

# Supporting Principal Professional Practice Through Evaluative Feedback: 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 Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2016

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BOSTON COLLEGE  
Lynch School of Education

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Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

SUPPORTING PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE THROUGH EVALUATIVE  
FEEDBACK: 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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AC Sevelius 2016

Submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education

May 2016

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Father Joseph O’Keefe (Chair)  
Dr. Nathaniel Brown (Readers)  
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**Abstract**

One of six studies examining one district’s implementation of the Massachusetts Model System of Educator Evaluation (MMSEE), this study examines how central office administrators (COAs) implement one of the central components of MMSEE, feedback. Feedback is intended to provide educators information and insight from supervisors with the intent to reflect on, improve and develop educators’ professional practice. Although there has been much research on principal evaluation, there has been little research on how feedback supports principals through the evaluation process making this study relevant and timely. By analyzing data collected through semi-structured interviews, findings revealed that principals and COAs had differing views of the type, frequency and relevance of feedback. To create a coherent and supportive structure for principal feedback recommendations include ensuring structures for effective communication and creation of collaborative professional development – COAs and principals – that include principal voice with explicit discussion and instruction on feedback.

## **Acknowledgements**

I am thankful to my team – Leah Blake McKetty, James “Kimo” Carter, Christine Copeland, Tanya Freeman-Wisdom and AC Sevelius – and truly grateful that we were placed together through this process. I have learned much from you about myself through our work together. Our work has had an impact on my academic, professional, and personal life. I will miss our regular meetings and look forward to our continued friendship and opportunity to work together in the future.

Father Joseph O’Keefe, my chair, thank you for personal and professional guidance. Your feedback helped to develop my thinking and skills throughout this process. For my other committee members, Dr. Jim Marini, thank you for the feedback and advice throughout this work, and Dr. Nathaniel Brown, thank you for your support and feedback, which challenged my thinking.

Lastly, I wish to acknowledge and thank the Boston Public School leadership team for giving me permission and time to improve my practice and grow in leadership through this work. I am truly grateful.

## **Dedication**

In times of great struggle, I am most aware of God's presence. Thank You for always fulfilling Your promise to me. You are always there for me, supporting me, carrying me and inspiring me. You have given me my greatest gifts, my family, strength and resiliency. May I always serve You.

I am thankful to my parents, Catalina Montes, Ed.D. and Eddy Montes, who have been role models in my life and instilled in me the importance of education and faith, offered encouragement, and supported me throughout my upbringing and career.

I also wish to dedicate my dissertation to my good friend, Marlene Veldwisch, who never wavered in her support of my efforts to complete my studies and fulfill my other responsibilities. I am grateful to Marlene for her patience, support and willingness to read and reread, and offer critical supportive feedback to better my thinking, writing and life. I am very grateful to you!

Lastly, I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Michael E. McNeil and my children: Michael K., Brian, Beth, Alexander, Annie, Matthew and Patrick, and my granddaughter, Kylie. Michael, I am so grateful that you are part of my life. You are why this was possible. Thank you for your patience, encouragement and prayers during this process. I recognize that this process has not been easy and we have all had to compromise and sacrifice to allow me to complete this work. I love you all very much.

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## CHAPTER 1 – PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW<sup>1</sup>

### **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,

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<sup>1</sup> 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 was 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.

Table 1.1

*Individual Studies*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
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"> <li>1. What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE?</li> <li>2. What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE?</li> <li>3. How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations?</li> </ol>
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"> <li>1. How do COAs and principals make sense of the evaluation process with the new MMSEE standards?</li> <li>2. When communicating with principals, how do central office administrators</li> </ol>

				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"> <li>1. How does the central office team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development?</li> <li>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?</li> </ol>
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"> <li>1. What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors?</li> <li>2. What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback?</li> </ol>

Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom	Supporting 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"> <li>3. How closely is the feedback tied to the work principals' view as central to their practice?</li> <li>1. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal?</li> <li>2. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs have for principals?</li> <li>3. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals?</li> </ol>
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"> <li>1. What leadership practices do principals view as the most useful?</li> <li>2. How are these practices assessed by the MMSEE?</li> <li>3. How are these practices</li> </ol>

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 offer 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).

ISSLC 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 ISSLC and VAL-ED standards were then adopted by many states as guidelines for district principal evaluation systems.

Massachusetts was one such state that incorporated ISSLC 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*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
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.
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.
August, 2010	The Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators begins its work.
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.

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The MA 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 MA 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 MA Task Force (2011) designed a model system that districts could adopt, adapt, or revise to comply with state regulations (MA ESE, 2012). The MA 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).

