That's where we're trying to work out the details." It is evident that principals who felt supported by COAs did not have as much of a problem with strong, opinionated central office feedback as principals who did not feel supported by central office. While intense feedback might energize some principals, it can discourage others. One isolated principal revealed, "I'm trying not to swim upstream, trying to go with the flow a little, but at the same time, sometimes the communication can get critical. There's a judgy kind of blamy thing that can happen." Finally, three principals unhappy with the SIP development process questioned central office motives for creating such robust, detailed plans. They felt the plans were more for public relations purposes than for school improvement.

Supervisory professional development. Principals perceived their professional development courses for supervising and evaluating teachers very positively. Out of thirteen

principals who took at least one course, eleven commented positively and nine gave glowing reviews. Although high social capital principals were more positive about the professional development course than low social capital principals, the correlation was much weaker, with many isolated principals commenting favorably about their experience.

Before the superintendent's arrival, there were not many courses available for principals. Principals recognized the culture shift when central office leadership required the supervision course and most viewed it positively. Principals reported that the lead instructor was very effective and that they learned how best to support teachers within the brand new evaluation system. A relatively isolated principal shared, "The course ... totally gave me the tools and the perspective of how to even think about helping teachers improve their practice. I felt very supported by the district that way." Finally, most principals took the core supervision course with their vice principals. These principals enjoyed teaming with their administrative partners. "You go in the class, principal and vice principal, and then you come out of the class and talk about what you saw and you calibrate. You get on the same page. There's nothing like that."

Principals' Perceptions on District Use of the MMSEE. Although district leaders admitted that principal evaluation is still a work in progress, principals have gone through a loose MMSEE-style evaluation cycle for at least the past two years. Table 3.4 outlines general principal perceptions of three stages of the yearly supervision and evaluation cycle: self-reflection and goal setting, observations and feedback, and end-of-year summative evaluations.

Table 3.4

Principal's Perceptions of MMSEE Supervision and Evaluation: Self-Reflection and Goal Setting, Observations and Feedback, Formative and Summative Evaluations

| Principal | Perception of Self-Reflection and Goal Setting | Perception of Observations and Feedback | Perception of Formative and Summative Evaluations |
|---------------------------|--|---|---|
| Principal 1 (Elementary) | | Very positive | Slightly negative |
| Principal 2 (Elementary) | Very positive | Slightly negative | Slightly positive |
| Principal 3 (Secondary) | | Slightly negative | Slightly negative |
| Principal 4 (Elementary) | Very positive | Very negative | Very negative |
| Principal 5 (Secondary) | | Slightly negative | Slightly positive |
| Principal 6 (Elementary) | Slightly positive | Very positive | Very negative |
| Principal 7 (Elementary) | Very positive | Slightly negative | Very negative |
| Principal 8 (Secondary) | | Slightly positive | Slightly negative |
| Principal 9 (Elementary) | Very positive | Slightly negative | Slightly negative |
| Principal 10 (Elementary) | | Very negative | Very negative |
| Principal 11 (Elementary) | | Very negative | Very negative |
| Principal 12 (Secondary) | | Very negative | Very negative |
| Principal 13 (Elementary) | Slightly negative | Slightly negative | Very negative |
| Principal 14 (Elementary) | Very positive | Slightly positive | Slightly negative |

Note: Empty table cells denote that the principal did not comment at all about the district initiative.

Overall, principals believed that the self-reflection and goal setting stages in the supervisory process were helpful for their practice. However, they were quite dissatisfied with the observations and feedback and had even a stronger negative reaction to how COAs conducted summative assessments. It is important to note that elementary and secondary principals have had very different evaluative experiences both this year and last. Therefore, it is

important to analyze principal perceptions of the evaluation process both in terms of how connected they are to central office and whether they lead elementary or secondary schools.

Self-reflection and goal setting. Only seven of the fourteen principals interviewed mentioned the first stages of the process and all of them were elementary principals. The assistant superintendent spent a great deal of time at the beginning of the year focusing on self-reflection and goal setting with the elementary principals, while the superintendent had previously de-emphasized this part of the evaluation process and emphasized regular observations.

Elementary principals' positive perceptions concerning self-reflection and goal setting reflected a hopefulness that the assistant superintendent will be a better supervisor, partner, and advocate than previous supervisors. Every veteran elementary principal commented on the administrator turnover and inconsistent supervisory practices during the preceding years. In contrast, five of the seven elementary principals reported that they appreciate the assistant superintendent's clear expectations and availability to help. One principal explained, "I think he's mindful of the fact that maybe this wasn't done in this fashion before and he really wants it to be explicit as we move forward and then spend quality time making sure we're all on the same page." Additionally, elementary principals praised the assistant superintendent's willingness to listen to principal feedback and slow down when principals have questions or concerns.

Overall, the positive outlook on self-assessment and goal setting reflect the impact that one brand new central office administrator is making. While most elementary principals negatively commented on other aspects of the evaluation system that they experienced last year, they often did so in a way that expressed hopefulness that with the new supervisor, things would improve.

Observations and feedback. As the sole supervisor of all fourteen principals last year, the superintendent was not able to observe many principals with the consistency and frequency that he would have liked. Consequently, many principals reported a negative experience with regard to observations and feedback. The resounding source of dissatisfaction from this group was that there were at most a few supervisory visits and very little opportunity to receive feedback.

Principals new to the district or leading Level 3 schools, whom the superintendent observed more frequently, had mixed-to-positive opinions about their observations. Four principals had positive comments about their visits and two had negative comments. The four principals who felt they benefited from the superintendent's observations and feedback appreciated his open-ended, non-judgmental, growth-oriented style. One principal commented, "Sometimes he's such a thinker it takes him a while, and you're like where's he going with this? And sometimes he's very philosophical, but in the end as I reflect on the past two years it's been very beneficial." The two principals who felt they did not benefit from his observations and feedback complained that he did not observe them enough, although one understood the superintendent's dilemma. "I think that the time demands on the superintendent to ... get to observe all his principals in action ... is very difficult."

Summative evaluations. It is not surprising that those principals who were not observed regularly and only received a sparse amount of feedback had a very negative perception of their summative evaluations. Except for two principals relatively new to the district, every principal felt that their summative evaluations did not help them with their practice. One common observation among principals was that the process had no transparency. "Last year I think my only tie to the evaluation process was when I went in in June and signed my evaluation. And

when I'm walking in, I don't know what rating I'm getting. No one should feel like that – that you don't know where you stand.” Not only was the summative evaluation disconnected from principal practice, it also did not connect well to the goals of the district and to student learning. One principal lamented, “I feel like I'm not doing the work I want to do. Am I proficient? He said I was and to me, that stuff doesn't even matter, the grade I get. I want to know the impact that my leadership team and I are having on student learning.” In sum, the great majority of principals found their summative evaluations to be merely an add-on, much like as the superintendent described, “the unfortunate period at the end of the sentence.”

Discussion

Using a social capital lens, this study examined five separate district efforts to support the growth and development of principals: the SIP development process, supervisory professional development, MMSEE self-reflection and goal setting, MMSEE observation and feedback, and MMSEE summative evaluation. Principals from both high- and low-social capital groups felt that supervisory professional development and the self-reflection and goal setting process were very helpful for their practice. High social capital principals, but not low social capital principals, felt that the SIP development process was helpful as well. There were mixed to negative opinions about supervisor observations and feedback, and decidedly negative attitudes toward summative evaluations.