Evaluation is not only similar across districts it is similar within each district with all types of educators. The MA 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 MA 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 MA 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 MA 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 MA Task Force understood the complexities of implementing MMSEE and exhorted MA 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 MA 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

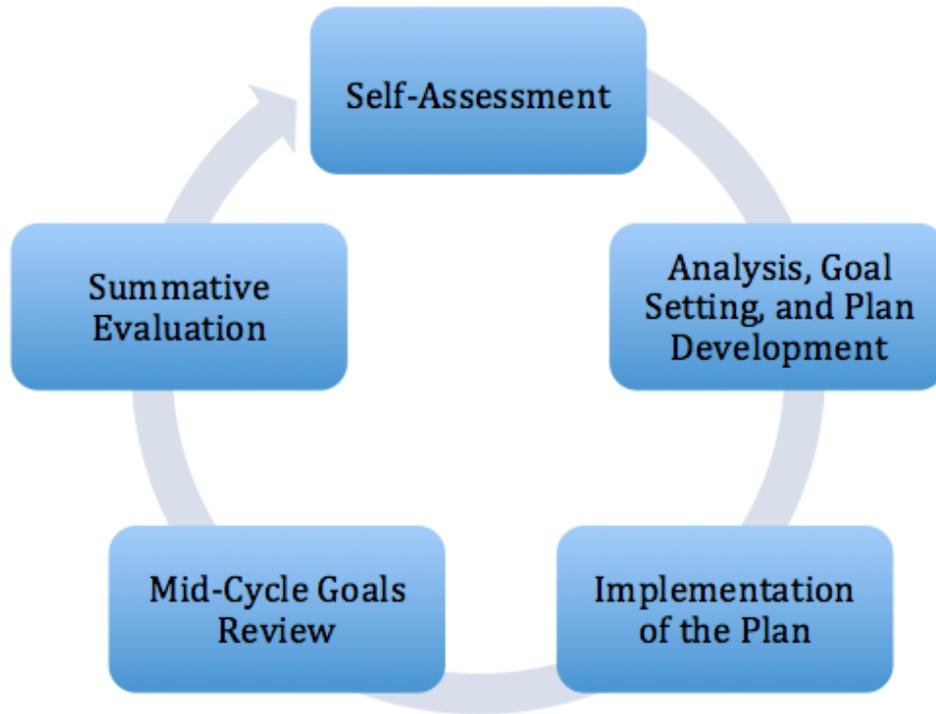
*Principal Standards of Evaluation*

<b>Standards</b>	<b>Explanation</b>
<b><i>Standard I</i></b>	<b><i>Instructional Leadership.</i></b> 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.
<b><i>Standard II</i></b>	<b><i>Management and Operations.</i></b> 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.
<b><i>Standard III</i></b>	<b><i>Family and Community Engagement.</i></b> 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.
<b><i>Standard IV</i></b>	<b><i>Professional Culture.</i></b> 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 – METHODOLOGY<sup>2</sup>

### **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. Figure 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. 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

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<sup>2</sup> 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.

revealed a holistic picture of the district’s implementation of MMSEE for principals (Yin, 2009).

Table 2.1

*Individual Studies’ Focuses and Conceptual Frameworks*

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<b>Overarching Focus:</b>		
The Use of MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals		
<b>Author</b>	<b>Individual Study Focus</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>
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
Alexandra 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

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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. Consequently, there is 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 – SUPPORTING PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE THROUGH EVALUATIVE FEEDBACK

This study, *Supporting Principal Professional Practice through Evaluative Feedback*, is one of six studies examining how one district, Emerson Public Schools (EPS, a pseudonym), implemented the new principal evaluation system called the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE). Although MMSEE is a state mandated system, Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE) does allow districts to have some autonomy in its implementation. Of particular interest in this study is how central office administrators (COAs) in EPS implement one of the central components of MMSEE, feedback, to promote principal professional practice. As part of MMSEE, feedback is expected to help principals build their professional practice by having COAs discuss and share insight with a principal regarding principal's self-assessment, observations of principal practice, and formative and summative evaluations (MA ESE, 2012).

As stated in Chapter 1, there has been much research on principal evaluation; however, literature on feedback given to principals as part of the evaluation process is limited (Goff, Goldring, Guthrie & Bickman, 2014; Kimball, Milanowski & McKinney, 2009) and research on feedback and how it pertains to principal practice is even more limited (Goff et al., 2014). For this reason and because of MMSEE's emphasis on the use of feedback as a central component in improving practice this study is significant. The study's conceptual framework is rooted in literature about the importance of feedback in organizational effectiveness with a focus on adult learning. It is from this framework that the research questions were developed. The purpose of this qualitative single case study

is to examine how COAs promote the growth and professional practice of principals using feedback.