Goal Alignment, Direct Assistance, and Relationship Building

On the whole, the range of opinions on each of the initiatives correlated with principals' perceived trust and connectedness with central office. High social capital principals were more positive about district efforts to support their growth and development than low social capital principals. This correlation shows that relationships do matter, and that any manner of COA

direct support for principals is indeed mediated by the strength of the relationship or the amount of social capital, as predicted by the conceptual framework illustrated in Figure 3.1.

According to the conceptual framework, in order for a district initiative to successfully support principal growth, the initiative must contain program goals that resonate with principal professional goals, opportunities for COAs to give principals direct assistance, and opportunities for both COAs and principals to develop connected, trusting relationships. Table 3.5 describes how each of the five initiatives fulfill these requirements:

Table 3.5
EPS's Programs Designed to Support Principal Growth and Development, Evaluated According to Goal Alignment, Direct Assistance, and Relationship Building

| Program Description | Alignment of Program Goals to Professional Goals | Opportunities for Direct Assistance | Opportunities for Relationship Building | Overall Principal Perception of the Program |
|--|---|--|--|--|
| Supervisory Professional Development: Courses that help principals and their assistants supervise and evaluate teachers | High alignment: Course goals of effective supervision align with principal professional goals | Moderately high direct assistance: Many chances to practice skills taught in class. Some walkthroughs. | High relationship building: Relationships developed among principals and assistant principals | Positive perception: From both high and low social capital principals |
| SIP Development: A rigorous annual process in which principals lead teams to analyze data and determine school goals | High alignment: Principals saw how school goals often matched their own professional goals | High direct assistance: Monthly meetings with Chief Academic Officer, additional support from other COAs | Mixed relationship building: Connected principals reported strong COA support, isolated principals often felt threatened by COA feedback | Mixed perception: High social capital principals were positive, low social capital principals negative |
| MMSEE Self-Reflection and Goal Setting: Principals self-evaluate according to MMSEE's rubric and set goals with their supervisors | High alignment: Direct discussion of professional goals | Mixed to positive direct assistance: Elementary principals reported high direct assistance, secondary principals did not comment | Mixed to positive relationship building: Elementary principals reported strong relationship building, secondary principals did not comment | Mixed to positive perception: Elementary principals positive, secondary principals did not comment |

| Program Description | Alignment of Program Goals to Professional Goals | Opportunities for Direct Assistance | Opportunities for Relationship Building | Overall Principal Perception of the Program |
|--|--|---|--|---|
| MMSEE Observations and Feedback: Supervisors observe principal practice and give feedback | High alignment: Principals felt that COA feedback was necessary for their growth and development | Mixed direct assistance: Some principals had regular observations and feedback, other principals had very few observations | Mixed relationship building: Principals with regular observations reported stronger relationships, principals with few observations reported weak relationships | Mixed to negative perception: Mixed perceptions from principals with regular observations. Negative perceptions from principals with few observations. |
| MMSEE Summative Assessment: The supervisor’s end-of-year meeting where principals are evaluated and rated | Low alignment: Principals found a disconnect between their evaluation and their professional goals | Little direct assistance: Principals felt that the summative evaluation did not give them any direct assistance | Little relationship building: Principals felt that the summative evaluation did not promote a closer relationship to their supervisor | Negative perception by both high and low social capital principals |

Breaking down district initiatives to promote principal growth and development into goal alignment, direct assistance, and relationship building categories can serve as a basis upon which to recommend program improvements. For example, SIP development is highly effective for many principals, as it is aligned with professional goals and provides many opportunities for direct assistance, but some principals who feel isolated from central office find it unhelpful. To improve this already strong program, the whole team of COAs and possibly some key principal colleagues should be available to participate in SIP development for each school. It may be beneficial to allow these isolated principals to help choose the team administrators to assist them in SIP development.

Likewise, district MMSEE implementation is strong with regard to goal alignment, but mixed in terms of direct assistance and relationship building. Despite how diligent the

superintendent and assistant superintendent are in making time to set goals, observe, give feedback, and evaluate principals, they do not have time to both give adequate direct assistance and build relationships, while at the same time keep up with their other responsibilities. More COAs, as secondary or supporting supervisors, should proactively leverage MMSEE supports and structures to assist and build relationships with principals. In EPS, principals should not have just one supervisor, but a team of supervisors actively working to promote their growth and development.

Differing Levels of Priorities

The COA prioritization of the five EPS initiatives for principal growth and development varied widely. Some Emerson programming, such as the SIP development process and the supervisory professional development program, were strong district priorities in that they were implemented both quickly and thoroughly. On the other hand, the principal evaluation system did not receive the same level of district prioritization, as the central office team developed it very slowly and implemented it in an inconsistent manner. The discrepancy between high-priority district initiatives and the lower priority district implementation of the MMSEE for principals has raised some uncomfortable ironies for both COAs and principals alike. How can the district have such a rigorous SIP planning process to develop, monitor and achieve school goals and yet be so lax in the oversight of principal professional goals? Furthermore, how can the district provide such strong professional development for principals to effectively give teachers valuable feedback on their instructional practice and yet be so scattered in observing and giving feedback to principals? These two ironies are non-discussable “elephants in the room” that negatively affect the trust and connectedness principals have for central office leaders.

Nevertheless, it is clear that this year the superintendent and his central office team are prioritizing principal evaluation and working diligently to make the MMSEE for principals more structured, transparent, and robust. Additionally, EPS has effective systems and structures that already support the growth and development of principals. The superintendent can leverage the successful supervisory professional development program to bolster MMSEE implementation by training COAs how to supervise, evaluate, and support principals just as the district successfully trained principals to supervise, evaluate, and support teachers. Then, the superintendent will be able to empower and expect that all COAs supervise and support principals either in a primary or secondary role. Additionally, the central office team can utilize the robust SIP development process by explicitly tying principal professional goals to school improvement goals and incorporating the extensive use of school improvement data as evidence for improved professional practice. By tying MMSEE implementation for principals more closely to already strong practices that support principal growth and development, the district central office team will have created a powerful, integrated principal support system that aligns district goals with principal professional goals, gives ample opportunities for COAs to give direct assistance to principals, and provides many ways for COAs and principals to build strong, connected professional assistance relationships.

CHAPTER 4 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS³

Employing various lenses and conceptual frameworks, the dissertation-in-practice team's six individual studies, when viewed holistically, provided a rich description and analysis of how Emerson Public Schools (EPS) Central Office Administrators (COAs) leveraged the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) to support the professional practice of principals. Two of the six studies covered policy implementation, including district interpretation of state policy (Sevelius, 2016) and communication of policy to district and school leaders (Copeland, 2016). Three studies focused on the professional relationships between COAs and principals in terms of developing instructional leadership (Freeman-Wisdom, 2016), providing evaluative feedback (McNeil, 2016), and generating trust and connectivity (Carter, 2016). One study examined principals' perceptions of COAs' support (Blake McKetty, 2016).

Each researcher employed a conceptual framework that served to frame the individual study's research questions. Through organizational learning theory, Sevelius (2016) found that EPS COAs were often able to match MMSEE state mandate with existing district goals through the designing of professional learning opportunities for principals. Employing sensemaking theory, Copeland (2016) discovered that COAs and principals lacked a consistent understanding about the enactment of MMSEE for principals. Two studies viewing principals as learners employed adult learning theory. Freeman-Wisdom (2016) found that while COAs honored previous experiences and related professional development to principals' practice, there were only limited opportunities to involve principals' voices in decision-making and the planning of their professional development. McNeil (2016) found a disconnection between principals and

³ This chapter was jointly written by the authors listed and reflects the team approach to this project: Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Christine A. Copeland, Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, Alexandra Montes McNeil, and AC Sevelius.

their evaluators in the understanding and delivery of feedback; therefore, few principals found COAs feedback relevant to their growth and development as instructional leaders. Carter (2016) employed social capital theory to examine how relational trust and connectedness between COAs and principals affected efforts to promote principal growth and development, finding that high social capital principals benefited more from district initiatives than low social capital principals. Finally, Blake McKetty (2016) discovered that the majority of principals used distributive leadership practices to improve instruction in their schools, and that principals had mixed opinions about COAs' ability to support them with their individual distributed leadership practices.

The purpose of this chapter is to share the themes that are cross-cutting through the six studies, to make recommendations to EPS based on these themes, to describe areas for further research, to discuss the implications of this research on policy and policymakers beyond EPS, and to and reveal the limitations of this work.

Synthesis of Findings

While each individual study employed various conceptual frameworks, the findings from the six studies overlapped to produce common themes. The following sections explore these themes. First, the Interpretation and Implementation section discusses the complex district context, the relatively low priority of principal evaluation, and the separation of principal evaluation and support. Next, District Support with Instructional Leadership outlines alternative ways COAs supported principals, including training on the supervision of teachers, support for school improvement plan development, and additional administrative staffing. The third section, Communication, describes how effectively COAs and principals communicated with each other throughout MMSEE evaluation cycle and in the context of other district efforts to support

principals. The final section, Principal Perspectives, examines how trust, connectedness, feedback, and other collaborative structures influenced principal perceptions of COA evaluation and support.

Interpretation and Implementation of MMSEE

All six individual studies found that EPS's historical and organizational context shaped how the district implemented MMSEE for principals. Upon his arrival, the superintendent assumed leadership over a highly decentralized organization characterized more as a collection of individual schools rather than as a coherent school system. The 14 schools had been setting their own agendas and competing against one another for resources. The understaffed central office had struggled to establish expectations and communication, develop curricular and instructional coherence, and create supports for administrators and teachers. With the lack of coherence and continuity resulting from decentralization, equity issues had arisen creating a number of tensions within the school system and community. Once in the role, the superintendent quickly grasped the district's challenges and, along with his growing team of COAs, has been working to garner community support, strengthen the central office's role throughout the district, recruit and develop school leaders, standardize curriculum across schools, tighten the school improvement process, and develop a common understanding of instructional practices.

The dissertation-in-practice team quickly found that MMSEE implementation for principals was only one of many initiatives happening simultaneously throughout EPS. Many COAs and principals indicated that they were overloaded with the extent of change. With all that was going on, the superintendent strategically prioritized the improvement initiatives that were most closely connected to the instructional core. Thus, the district's MMSEE adoption for

teachers took top priority. Not only did MMSEE provide a standardized model of effective teaching practice, it also provided principals a toolkit to assess instruction collaboratively and to support teachers in improving their practice. To take full advantage of these tools, the superintendent and other COAs required extensive training for principals and school-based administrators. Although the MMSEE provided similar supports for COAs to supervise and evaluate principals, the superintendent placed a low priority on principal evaluation.

The district's lack of urgency about principal evaluation manifested in a number of ways. First, there was no standardized evaluation process for principals. Only the superintendent and assistant superintendent evaluated principals and it became clear that each supervisor evaluated principals differently. The superintendent emphasized informal site visits and verbal feedback while the new assistant superintendent focused on self-reflection and goal setting processes.

Additionally, during the absence of an assistant superintendent the previous year, principal evaluation responsibilities were not distributed to other COAs while the search for a new assistant superintendent was underway. Instead, the superintendent, by himself, attempted to supervise and evaluate all fourteen principals. Even with the arrival of the new assistant superintendent, there still remained a central office divide between principal evaluation and principal support. Although there were a number of EPS COAs who were capable of supervising and evaluating principals in either a primary or secondary role, only the superintendent and assistant superintendent evaluated principals. In fact, other COAs went out of their way explaining to interviewers that while they frequently supported principals' practice, they have absolutely no role in principal evaluation. This is inconsistent with the superintendent's belief that all COAs, operating as an extension of his leadership, should have a role in both evaluating and supporting principals. While EPS teacher evaluation has integrated well with other district

efforts to support teachers, principal evaluation has remained isolated from the district efforts to support principals with instructional leadership, which will be described in detail in the following section.

District Support with Instructional Leadership

Interview data from the six individual studies found that MMSEE prompted a deliberate shift in how COAs support principals with instructional leadership. MMSEE's mandate that all principals be proficient in Standard I: Instructional Leadership, along with the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education's (MA ESE) urgent call to improve academic performance in Level 3 schools, prompted this shift in support. In response, COAs prepared principals for teacher evaluation by contracting services from Research for Better Teaching (RBT), they required principals to develop data-driven School Improvement Plans (SIPs), and they provided assistant principals and content coaches to specific schools. The following sections describe these supports in greater detail.

Research for Better Teaching (RBT). In order to support principals with the supervision and evaluation of teachers, which is one of five indicators under the MA ESE definition of instructional leadership, COAs contracted services from RBT. RBT training was offered to principals, school-based administrators, and teachers at Level 3 schools. For principals and school-based administrators, COAs sought to create a collaborative learning opportunity to develop a shared understanding of effective instruction through calibration and thereby improve instruction throughout the district. For teachers at Level 3 schools, COAs wanted to ensure that teachers and administrators shared a common language about practice and had similar expectations.

Both principals and COAs noted that RBT training was a resounding success. Interview data attributed RBT training to the opportunities for principals to engage in site-based walkthroughs, to problem-solve alongside colleagues by working on case-studies and viewing instruction at varying performance levels, and by providing access to RBT coaches for on-site support. As a result, principals reported a strong sense of preparedness in their supervision and evaluation of teachers.

School improvement plans (SIPs). To align principals' professional practice goals, school-wide student learning goals, and district goals, COAs led by the Chief Academic Officer required all principals to develop and implement an extensive SIP in collaboration with coaches, teachers, and site councils. The development of SIPs engaged principals in a rigorous, data-driven process as they reviewed state assessment and school-based data. In addition to the data, the SIP process informed principals as they outlined action steps, timetables, and determined measures of progress toward goals. This year-long process required principals to reflect on their practice, identify strengths and areas for development, and guide the work throughout the school year. To ensure success, principals received coaching with their SIPs from COAs at least on a monthly basis. These plans are presented at school committee meetings every year. The majority of COAs interviewed considered the SIP development process to be an extremely effective way to support principals. On the other hand, principals' perceptions of the SIP process were divided.

Content coaches. To address academic performance, COAs hired English language arts, English as a second language, and math coaches. These coaches were assigned to schools to provide direct assistance to teachers. Level 3 schools had full-time coaches while Level 1 and 2 schools had part-time coaches. COAs differentiated this support to ensure schools with high-needs populations such as students with disabilities and English language learners, had adequate

staffing to improve teacher practice and student performance. While all principals were appreciative of the extra staffing, principals in Level 1 and 2 schools expressed concerns regarding unequal levels of support.

Assistant principals. Prior to MMSEE, elementary schools only had one administrator. However, given the extensive MMSEE requirement for teacher supervision and evaluation, the superintendent provided elementary schools with assistant principals. One important role of the assistant principal was to support principals with supervision and evaluation. Elementary school principals reported this support as timely and necessary given the number of teachers they are responsible for evaluating during each cycle. Additionally, principals appreciated having a thought-partner in this work.

RBT, SIPs, content coaches, and assistant principals – all initiatives guided by EPS’s MMSEE implementation – emerged as useful supports to principals’ development as instructional leaders. However, it seems that principals were not able to connect each of these supports to their work in meeting the district’s priorities. The following section focused on communication will highlight this disconnect.