### **Description of the Research Questions**

Feedback, as it pertains to MMSEE, is a mechanism intended to provide educators information and insight from their supervisors on their practice with the intent to reflect, improve and change the educators' professional practice (MA ESE, 2012). Evaluators, in this study COAs, are expected to establish on-going communication and collaboration with those that they are supervising, as outlined in the implementation guide's five-step cycle of continuous improvement (see Figure 3.1). Through the process outlined in the five-step process, COAs and principals engage in discussion from self-assessment to the summative evaluation. Feedback opportunities exist in each step of the process. For feedback to be successful in improving practice, the principal has to be willing and to receive, accept and apply the feedback (MA ESE, 2012).

Since the intent of the feedback is to build principal practice, the theory of adult learning will shed light on constructive feedback opportunities. Adult learning theory is designed to promote practices that support adults to learn. Although adult learning theory will be discussed in more detail in the Review of Literature, some of the principles of adult learning theory include creating an environment where there is collegiality and trust, where there is mutual respect and where real support can be sought and found with the intent to grow professional collaboration and practice (Drago-Severson, 2012).

Figure 3.1 Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement with Feedback Opportunities



Figure 3.1. The green arrows overlaid on the cycle of improvement demonstrate feedback opportunities outlined for COAs by MA ESE. The designers of the MMSEE expect that evaluators will have regular and continuous opportunities to offer feedback through the cycle. Adapted from “MMSEE Part V: School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide,” by the MA ESE, 2012e, p. 7 that is referred to in Chapter 1.

In examining the systems and structures that EPS established to offer and support principals through feedback, of particular interest was whether or not COAs took into consideration the tenets of adult learning theory. Specifically, is the feedback grounded in the context of the principals’ work, co-constructed in a psychologically safe environment

and applicable to the principals' current practice? In order to examine the use of feedback in EPS the research questions that were studied were:

- What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors?
- What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback?
- How closely is the feedback tied to the work that principals' view as central to their practice?

### **This Study in Relation to the Overall Dissertation-In-Practice**

This study, researching how COAs promote the professional practice of principals using feedback, is one of six studies that together compose the overarching project examining how EPS promotes the professional practice of principals using MMSEE. In the overarching study, six researchers examined key strands of the implementation process of MMSEE in EPS. In collaboration, the researchers addressed their overarching question: how do COAs promote the professional practice of principals using MMSEE?

Feedback is a central component of MMSEE. The decision of how EPS decided to implement feedback as part of the overall implementation of MMSEE ties this study to work of Sevelius (2016). Once the MMSEE mandate had been interpreted, COAs communicated policy to the district (Copeland, 2016). Communication and how COAs and principals make sense of the communication ties directly to the effectiveness of feedback to improve practice.

Most importantly, the implementation of MMSEE has resulted in a change in relationship for many COAs from a managerial role to that of an instructional role. For feedback to be successful, there must exist a trusting relationship between the evaluator and the principal (Carter, 2016). Feedback about instructional leadership is particularly

important because instructional leadership is deemed the most important standard among the four by which a principal's effectiveness is measured (Freeman-Wisdom, 2016). Lastly, the perspective of principals on COAs' support is central to improving principal practice (Blake McKetty, 2016).

### **Review of Literature**

In supporting principals' professional practice through feedback, COAs should consider those learning practices that are most effective for adults. Adult learning theory is a conceptual framework that was selected to support the work in this study because this framework provides concepts that support and build adults as learners. Additionally, there are close connections between the principles of adult learning theory and that of successful feedback systems. Those relationships between adult learning and feedback are examined in this review.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Adult learning theory, or androgogy, is the model of learning that focuses on those practices that best supports the learning of adults (Knowles, 1990; Merriam, 2001; Taylor & Kroth, 2009b). Many researchers base their work on the principles of adult learning that are espoused by Malcolm Knowles (McGrath 2009; Merriam, 2001, 2009; Taylor & Kroth 2009a, 2009b; Rodriques, 2012). Adult development is characterized by being more responsible for self and more independent. As the identity of the adult develops, the need for this independence to be recognized by others increases. Adults will resist learning if they believe that the learning is being imposed as opposed to self-directed (Knowles, 1990).

Argyris and Schön (1978), in their work on organizational development, also developed models to increase competence in professional practice. Two major components of this theory are closely linked to the work of Knowles (1980); they are that there be mutual learning between the learner and peers, and that the learner be able to practice the learning. Knowles (1980) furthers this work and states that in order for adults to learn, the adults must see themselves as participants in the learning process, and the prior understanding of the teacher/student relationship must be re-envisioned within the psyche of the adult learner. Since adults must see themselves involved in the learning process, the instructor must be seen as a facilitator of learning rather than the director or giver of information (Knowles, 1980). Also, central to promoting adult learning are the conditions established in the classroom environment; the learning environment must be one in which the adult feels “accepted, respected, and supported” (Knowles, 1970, p. 41).

Adult learners need to know why it is relevant or necessary to learn the information that is being taught. Adults need to connect the learning to something meaningful now or in the future. Most adults have the experience of learning through a dependency on the teacher; however, adults will become more successful in their learning if they participate actively in the learning process (McGrath, 2009; Taylor & Kroth, 2009a). Adults also bring a wealth of experience to the learning. In order to increase learning, adults must bring that experience into the classroom through dialogue and real-life examples and scenarios. Additionally, motivation is key to promoting adult learning. Many adults feel the pressure of adult responsibility; however, it is the internal motivation that inspires adult students to persevere and without which a student may leave the learning process incomplete. Internal motivation is generally tied to the

students' positive self-esteem and sense of belonging. For adults to learn the environment must be psychologically safe so that students can make mistakes without retribution. The psychological safety of the learner is paramount in the learning process (Knowles, 1990; McGrath, 2009).

### **Feedback - a Key Feature of Adult Learning Theory**

How can evaluators use their knowledge of adult learning theory to offer appropriate feedback to their principals? In order to explore this question it is first necessary to examine feedback. The term feedback has different meanings depending on the context and its use. In some research, feedback was found to describe information shared about an individual's practice (Harrison & Rouse, 2015) or information shared about an individual's practice for the purpose of improving the practice or product that is produced (Harrison & Rouse, 2015; Goff et al., 2014). Feedback originally stems from business practices and is now more commonly used in education. Since the designers of MMSEE expect that feedback be an integral part of the evaluation system, an examination of feedback is necessary.

Much of the research on feedback is found in the business field, as the term feedback was first coined in the 1800s during the industrial revolution (Stone & Heen, 2014). In examining the goal of MMSEE to promote professional practice, the definition of feedback that best suits the purpose of this study is that definition that links feedback about one's performance to modification in actions that leads to an improvement in practice (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Since feedback is seen as an integral part of the five-step cycle of continuous improvement, feedback is expected to be part of the iterative

process of growth. Yet, the desire to improve practice with feedback has not always led to improvement.

In a meta-analysis study of feedback intervention theory, Kluger and DeNisi (1996) found that there is nearly an equal probability of improving performance through feedback as decreasing performance through feedback. The explanation for this mixed response may be related to the stress associated between feedback and job performance, in particular performance evaluation. Research on evaluation, and the stress associated with evaluation, indicates that the focus on evaluation tends to decrease creativity. The creation of new ideas is challenging to the feedback provider because novel ideas are unfamiliar making it challenging to offer appropriate and relevant feedback (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Moreover, specific feedback may stunt the growth of practice because the receiver may become dependent on the giver of feedback. The specificity of the feedback may initially increase performance, but over time limits the ability of the receiver of feedback to self-correct or generate independent ideas (Goodman, Wood & Hendrickx, 2004). These three concerns – limitation of the provider of feedback to give quality feedback, the stress that feedback causes because it is evaluative, and offering too much feedback – are significant issues that may produce negative consequences when considering the purpose of feedback in MMSEE.

Recent work on feedback offers insight on how feedback can be used to produce constructive versus destructive results. The work of Harrison and Rouse (2015) suggest that feedback is a result of the interactions between the feedback provider and receiver and “not a one-sided passing of information (p. 377).” It is rather the co-construction of the interaction that leads to more creative activity. Additionally, the manner in which

feedback is delivered, or feedback style, and the ability of the feedback provider to offer the feedback in a style that best supports the personality and nature of the receiver is integral in determining the success of the feedback. There is also an expectation that the receiver and provider of feedback are in dialogue with each other such that there is an opportunity for new ideas to be generated and professional growth to occur in both parties. In considering the learner or worker, it is important to note that creative learners play an active role in shaping the feedback. The content of the feedback and quantity of evolving interactions between the feedback provider and receiver will result in a better product (Harrison & Rouse, 2015). Feedback viewed as dialogue between the receiver and provider should be co-constructed with consideration of the receiver's needs and learning styles which correlates with many of the adult learning theory tenets (Pollack, 2012).