Communication

From the previous two sections, it is clear that both COAs and principals worked to develop initiatives that would reshape professional practice and positively impact student learning. That said, there remained a number of disconnects between COAs and principals in terms of intent, perception, and outcomes of MMSEE implementation and principal support. A pervasive theme that emerged across all studies was the lack of effective communication between COAs and principals. According to principal interview data, COAs did not explicitly communicate their plan of action with respect to principal evaluation. The disconnect between

COAs and principals manifested itself in several ways. Principals were not well-versed in the MMSEE's evaluation processes and expectations for principals, did not connect district support to their work as instructional leaders, and lacked clarity about the purpose and use of feedback. In addition, principals did not believe that the weekly meetings supported their development as instructional leaders. The following sections discuss these gaps in communication in greater detail.

Principal evaluation and expectations. Most principals had limited knowledge and understanding of the MMSEE and the expectations of their evaluators. Some principals had no knowledge that they must be proficient in Standard I: Instructional Leadership in order to receive an overall proficient rating. Furthermore, some principals did not have much understanding of the rubric, often confusing the teacher rubric with the administrator rubric. With the notable exception of the assistant superintendent's efforts to explain the self-reflection and goal setting processes for elementary principals, the dissertation-in-practice team found little evidence that COAs had reviewed MMSEE requirements and expectations for school-level administrators. Moreover, many principals did not have a clear idea about the frequency and nature of supervisory visits and often did not participate in formal midyear formative assessment meetings. Consequently, many principals reported that end-of-year summative evaluation meetings were perfunctory and not connected to their practice.

Feedback. Interview data revealed that COAs and principals do not have a common understanding of the purpose of feedback. COAs believed that engaging in conversations with principals about their practice constituted feedback. Principals viewed only written communication received from COAs as feedback. Principals believed they received limited feedback to improve their practice. Principals identified feedback they received from COAs

primarily connected to parent complaints, compliance issues, and not connected to instructional leadership. Principals were often surprised by the feedback they received during formative feedback sessions and on summative evaluations because it did not reflect the work they were doing in their buildings. Given the level of training principals received through RBT to supervise and evaluate teachers, principals expected a similar process in their work with their evaluator.

Aligning district supports with MMSEE. EPS provided RBT, supported principals with SIPs, and gave schools additional staff members to support the implementation of MMSEE. However, because COAs did not explicitly communicate the intent of these supports, principals did not seem to connect this support to their practice. Principals were able to connect the RBT training to their work as supervisors and evaluators, but were not able to connect this training and support to their improvement in Standard I and the district's priorities. Additionally, COAs saw the benefits of engaging in the SIP process, yet many principals found this to be additional work and not connected to MMSEE's implementation or their growth as instructional leaders. Lastly, principals appreciated the additional personnel support from COAs in the form of assistant principals and content coaches, but again did not see the connection to MMSEE or their professional growth. The data suggested that effective two-way communication between COAs and principals is an area of growth for the district.

Problem solving. The EPS superintendent expected that when principals faced a significant problem of practice that they should approach him or other COAs immediately for support. Despite that expectation, only half of principals felt comfortable doing so. Reasons for this hesitation included being negatively surprised by responses to such outreach in the past and an unwillingness to be judged poorly because they had a problem in their school. Despite the

superintendent's expectation of COA and principal collaboration when addressing problems of practice, some principals struggled to do so.

Weekly meetings. EPS COAs understood that time needed to be allocated for effective communication to take place among administrators; thus, the superintendent created a schedule of two-hour weekly afternoon meetings. The meeting structure changed depending on the week of the month. Some meetings were just with principals, others included the whole district leadership team; some meetings had a fixed agenda and focused on information dissemination, others had a more flexible agenda.

Most of the COAs interviewed felt that the meetings were both important and effective. They emphasized that the meetings not only strengthened communication, but also offered a regular forum for professional engagement and collaboration. Additionally, COAs touted the meetings as opportunities for principals to understand district initiatives. However, most principals had neutral or negative perceptions of these meetings. Although a couple of principals mirrored positive COA perspectives, negative responders emphasized that the meetings were too long and too frequent, often filled with tension, and used mostly for information dissemination. So while there was a successful allocation of time, many principals expressed frustration with the use of that time.

Principals' Perspectives

The overarching study focused on both COA and principal viewpoints on MMSEE, and while COA perspectives were relatively uniform, principal perspectives varied widely. The dissertation-in-practice team identified a number of themes that led to the variance of principal opinion. These themes, outlined in the following sections, are relational trust and connectedness, boundary spanners, collaborative structures, and principals' voice.

Relational trust and connectedness. Each EPS COA and principal emphasized the importance of having connected, trusting relationships. However, while all COAs reported that they had successfully generated trusting professional assistance relationships with principals, only eight of the fourteen principals trusted and felt connected with central office. For the most part, principals expressed very strong opinions about whom they were connected to or disconnected from, and about whom they trusted and whom they did not. Coding and analysis revealed a dichotomy among principals: those who trusted and felt connected to COAs and those who distrusted and felt isolated from central office.

Relational trust and connectivity impacted principals' perceptions on district implementation of MMSEE and other efforts to promote principal growth and development. With some initiatives, such as SIP development and informal supervisory visits, there was an exceptionally strong correlation with high-trust principals having very positive perceptions and low-trust principals having extremely negative perceptions. However, other initiatives produced more uniform responses. The great majority of principals negatively perceived the district's practice of summative assessment. On the other hand, all but one principal had favorable opinions about their supervisory professional development through RBT and all elementary principals had neutral to positive perceptions about the assistant superintendent's goal setting process. These two initiatives that successfully promoted the growth and development of principals had three common characteristics: they were closely aligned to principal goals, they provided opportunities for direct assistance, and they allowed COAs and principals to develop close, trusting professional assistance relationships.

One major factor that affected principal trust toward COAs was the differing priorities and expectations for principal and teacher evaluation dating back to EPS's launch of MMSEE

implementation. Findings indicated that the superintendent wanted MMSEE to be utilized for teachers immediately. A joint labor committee, including teacher representatives and administrators, was involved in the rollout of MMSEE for teachers, which created an environment where principals and teachers fully understood the teacher evaluation process. Conversely, the EPS superintendent did not come to a formal agreement with principals. Rather, he determined the principal evaluation process himself. Principals, in turn, often did not understand the process and expectations of their own evaluations..

The discrepancy between the high priority of teacher evaluation and the lower priority of principal evaluation raised an uncomfortable irony for principals. A question emerged as team members interviewed principals: how can the district provide such strong professional development for principals to effectively supervise and evaluate teachers and yet not expect or support COAs to supervise and evaluate principals in the same manner? At the time of the study, it was clear that this gap between principal and teacher evaluation was closing. The superintendent and union-based administrators had just negotiated a system for evaluation to be put in effect for the first time this year, and the expectation was that principals and other non-union administrators would follow the agreed upon protocol as well. This was an important first step to make MMSEE for principals more structured, robust and transparent.

Boundary spanners. The findings across the individual studies highlighted a wide range of relationships between principals and COAs in EPS. Notable throughout the network of relationships are a few key principals and COAs that serve as boundary spanners between central office and schools. Boundary spanning COAs are often the only people with whom isolated principals felt they can go to for help. Boundary spanning principals were highly connected with central office and could often represent the needs of their more isolated colleagues. Additionally

there were a number of COAs and principals new to their positions that had the potential to become important boundary spanners in the future.

Collaboration. The data suggested that principals valued the collaborative structures that they created within their schools much more than they valued district efforts to build collaboration among administrators. Principals created collaborative structures that organized staff and supported instructional improvements. These structures included grade level teams to review students' performance data, participation in whole school professional development, and the use of content coaches to support teachers' instructional practice. In contrast principals only rarely discussed the structures provided by the COAs. Most principals inconsistently referred to verbal feedback, weekly meetings, and walkthroughs that they received from COAs as supporting their individual growth and development. The COAs however viewed their relationships with principals as collaborative and saw themselves as partnering with principals to support their growth and development through district provided supports. Thus, these conflicting viewpoints need to be addressed as principals and COAs continue to develop effective collaborative structures.

Principal voice. The research team found that principals had limited voice in district decision-making processes and professional development design. Though all principals participated in learning opportunities, they were not otherwise engaged or consulted when decisions were made as to what kind of professional development might enhance their practice. Only two EPS principals were included on the Critical Management Team, an important decision-making body in EPS tasked with planning professional development, aligning K-12 curriculum, and developing communication guidelines. Many principals expressed little agency

in their learning and, during interviews, seemed more passive in describing their learning opportunities afforded to them by COAs.

Recommendations

Through observation, interpretation, and analyses of the studies, the research team found that there were specific needs of the district that should be addressed if the MMSEE is to be effective in EPS. Although MMSEE is a state mandated system, MA ESE allows districts to adopt, adapt, or modify the system to best meet the needs of individual districts. The dissertation-in-practice team recommends that EPS use this freedom to develop an evaluation implementation plan for principals, ensure and increase effective communication, and restructure professional development to establish a learning-centered organization. While dissertation-in-practice team members approached data analysis through five different conceptual frameworks, every conceptual framework could be applied to each recommendation below. The following recommendations highlight opportunities for learning based on the team's findings.

Recommendation 1: Develop an Evaluation Implementation Plan for Principals

At the time of this study, EPS had neither created nor fully implemented all the components of MMSEE. EPS's implementation has evolved from a set of informal evaluation practices dependent on individual evaluators' preferences to a more consistent system. In the last year, a joint committee developed a formalized evaluation process for union-based administrators with an implicit understanding that principal evaluation would operate under the same guidelines.

The findings of this study indicate that principals believe that the district implemented MMSEE for teachers quite successfully and recommends that COAs should employ similar successful practices when implementing MMSEE for principals. The teacher evaluation system

was successful because first and foremost the superintendent made teacher evaluation a high priority. Second, the decision to adopt MMSEE for teachers in the district was made jointly between teachers and administrators. Third, the system allowed for multiple evaluators – principals, assistant principals, and coaches – to observe practice, discuss instruction, and support teachers’ growth and development. Fourth, there was a formal professional development process that allowed administrators and even some teachers from Level 3 schools to develop the same language and foster common understanding about teacher supervision and evaluation. Finally, the district empowered principals, as supervising evaluators, to develop collaborative structures within their schools and tie teacher professional goals to school improvement goals. The following recommendations are based upon EPS’s successful implementation of MMSEE for teachers.

Prioritize and develop formal structures. In order to improve principal supervision, the superintendent should prioritize principal evaluation and form a committee of COAs and principals to determine whether to adopt the evaluation system currently used for union administrators or adapt the system to serve the needs of principals in particular. The system should include a chart of evaluation responsibilities, a thorough description of the evaluation cycle including timelines and deadlines, and an explicit account of what evidence should look like for proficiency. Ample time needs to be allocated for individualized and joint professional development for both principals and COAs.

Professional development sessions should be scheduled throughout the year to ensure all COAs and principals have a clear understanding of the evaluation cycle and the standards by which they will be measured. In particular, COAs and principals should discuss and come to a common understanding of the expectations outlined in the School Level Administrator Rubric.

This professional development can be used to link the important data-informed work of SIP development with principal goals and COA support. Aligning the work of the SIP to the work that principals and their teams are doing in schools ensures that principals are making the connections between district mandates, school level work, and their own professional growth.

Increase the number of COA evaluators for effective feedback. Currently, the superintendent and the assistant superintendent are the only evaluators of EPS principals. Although the superintendent considers all COAs as responsible for principal support in the evaluation process, COAs believed that the superintendent or assistant superintendent are solely responsible for evaluation and thought they had no part in the process. Similarly, principals did not view other COAs as supervisors and often did not recognize the supports and feedback they offered as supervisory. To make the superintendent's vision of support more transparent, COAs could formally become either primary or secondary evaluators for EPS principals. By pairing more than one COA with each principal by principal need, evaluators may be able to spend more time in schools. Increasing school visits by multiple principal supervisors would support the need expressed by principals to have their evaluators better understand school context and enable the evaluator to support principals' work through dialogue and real-life examples and scenarios that pertain to individual principal practice.

Recommendation 2: Ensure Effective Communication

The findings from the interview data revealed inconsistencies in communication between COAs and principals regarding principal evaluation, joint work, and feedback. This section focuses on collaborative and communication structures COAs and principals need to employ to effectively build relationships and establish a culture of transparency.

Collaborative structures. COAs should work collaboratively with principals on organizing instructional improvement efforts, jointly examine initiatives that improve principal practice, and determine district priorities. Structures that are currently in place are: the critical management team, weekly meetings, walkthroughs with COAs, and the use of content coaches to improve instruction. COAs need to build upon current collaborative practices to develop relationships that support principal leadership and growth. For example, COAs and principals can work together to have joint decision making opportunities for the district. This will help cultivate COA and principal relationships, communication, and structures to refine best practices for school improvement efforts.

Communication structures. In order to effectively communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals, COAs should develop a timeline for when cycles of the evaluation process will occur and create written documents that are housed on the district's website that principals can use for reference and support. Documents could include organizational charts, policies and procedures for communication and common resources to support principal practice.

Observation and feedback cycle. COAs should engage in a consistent cycle of observation and feedback for principals. Observations, feedback, and expectations for how and when the feedback will happen should be articulated. Finally, the formative evaluation should provide principals with feedback on the four standards outlined in the School Level Administrator Rubric, with an emphasis on Standard I: Instructional Leadership, and provide clear recommendations for improvement before the summative evaluation that occurs at the end of the cycle. Creating a transparent system of principal evaluation would mitigate some communication challenges that principals are experiencing in the district.

Recommendation 3: Restructure Professional Development for Principals

This last set of recommendations are specific to restructuring professional development for principals in an effort to become a learning-centered organization. These recommendations include increasing opportunities for principal voice, engaging in joint professional development, and moving to a learning-centered organization.

Principal voice. The research team strongly recommends the inclusion of principal voice in the design of professional development. As school leaders and facilitators of adult learning in their buildings, principals have strong opinions and recommendations for systems and structures that will help them build their own practice. COAs should harness this expertise and use it to facilitate adult learning at the district level rather than being the sole decision makers of such opportunities.

Principals should see themselves as more than just participants in the learning process. Rather, principals should play a central role in deciding upon structures that will help them craft their own professional growth. This work includes identifying the professional development opportunities, both facilitating and co-facilitating these sessions, the development of expectations of priority elements and indicators as identified by MMSEE, and the roll out of any related processes, including norms, professional practice goals, and expected outcomes. This inclusion of voice will increase trust and buy-in, which emerged as a significant barrier in the district. This increased trust will set the stage for more successful program implementation, renew commitments to meeting individual professional goals, and improve student achievement in the months and years to come.

Joint professional development. Principals and COAs should collaboratively engage in all levels of professional development – from design, to implementation, to assessment – so that

all can develop a common language and understanding about what constitutes effective instructional practice. By having COAs and principals participate in joint professional development, they will see the work of improving practice as instructional leaders as their shared responsibility.