**Feedback for principals.** Research suggests that there has been little feedback given to principals (Kimball et al., 2009; Goff et al., 2014). Education research on feedback and principal practice is limited (Goff et al., 2014); however, with the emergence of new principal evaluation systems, in which feedback is seen as a central component of the work, this has begun to change (Parylo, Zepeda, & Bengtson, 2012). In their phenomenological study Parylo, Zepeda and Bengtson (2012) identified eight themes central to the evaluation of principals; feedback was one of those themes. In identifying feedback, principals expressed appreciation for and valued feedback from superintendents with whom they shared an understanding of the position, because superintendents who had been principals, were often perceived to be more empathetic relative to the role. Written or oral feedback was well received and viewed as information

to improve practice. Principals in this study expressed no apprehension in receiving negative feedback; rather it was viewed as supportive and corrective. This work suggests the importance of principals and evaluators having positive and trusting relationships as a component for successful feedback.

***Feedback and the coaching model.*** The use of feedback in education is evident in coaching relationships, but again there is little research on the impact of coaching and feedback in education (Goff et al., 2014). Wise and Hammack (2011) studied coaching competencies that were successful in working with principals. These were: regularly scheduled coaching visits occurring at the school sites followed up with emails and phone calls, building trusting relationships with principals by spending time with principals to debrief current situations and issues, communicating effectively, and lastly facilitating learning and performance. In this research, feedback is seen as a function of communication to push the leader to new levels of understanding.

In the Parylo et al. (2014) study, feedback is defined as information regarding one's performance. Unlike the business model definition, this definition lacks the intent of feedback to build practice. In this study, feedback was provided from multiple sources such as supervisors, teachers, students, parents and data; however, it was left to the principal to make adjustments to practice independent of the interaction with the supervisor. In this case, coaching could play a pivotal role of being the vehicle that provides the principal with the bridge to use the feedback constructively to modify practice. The coach provides or creates in the principal the cognitive dissonance that assists in creating constructive action as a result of feedback.

## **The Gap**

The challenge with feedback research in education may in part be a result of the confusion as to the role and definition of feedback in the field. In education, the use of feedback is generally limited to communication shared orally or in writing about an individual's practice with the expectation that this knowledge will result in corrective action or increased performance (Singh & Vohra, 2005). Some research indicates that the use of feedback in coaching has been successful because the coach, as a non-evaluator, provides what is psychologically safe feedback. On the other hand MA ESE expects that the evaluator be the one to provide feedback and that this feedback positively impact performance. Unless the feedback is delivered and received in a safe environment the outcome may not meet expectations.

## **Coding and Analysis Methods**

The data for this study was collected using semi-structured interview described in Chapter 2. The semi-structured interview process allowed researchers to explore ideas mentioned by interviewees. The specific questions used to address the research questions in this study were:

- How and how often do you receive/give feedback?
- What is the purpose of the feedback?
- Do you find that the feedback you receive/give is applicable to your current practice?

Several interviewees mentioned feedback throughout their interviews, the semi-structured process allowed interviewers to ask follow up questions to those specifically listed in the interview protocol. Since, the data for this study were collected as part of the

larger study, the information was shared across researchers and coded for this study. Of particular interest were those ideas that arose regarding the frequency and type of feedback that principals receive from their supervisors and whether or not that feedback is tied to the work that principals' view as central to their practice.

To begin the analysis process, an *a priori* set of codes was used (Creswell, 2014). The sample list included statements or observations of the following: self-directed learning, role of the evaluator/principal, experience of the principal, experiential techniques, readiness to learn and orientation of learning (Taylor & Kroth, 2009). This a priori list was used to begin the coding process, however the coding process was iterative until a final list of themes emerged from the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998; Creswell, 2014). The final list of codes was: feedback frequency, purpose, structure – formal and informal, – and relevance to practice. Analytic memos were also completed after each interview 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. As stated in Chapter 2, to facilitate this process a qualitative research software package, Dedoose, was used. The software facilitated the coding and analysis of qualitative data and was a tool for developing themes and patterns that allowed the researcher to examine principals' perception of the feedback received by their evaluator, its frequency and its relevance to their practice.

## **Findings**

The findings section below discusses the overall results of this study in response to the following questions:

- What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors?

- What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback?
- How closely is the feedback tied to the work that principals' view as central to their practice?

The findings section focuses on the differences of opinion between the 14 EPS principals and their evaluators, the superintendent and assistant superintendent. The principals and their evaluators differed in opinion in the definition and relevance of feedback; however, there was some agreement found with respect to the purpose of feedback.

### **Differing Opinions: Principals vs. Evaluators**

In analyzing the data, four major themes arose central to understanding feedback in EPS. Both the principals and their evaluators identified these themes during their interviews. They are:

- the type of feedback, formal or informal,
- the frequency of feedback given to principal
- the purpose of feedback in principal evaluation, and
- whether or not the feedback offered to principals was relevant to their practice.