Learning-centered organization. Interview data revealed that principals participated in professional development, but their responses indicated their participation as compliance as opposed to high-level motivation to learn from COAs. In order to maximize opportunities to learn together and reorient the organization, COAs must be willing to move to a learning-centered mindset and away from an authority-centered position. Learning is personal and requires trusting relationships. When opportunities to learn are presented as mandates by COAs who have little trust to build upon, principals are less likely to engage in such a personal process (Knowles, 1980; Schein, 2010). By situating all experiences in the agreed-upon learning, principals are more likely to engage, and continue to engage, in the collective work of getting smarter. The onus is now placed squarely on all learners, rather than on the authority figure mandating that the learning take place. This shift also allows COAs to enter the learning, leveling the expertise in the room and messaging, *We are all learners here.*

Recommendations for Policy or Research

The findings presented in this study have potential implications for other districts, both in Massachusetts and other states. To begin, COAs, when launching a new initiative like MMSEE, should take the time to identify the strengths of the district (be they human or structural), the goals essential to the continued success of their on-going shared work, and areas of necessary growth. These should align with the mission and vision of the district and COAs should work to ensure that any new program support or enhance these district assets. If the mandate does not

support the ongoing work, COAs need to engage stakeholders in a transparent process of building a new and agreed upon alignment.

Secondly, COAs need to ensure that professional opportunities contribute to and align with these new agreements. From the principal perspective, the professional development provided them through tightly coupled systems, as RBT did, was instrumental in the successful roll-out of the MMSEE with teachers. Because of this unified work, principals felt capable of supervising and evaluating teachers in a way that supported the ongoing improvement of instructional practice at various levels of the school district. Thus, policy-makers and researchers should take a deeper look at the RBT program, or programs that offer this type of whole district/individualized model, to understand if other districts are also experiencing success, to what degree, and what elements of the programs have the greatest impact.

Thirdly, COAs should include considerations for trust- and capacity-building when launching a new initiative. Regardless of the current climate of their district, the process of reorienting an organization to meet the needs of a new mandate has the potential to disrupt systems and relationships. In order to mitigate potential tensions, COAs should move away from authority-centered decision-making and towards a learning-centered framework. In this way, the learning takes center stage rather than the will of the COA, who on many occasions, is at the mercy of the State.

Beyond MMSEE, it would behoove policymakers and COAs to see if the lessons learned in EPS could be applied to new mandates currently or soon to be affecting practitioners in Massachusetts, such as changes to the State's standardized testing systems, ongoing requirements for all educators to become licensed as Sheltered English Immersion teachers, the need for all educators to be trained in more current safety responses to threats in schools, or the

impact on traditional public schooling if the charter school cap were to be lifted. By looking to EPS and this study, COAs could build upon successes – and avoid pitfalls – when implementing mandates, be they driven internally or externally.

Directions for Further Study

While this dissertation-in-practice team examined one district’s implementation of MMSEE and how it was used to support the growth and development of principals, every districts in Massachusetts has begun using the tool as the primary mode of supervision and evaluation for all educators. In regards to the MMSEE, there are several possible directions for further study including, but not limited to, examining patterns across the state or in like districts to understand how effective the MMSEE tool is at gauging professional growth, identifying aspects of the MMSEE tool that are and are not helpful to users in an effort to give feedback to the MA ESE, or comparing and contrasting how the policy was rolled out in a broad sample of districts in an effort to identify impactful, high-leverage policy implementation strategies.

Additionally, research could be conducted to identify high-leverage supports that can be applied broadly when attempting to improve principal practice, especially in light of MMSEE’s Standard I: Instructional Leadership. The focus on instructional leadership creates a professional environment in which principals are being asked to move out of the role of building manager and squarely into the role of instructional leader. COAs could benefit from a set of research-based strategies that give them the tools to help principals in their districts make this shift.

In EPS specifically, and after another year of MMSEE use, researchers could revisit the district to follow up with principals to see how the first full cycle of the MMSEE went, in their opinion. COAs could also be re-interviewed to see if their perceptions of the tool and its

usefulness had changed. Beyond the tool itself, researchers could understand if through this collective work relationships had improved, feedback had a more desirable impact on practice, and principals had an increased voice in the design of their professional growth and development opportunities.

Perspectives on District Leadership

The following sections describe how the dissertation-in-practice team's research, findings and recommendations inform understanding of effective district leadership. Through the analysis of the district's MMSEE implementation using unique perspectives and conceptual lenses, researchers gained further insight into effective district leadership.

The Importance of a Communication Plan

Policy interpretation is complex and designing a communication plan that allows all stakeholders to understand these inherent complexities should be an essential part of the interpretation work. When COAs understand what is expected of a policy moving forward and principals do not, gaps in understanding are bound to arise. These gaps are often filled with misinformation, mistrust, and skepticism – all experiences associated with initiative fatigue. This gap filling can hobble the work of a superintendent and his or her team.

Whether a policy is mandated from the state or is born from a specific district need, buy-in is essential, and a tight communication plan can serve as the foundation of success. The plan should communicate the specific needs the policy targets, roles and responsibilities of implementers, direct supports that will be provided to personnel, and how the work will be assessed. The plan should also communicate what other initiatives the new policy will replace or enhance, why it is necessary, and how the work will be distributed among leaders. A solid

communication plan facilitates a transparent implementation process in which people see how their work contributes to overall district goals and their own professional growth.

Fair Does Not Mean Equal

In districts like EPS, where there is such a diversity of families, neighborhoods, and schools, it is important for COAs to understand individual school context and needs. The dissertation-in-practice team saw first-hand the dilemma COAs faced between allocating resources for each school on an equitable basis and providing for the lowest performing schools. Every school has specific needs that are dependent upon its accountability status, needs of its students, and extended community. A superintendent and his or her leadership team must strategically prioritize resources for the most needy schools and, at the same time, transparently communicate to other stakeholders the reasons behind resource allocation.

Joint Instructional Leadership Opportunities

No one knows better the complexity of school leadership than principals. Each day principals must make many decisions, often without time or information to deeply consider the implications. The study showed that principals were eager to improve their practice so that their decisions were aligned with the emerging needs of their school communities, but often felt at a loss as to how to get better. Many relied on their COAs to present learning opportunities to them that could enhance their practice. When such opportunities were presented to principals, they were appreciative; however, when those opportunities fell short or seemed disconnected to their overall professional mission, frustration and feelings of failure took hold.

Knowing this, a COA should adopt a strength-based approach to principal development and assume that each principal is invested in professional development to bolster instructional leadership. COAs should not assume what instructional leadership professional development is

best for principals; rather, it is essential for principals and COAs to plan learning opportunities together. With principal input, a COA can support school leaders with confidence knowing that learning will target each leader's growing edges.

Growth-Oriented, Reciprocal Feedback

This study emphasized the importance of creating feedback systems and structures collaboratively with those in the feedback loop. By developing these feedback systems with principles of adult learning theory in mind, those participating in the learning are able to build relationships, clarify ambiguity, and honor each other's experience. Feedback among district and school administrators is most powerful and productive when it is reciprocal – goes both ways between COAs and principals – and when both participants focus on a partnering, growth mindset. Since feedback is intended to improve practice, such feedback loops will allow both COAs and principals to offer information and insight for one another, thus more effectively improving practice.

The Link Between Relational Trust and Distributed Leadership

The dissertation-in-practice team found that the fundamental building blocks of the organization's leadership team were not the individual actors, but the relationships between and among district and school leaders. A crucial component of successful district leadership is building strong relationships and leveraging the resulting social capital to promote collective action. Specifically, distributed leadership plays a strong role as COAs strive to build social capital with principals. Spillane (2010) described distributed leadership using the metaphor of a partnered dance, the Texas Two-Step. Although the actions of the individuals in the dance are important, it is the interaction between the individuals in the context of the music that defines the activity of the dance. Just as with dancing, distributed leadership is defined by the interactions

among multiple leaders and followers in various situations. When viewed globally, distributed leadership can be seen as a network of relationships among leaders and followers, ever adapting and evolving. In this way, distributed leadership and social capital operate within the organization similarly, as both flow and spread non-linearly and reciprocally through interrelationships.