**Formal and informal feedback.** Principals and evaluators had different opinions as to the type of feedback received. Of the 14 principals in this study, 13 referred to feedback only as that feedback provided by their evaluator. Although principals received feedback from other COAs, it was not considered evaluative feedback. Feedback itself was divided into two categories, formal and informal. Principals viewed formal feedback as part of the principals' evaluation; informal feedback was perceived as non-evaluative. As demonstrated in Table 3.1, four principals stated that they had received only formal

feedback; five principals stated that they had received only informal feedback; two principals stated that they received both formal and informal feedback; and five principals did not distinguish between formal and informal feedback.

Informal feedback was perceived as optional: “It’s been more suggestions than feedback.” Three principals referred to feedback from other COAs in their interviews. One stating, “The feedback I’ve gotten, on occasion, has all been from one COA.” Although this feedback was seen as supportive, it was seen as non-evaluative because it was not feedback provided by their evaluator.

Principals’ view of feedback was in direct contrast to that of their evaluators. The evaluators viewed any feedback given by them or by other COAs as feedback subject to inclusion in the principals’ evaluation and relevant to principal practice: “We see ourselves really as a supervisory unit, at least that’s how I want them to think of themselves, that we are all coaching and supporting from our respective areas.” Like the principals, the superintendent distinguished between formal and informal feedback. Formal feedback is given “mid-year and at the end of the year;” informal feedback is given to principals during weekly meetings, school visits and other informal opportunities during the course of their work. The assistant superintendent, who is new to the district, referred to his feedback as informal conversations.

To summarize, the difference between formal and informal feedback, from the principals’ perspective, is that formal feedback is evaluative and informal feedback is not. However, evaluators expressed that all feedback offered to principals to be evaluative and that the difference between formal and informal feedback was how the feedback was delivered. Formal feedback was feedback given once or twice a year through the

discussion of the formative and summative evaluation and informal feedback was all other feedback.

Table 3.1  
*Principals' Perspective on Formal and Informal Feedback*

<u>School Type</u>	<u>Formal</u>	<u>Informal</u>	<u>Not Stated</u>
Elementary		X	
Elementary			X
Elementary			X
Elementary	X		
Elementary		X	
Elementary	X		
Elementary			X
Elementary		X	
Elementary	X	X	
Elementary			X
Secondary			X
Secondary		X	
Secondary	X	X	
Secondary		X	

*Note.* “Not Stated” was used to denote that principals did not state whether or not the feedback that they received was formal or informal. Elementary principals are inclusive of all school leaders from pre-kindergarten to grade 5. Secondary principals are inclusive of all middle and high school leaders.

**Frequency of feedback.** Most principals viewed that the frequency of feedback was limited as displayed in Table 3.2. There were eight principals who identified that they received feedback monthly; two principals who received feedback weekly; three who believed that they received feedback as needed; and one that identified as having received feedback only yearly through the receipt of the evaluation.

This is in contrast to the evaluators who believed that principals received frequent feedback through a variety of venues that included weekly principal meetings, school visits and regular communications. The superintendent specifically viewed his feedback inclusive of the feedback given by any of the COAs who support principals. The superintendent shared this description of how he supports principal with feedback:

In my regular conversations with them, I'm usually monitoring the things that I need to bring to them as feedback, system wide issues, or building level issues that have bubbled up that I recognize as critical issues. I'm usually trying to monitor those things and bring about conversation that causes them to get coaching from me on those issues, or to listen for the degree to which they're getting support from the rest of the leadership team, around critical issues.

Of note, secondary principals, those supervised by the superintendent, reported to have had more feedback than elementary principals. This in part may be a result of the assistant superintendent vacancy that was recently filled. As one elementary principal stated with reference to their evaluator, "I don't know that he has been here enough to know my practice." Many of the elementary principals mentioned that, with the addition of the newly hired assistant superintendent, they were hopeful to have increased school visits and feedback.

Table 3.2

*Principals' Perspective on Frequency of Feedback by Administrators*

<u>Frequency of Feedback</u>	<u>Number of Elementary Principals</u>	<u>Number of Secondary Principals</u>
Weekly	0	2
Monthly	7	1
Yearly	1	0
As Needed	2	1

*Note.* "As Needed" was used by some school leaders who did not specify frequency.

**Purpose of feedback.** The principals in this study generally agreed that most of the feedback that they received from their evaluators was in response to complaints brought forth by vocal community members to the central office. As indicated in Table 3.3, seven of the 14 principals explicitly stated that the feedback they received was directly linked to parental complaints. For example, one principal stated, "...the nature of the feedback is usually responding to a parents' concern." Three principals mentioned receiving feedback on staff complaints and school culture issues, such as this one: "There's definitely been feedback on the culture and climate of the building." More specifically, principals stated that feedback linked to any issues that may result in negative publicity such as parent and teacher complaints was "situational" and "reactive." During interviews few principals mentioned feedback linked to their role as an instructional leader.