Noting the striking parallels among the constructs of distributed leadership and social capital, Harris (2012) constructed a compelling argument that envisions fundamentally new roles for district and school leaders. District leaders should stop thinking of their organization as a hierarchy and remove themselves from their position at the top. Instead, they should view the district as a network, place themselves in the middle, and refocus their core role as developing the leadership capacity and capabilities of others, and thus transforming schools to meet twenty-first century needs.

Limitations

This section reveals the limitations of this study. These limitations were that the study focused on only one district, the timing of the study, and that there are limitations inherent in qualitative research.

One District

While the dissertation-in-practice team sought a representative district to study, there were aspects that made EPS unique and thus not representational. For example, EPS was undergoing shifts in culture that included a new central office leadership team member, experiencing tensions between a tightly coupled evaluation system launch for principals (MMSEE) who were used to being left alone in their work, and the review of SIPs with data teams to determine progress towards meeting school goals.

Each school district faces challenges specific to that community and EPS was no different; this specificity of place and problems presented a limitation to this study.

Timing of Study

The fall of 2015 marked a time of transition in EPS which included the hiring of a new assistant superintendent and the rollout of MMSEE cycle with principals.

Prior to the addition of the new assistant superintendent, the duties typically assigned to this position had been distributed amongst senior staff. Once the new superintendent was in place, the role could be reconstituted and the two top central office leaders could divide the supervision of principals up between them. The superintendent took on the responsibility of evaluating the high school and middle school principals while the assistant superintendent was responsible for evaluating all elementary principals. When the research team conducted interviews in EPS, the assistant superintendent had just begun to work closely with the 10 (out of 14) principals. Data gathered from interviews with principals show that the majority were pleased with the support they were receiving from the new assistant superintendent and had, by December 2015, already had several sessions with him in which they discussed their practice, performance, goals, and specific cultures of their schools.

One of the specific duties of the assistant superintendent was to launch MMSEE supervision and evaluation cycle with elementary principals, while the superintendent did the same with middle and high school principals. Interviews with principals demonstrated that MMSEE cycle had indeed begun and that they felt comfortable with the roll-out to date.

Because of the timing of this study, the research team could not gather data on the full cycle of MMSEE for principals, nor could the team analyze how the addition of the new assistant superintendent enhanced or detracted from the culture of EPS.

Limitations to Qualitative Studies

While there are many benefits of qualitative research, there are also limitations including, but not limited to, data interpretation by team members, interpretation of interview questions, interpretation of interview data, acquired knowledge that is not generalizable to other districts.

Interpretation of interview questions. Another limitation is how each COA or school principal interpreted the questions being asked of them during interviews. While researcher were, on occasion, asked for clarification during interview session, how a question was internalized, understood, and interpreted was ultimately up to the interviewee and influenced the final answer given to researchers.

Interpretation of interview data. Once researchers had completed all interviews, and in some cases document reviews, the analyses of the gathered data included significant interpretation. Researchers analysed individual interviews and then worked to make sense of the data within the larger context of EPS. The merging of interview responses in an effort to present a unified message depended on researchers interpreting meaning and messages from individual respondents. While the dissertation-in-practice team sought to minimize bias throughout the interpretation process, results were more easily influenced by professional experience being that researchers also use MMSEE to evaluate teachers or as the tool for their own professional evaluation.

Knowledge not generalizable. The knowledge gleaned in EPS may not be applicable to other school districts in Massachusetts and/or beyond. While researchers attempted to make recommendations that could be extrapolated onto other districts or problems of practice, the circumstances in and recommendations to EPS may be too specific to be of any help to other practitioners.

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APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT



Boston College Professional Administrators Program

Informed Consent to be in study:

How Do Central Office Administrators in One School District use MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals?

Researchers:

All team members are Ed.D students in the Boston College PSAP program and school district administrators

Leah Blake-McKetty: Principal, John Winthrop Elementary School, Boston Public Schools

J. Kimo Carter: Principal, Watertown Middle School, Watertown Public Schools

Christine Copeland: ELA and History Specialist (9-12), District Academic Response Team, Boston Public Schools

Tanya Freeman-Wisdom: Headmaster, Community Academy of Science and Health, Boston Public Schools

Alexandra Montes McNeil: Principal Leader, Boston Public Schools

AC Sevelius: Principal, Heath School, Public Schools of Brookline

Adult Consent Form

Introduction

- You are being asked to be in a research study of how central office administrators use the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) to promote the growth and development of principals.
- You were selected to be in the study because you are either a central office administrator or a principal.
- Please read this form. Ask any questions that you may have before you agree to be in the study.

Purpose of Study:

- The purpose of this study is to examine how central office administrators use the MMSEE to promote the growth and development of principals in one school district. As such, each member of the research team will address this central focus through six individual studies. The individual studies will examine how central office administrators' interpretation of policy, communication of policy, development of professional help relationships, utilization of effective systems of feedback, support of instructional leadership, and support of principals' leadership styles all promote principal growth and development.
- People in this study are principals and central office administrators in "EPS" located in Massachusetts.

What will happen in the study:

- If you agree to be in this study, we would ask you to do the following: answer interview questions for the duration of the interview protocol which should last approximately one hour, answer any follow up questions through telephone or email, and provide additional documentation for the research team if necessary.
- Please note, we will be audio recording interviews and will destroy audio files upon completion of this study.
- The research team will be conducting observations and a document review. This data will be gathered through field notes and stored on a secure server.

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

- The primary risk associated with this study is the emergence of stressful feelings while participating in interviews. We recognize that discussing how supervision and evaluation may invoke strong feelings and we seek to minimize a stressful response.
- Please know that there may be unknown risks at this time.

Benefits of Being in the Study:

- The purpose of the study is examine how central office administrators use the MMSEE to promote the growth and development of principals in one school district.
- The benefits of being in this study are participants will be providing the research team with their insights on the professional supervision and evaluation systems currently used in their district and the Commonwealth. We believe that our research will inform how feedback is given and received, and increase the likelihood that supervision and evaluation impacts the professional growth of both school principals and district leaders.

Payments:

- You will not receive payment for being in the study.

Costs:

- There is no cost to you to be in this research study.

Confidentiality:

- The records of this study will be kept private. In any sort of report we may publish, we will not include any information that will make it possible to identify you. Research records will be kept in a locked file.
- All electronic information will be coded and secured using a password-protected file. Audio recordings will be used by the research team for the purpose of transcribing and analyzing results for educational purposes only. Audio recordings will be stored on an electronic device and will be deleted as soon as all information is transcribed.
- Mainly just the researchers will have access to information; however, please note that a few other key people may also have access. These might include government agencies. Also, the Institutional Review Board at Boston College and internal Boston College auditors may review the research records.

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:

- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.

- During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.
- Participants can skip any questions they don't want to answer.

Getting Dismissed from the study:

- The researcher may dismiss you from the study at any time for the following reasons: (1) it is in your best interests (e.g. side effects or distress have resulted), (2) you have failed to comply with the study rules, or (3) the study sponsor decides to end the study.

Contacts and Questions:

- The researchers conducting this study are:
 Leah Blake-McKetty: leahmblake@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
 J. Kimo Carter: jkimocarter@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
 Christine Copeland: copeland.boston@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
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 Alexandra Montes McNeil: amontesu25@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
 AC Sevelius: ac.sevelius@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her/him/them at the emails listed above.