Unlike principals, the evaluators described the purpose of feedback as that feedback which supports the developmental needs of the principal. Those needs included

support in instruction, parent engagement, and teacher evaluation. The superintendent stated:

We talk about what they are doing to move the needle in their building. That's why I go into classes with them, because it causes us to have direct conversations about their strongest or their weakest teachers, and what they might need.

As mentioned earlier, half the principals interviewed mentioned that parental concerns were a focus of their feedback. From the superintendent's perspective, there were principals who required support in parental engagement and interactions:

That's their growth edge right now. They're struggling, so we go hard after that. I'll join them in a parent conference, or I will monitor a particular issue, or I'll join the team, the intervention team, to actually help them diagnose. I do so to model for the principals mechanisms for how they can manage those issues.

The superintendent expressed hope that, by discussing these topics, principals were building their practice in support of students, families and staff; therefore, he believed that his feedback was directly tied to the principals' ability to support staff and ultimately student growth. The assistant superintendent, being new to the role in this district, described his purpose in giving feedback as a "sounding board, a mirror for their thinking." He mentioned in his interview that principals have called him regarding parent challenges and he supported them through this.

Both principals and evaluators cited parental communication and community concerns as a dominant subject of the feedback. Principals viewed this feedback as an opportunity to avoid unnecessary public scandal and evaluators saw it as an area of growth or support "to make sure that they were ok." Interestingly, principals also

indicated that they were preemptive in contacting central office regarding any parents and community issues that might lead to central office contacting them first.

**Relevance to practice.** One of the tenets of adult learning theory that was considered in this study is that adults learn best when they can connect the feedback that they receive directly to their practice (Knowles, 1980). Table 3.3 summarizes principals' key words and responses regarding the relevance of evaluator feedback to principal practice. Six of the 14 principals interviewed did not answer this question or responded that the feedback received was not relevant to their work "...so when we sit and talk, it's not about the things that I would hope for." Interestingly, feedback was appreciated by many principals as supportive of the managerial aspect of their work. One principal stated, "For me, it reaffirms what I'm doing and that I actually am moving on the right track." However, of those who found the feedback helpful, none of the principals mentioned that the feedback was helpful with respect to instructional leadership. "We never talk about instruction, ever. It's tough." Therefore, no principal linked their evaluative feedback to the one area, instructional leadership, that the MMSEE requires all principals to be proficient in order for a principal to be rated proficient overall.

In contrast to the principals, the superintendent and assistant superintendent believed that all feedback was directly tied to principal work and principal needs. They viewed their feedback as supporting and developing principal practice. As the superintendent indicated in his interview, "...these are really talented people. I'm usually helping them to gain insight as to how they can maneuver a situation... It's my job to sometimes point out issues and hypothesize possibilities so that she can entertain them and try to improve..." The superintendent and assistant superintendent saw themselves as

coaches supporting and encouraging principal work. This was supported by the superintendent description of his leadership style as that of one that affords principal autonomy over their work and needs. His expectation was that, if supports or feedback were needed, it should be sought. As he stated:

I give my principals a lot of autonomy. I really expect them to manage their buildings, and I really go out of my way to not get in their way. To not be seen as superseding them, or overriding them, I really want them to be able to be the person who is seen as the person not only with titular control but with actual control. To do that, it means that when they're in trouble, they really need to be reaching out and making sure they're getting all the support that they need, and that only reassures me that they're able to be strong in those difficult moments.

There was an overall disconnect between principals' perception of feedback and that of their evaluators. Of the 14 principals, nine expressed that feedback received from their evaluators was generally related to parental or community concerns. As one principal stated, "They call me if there is a problem." Five other principals linked their feedback to more compliance related demands such as goals and state testing. One principal mentioned classroom visits; this principal offered insight into her understanding of her evaluator: "Sometimes he's such a thinker it takes him a while, like you do not know where 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."

In brief, principals, who had identified as having had a stronger relationship with COAs, felt more supported by the feedback received. Those principals who believed that

they received little to no feedback felt disconnected to the central office and believed themselves to be alone in building their professional practice.

Table 3.3

*Principals' Perspectives on the Purpose and Relevance of Evaluator Feedback*

<u>School Type</u>	<u>Purpose</u>	<u>Relevance</u>
Elementary	Areas of strength and growth, job expectations, classroom observations, school improvement plan	Not sure
Elementary	Affirmation of practice	No response
Elementary	Reactive, parental feedback	Not related to instructional practice
Elementary	Parental feedback, school improvement plan	Offers a different perspective, helpful
Elementary	Check on school climate	Very helpful
Elementary	Little feedback given	No
Elementary	Parent, teacher and students issues	Not answered
Elementary	Student and staff issues, parental support, job expectations	Helpful
Elementary	Parental support and feedback, dialogue about classroom observations	Feels supportive
Elementary	Parental concerns, district expectations	Check in with supervisor
Secondary	Related to goals, state testing, input on principal evaluation	Affirmation of work, helpful, provides resources, ongoing conversations
Secondary	Classroom visits	Thought partner
Secondary	Parental feedback	Supportive, helpful
Secondary	Learning walks, culture, climate	No response

*Note.* Purpose is defined as the reason something is done. Relevance refers to whether or not the feedback that was offered was important to the principals' practice. "No response" was used if the principal did not answer the relevance question.

### **Implication for Practice**

This discussion points to opportunities to improve principal feedback in order to better support principal professional growth through increased systems and structures for principal evaluation through the use of adult learning theory.

### **Connections to Literature about Feedback as an Essential Element of Adult**

#### **Learning Theory**

Contrary to adult learning theory, the school leaders in EPS did not see themselves as engaged in their own growth and development. This is in part due to the lack of clear communication by COAs as to how COAs are supporting principal practice and growth and to a misalignment of expectations. School leaders did not link the feedback that was given to them as relevant to what they see as the core aspect of their practice, instruction. As a result of these findings, it is evident that there are misunderstandings between COAs and school leaders regarding key components of the evaluation process. Principals and evaluators in this district had differing opinions about the definition and purpose of feedback. Principals perceived feedback as information shared with them regarding urgent needs of the district, and in particular student, parent and teacher complaints. Feedback was either formal or informal. Formal feedback was seen as solely for the purpose of evaluation and informal feedback was seen as supportive and non-evaluative. Feedback offered by non-evaluators was viewed as informal feedback and, though supportive, not tied to the principals' work. In contrast, the

principal evaluators considered all evaluator and central office feedback as an opportunity to build principal professional practice. Additionally, evaluators viewed all feedback as evaluative.

This dissonance between principals and the central office team was in part a result of the lack of agreement and understanding of key terms and structures with respect to the use of feedback. Since feedback by principals was viewed solely as the interactions between the evaluator and the principal, principals did not recognize the central office team's collective efforts to support them. They appreciated the input of COAs, but did not link those conversations to their evaluator's efforts in supporting them. This led some principals to feel isolated and alone in building their professional practice as noted by their responses as to whether or not feedback received was relevant to their practice, refer to Table 3.3.

### **Limitations specific to feedback**

The limitations of this study are consistent with those limitations of the overarching study (see Chapter 2). Additionally, the assistant superintendent position in this district was vacant prior to this school year; as a result the superintendent evaluated all school leaders during the previous year. Since the vacancy was filled in September, the evaluative experience of the elementary principals was a completely new process.

### **Opportunities for Success**

COAs at Emerson Public Schools believe in the capacity of their principals and want for their leaders to experience a supportive and interactive learning environment. This premise and an understanding of adult learning theory can provide a foundation by

which the central office team in collaboration with principals can build a system to support principals' professional growth and practice.

**Joint professional development.** Principals and COAs should participate together in professional development, such as Research for Better Teaching (RBT). RBT is an organization that EPS currently uses to support teacher evaluation. The suggestion is to have RBT aid in developing a common understanding between COAs and principals regarding observation and feedback specifically for principal evaluation. By having COAs and principals participate as a team will allow the superintendent the opportunity to explicitly communicate the principal evaluation structure and process.

**School visits.** In order for principals to build their professional practice, evaluators, as facilitators of adult learning, must understand the individual principal's school specific context and culture. This will enable the evaluator to bring insight to that principal's work through dialogue, and real-life examples and scenarios that pertain to practice. This understanding will be created by dedicated time spent at the schools and in supporting the instructional work of principals.

**Principal voice.** Using the tenets of adult learning theory, COAs and principals should jointly develop an implementation system of the MMSEE such that principals see themselves as participants in the development of those systems that will build their professional growth. This would include expectations of priority elements and indicators and the roll out of the evaluation process with set expectations and deadlines.

Additionally, the evaluators should explicitly state how COAs and central office supports are intentionally designed to support principal professional growth and practice.

## CHAPTER 4 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS<sup>3</sup>

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

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<sup>3</sup> 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.

opportunities to involve principals' voices in decision-making and the planning of their professional development. McNeil (2016) found a disconnection between principals and 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 Distributive 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 capacities 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



### **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](mailto:leahmblake@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX  
 J. Kimo Carter: [jkimocarter@gmail.com](mailto:jkimocarter@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX  
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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](mailto: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 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.*