- If you believe you may have suffered a research related injury, contact the researchers at the emails listed above who will give you further instructions.
- If you have any questions about your rights as a person in this research study, you may contact: Director, Office for Research Protections, Boston College at (617) 552-4778, or irb@bc.edu.

Copy of Consent Form:

- You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records and future reference.

Statement of Consent:

- I have read (or have had read to me) the contents of this consent form. I have been encouraged to ask questions. I have received answers to my questions. I give my consent to be in this study. I have received (or will receive) a copy of this form.

Signatures/Dates:

- Study Participant (Print Name) : _____ Date _____
 Participant or Legal Representative Signature : _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions for Central Office Administrators and Principals

We are from Boston College and we are conducting a study to examine how central office administrators use the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) to promote the growth and development of principals. We hope to use what we learn from interviews with central office administrators and principals to share our findings with the district and state on how to better support principal professional growth and development.

Interview Questions, Principals

Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:

What are the district's priorities for principal evaluation and support?

- How are they determined?

How do they relate to the state's model system?

Do you believe that the model system is an effective tool to support principals? Why or why not?

How do your central office administrators communicate with you about the evaluation process?

- Formally? Informally?

Do you feel that you have a common understanding with your supervisor about the evaluation process? Why or why not?

What are your interactions with COAs, in general?

Questions on instructional leadership:

How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted your role?

- *Describe your role and focus prior to MMSEE in comparison to today's responsibility and expectations. If MMSEE is all you know, describe today's responsibilities and expectations.*
- In order to receive an overall proficient rating, MMSEE requires every principal to be proficient in Standard I, Instructional Leadership. What does mean to you?
- How does this mandate inform your work?

How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way central office administrators evaluate you?

- Are COAs using new methods?
- Has the frequency of site visits increased?
- What happens during site visits?
- Has the conversations with COAs changed?

- What are conversations with COAs about?

How do central office administrators support you with instructional leadership?

- What other support do you receive?

Describe the type of support you need with instructional leadership.

Questions on leadership practices:

What specific practices do you rely on most as you lead your school?

- For example, collaboration, building team, distributive leadership
- Every principal has his or her own toolbox that they use to effectively lead, what are the practices that you use?

How do these leadership practices align with MMSEE?

Based on your skills, leadership practices, and school context, how do central office administrators differentiate support?

Do you have a common understanding of what kind of leadership skills COAs are looking for?

Questions on feedback:

The model system is designed to give multiple opportunities for formal and/or informal feedback.

How and how often do you receive feedback from your evaluator?

- How do you define feedback? How do you interpret feedback? Formal/informal? How do they tell you about your practice?

What is the purpose of the feedback?

- What is the nature of the feedback?

Do you find that the feedback you receive is applicable to your current practice?

- Is the feedback tied to your practices? Is it relevant?
- Can you elaborate or expand on that?
- What kind of feedback would you like?

Questions on professional relationships:

How does the central office team set a tone of trust and connectedness with the supervision and evaluation of principals?

How has MMSEE affected your professional relationships with your supervisors?

When you have a significant problem of practice, to whom do you go for help and support? Why do

you go to him or her?

When you need to seek support/help/advice, who are your top three go-to people? *Please name the people.*

Interview Questions, Central Office Administrators

Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:

What are the district's priorities for principal evaluation and support?

How do they relate to the state's model system?

What leadership qualities do you look for in your principals?

- How do they know these are the preferred qualities?

Do you believe that the model system is an effective tool to support principals? Why or why not?

When you learned that there was a new evaluation policy to enact, what did you do to interpret it? Who was involved and how did you arrive to consensus about its use in "Emerson" Public Schools?

What specific action steps did you take to implement MMSEE for principals?

Please describe the ways in which you communicate with principals about the evaluation process.

How do you ensure that you have common understanding with school principals about the evaluation process?

How do you negotiate differences in understanding with principals?

Questions on instructional leadership:

How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal?

- Describe the role of principals prior to MMSEE in comparison to today's responsibilities and expectations.

How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way you evaluate principals?

- Describe and give examples of the way COAs evaluated principals prior to MMSEE in comparison to current practices.
- If there is no difference, how has instructional leadership enriched the process?

How do you support principals with instructional leadership?

- How are you developing principals as instructional leaders?

Questions on leadership practices?

How do you differentiate your support based on principal and school needs?

Questions on feedback:

The model system is designed to give multiple opportunities for formal and/or informal feedback.

How and how often do you give feedback to principals?

- How do you present the feedback? Formal/informal? How does it relate to their practice?

What is the purpose of the feedback?

- What is the nature of the feedback?

Do you find that the feedback you give is applicable to your current practice?

- Is the feedback tied to principal practices? How do you know?
- Can you elaborate or expand on that?

Questions on professional relationships:

How does the central office team set a tone of trust and connectedness with the supervision and evaluation of principals?

How has MMSEE affected your professional relationships with principals?

When you have a significant problem of practice, to whom do you go for help and support? Why do you go to him or her?

When you need to seek support/help/advice, who are your top three go-to people? *Please name the people.*

APPENDIX C – LIST OF CODES FOR ANALYSIS

1. Central Office Administrators' Traits and Actions That Build or Break Principal Trust
 - 1.1. COA Leadership Traits
 - 1.1.1. Availability / Responsiveness
 - 1.1.2. Inclusiveness / Openness
 - 1.1.3. Competence
 - 1.1.4. Consistency
 - 1.1.5. Transparency
 - 1.2. COA Leadership Actions with Principals
 - 1.2.1. Collaborative Decision Making
 - 1.2.2. Feedback in Partnership
 - 1.2.3. Performing Joint Work
 - 1.2.4. Providing Leadership Tools
 - 1.2.5. Modeling Complex Thinking
 - 1.2.6. Creating Cross-Boundary Connections
 - 1.2.7. Brokering Resources
 - 1.2.8. Buffering From Bureaucratic Demands
 - 1.2.9. Differentiating By School Context
 - 1.3. Trust Breakers
 - 1.3.1. Communication Breakdown
 - 1.3.2. Fear of Repercussions
 - 1.3.3. Job Stressors
 - 1.3.4. Technology or Logistical Problems
 - 1.3.5. Administrator Turnover
 - 1.3.6. Isolation
 - 1.3.7. No Common Purpose
 - 1.3.8. No Trust In General (Unclear Reason)
2. MMSEE Effects on Trust and Connectedness Between Principals and COAs
 - 2.1. MMSEE Components
 - 2.1.1. Self-Assessment
 - 2.1.2. Goal Setting
 - 2.1.3. The Rubric
 - 2.1.4. Observations
 - 2.1.5. Feedback
 - 2.1.6. Formative Evaluation
 - 2.1.7. Summative Evaluation

- 2.2. District Efforts to Support Principals: Effects on Trust and Connectedness Between Principals and COAs
 - 2.2.1. Weekly Meetings
 - 2.2.2. School Improvement Plan Development
 - 2.2.3. Principal Professional Development
 - 2.2.4. Staffing Resources
 - 2.2.5. Walkthroughs
 - 2.2.6. DSAC Support

3. Principal Perceptions of Networked Support
 - 3.1. Connectedness with the Superintendent
 - 3.2. Connectedness with the Assistant Superintendent
 - 3.3. Connectedness with the Chief Academic Officer
 - 3.4. Connectedness with Outer Circle COAs
 - 3.5. Connections with other Principals
 - 3.6. Connections with Teachers / School Staff / School Community
 - 3.7. Connections Outside of the District
 - 3.8. No Connections