How School Leaders Sustain Student-Centered Innovation:

Lessons from North Minneapolis
Welcome

Joel Luedtke
The Jay and Rose Phillips Family Foundation
The State of the Principalship in Minnesota

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The State of the Principalship

June, 2023

Katie Pekel, EdD
Do Principals Really Matter?
Exploring the research behind this leadership role
Impact of the principal

“Across six rigorous studies estimating principals’ effects using panel data, principals’ contributions to student achievement were nearly as large as the average effects of teachers identified in similar studies. Principals’ effects, however, are larger in scope because they are averaged over all students in a school, rather than a classroom.”

Studies demonstrate that schools with more effective principals have:

- Lower student absenteeism and chronic absenteeism.
- Higher teacher job satisfaction.
- Reduced teacher turnover, particularly of effective teachers.
- Better academic achievement among students

*Replacing a below average elementary principal with an above average principal would result in an additional 2.9 months of math learning and 2.7 months of reading learning for students*

Through funding from the Joyce Foundation and the Minneapolis Foundation, CAREI developed a statewide survey of principals to elevate their voices in Minnesota while informing multiple stakeholders including (but not limited to) policymakers, school boards, principal licensure and professional development programs, and organizations like MESPA and MASSP that support Minnesota principals.
Survey Administration

- Every principal and AP in MN sent a person-specific email
- November 11, 2021 through December 5, 2021
- Will administer every other year
- Report of findings at z.umn.edu/MNPS22
Survey Topics

- Career Information
- Job Satisfaction
- Preparation and Licensure
- Professional Development
- Working Conditions
- Influence
- Educational Ecosystem
- COVID-19 and School Transformation

- Culturally Responsive School Leadership
- Leadership Self Efficacy and Needed Supports
  - School Improvement
  - Management and Decision-making
  - Culture and Climate
  - Instructional Leadership
Follow-Up Focus Groups

Participants

● Twin Cities leaders (2 groups)
● Greater Minnesota leaders (2 groups)
● Elementary leaders (1 group)
● Secondary leaders (1 group)
● Leaders identifying as Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) (1 group)
● Leaders identifying as Female (1 group)
● Early-career leaders (1 group)

Topics

● Professional development
● Instructional leadership
  ○ Culturally Responsive School Leadership
● Staff and student mental health
● Community-Engaged Leadership*
● State accountability
● Supervisor support
● Group-specific questions
The state of the ‘Principalship’ in Minnesota
Working Conditions

• **79%** of respondents feel their primary role is to be an instructional leader...

• However, only **61%** of respondents report their supervisor ensures they have the time to do so.

• Only **46%** of respondents agreed that their current workload is sustainable
The Minnesota Principals Survey

Time Spent on Tasks by Type

- **Internal administrative tasks**: 1% blue, 4% purple, 35% green, 34% yellow, 26% orange
- **Instructional tasks**: 21% blue, 41% purple, 28% green, 8% yellow, 2% orange
- **Student interactions**: 4% blue, 27% purple, 40% green, 15% yellow, 15% orange
- **Family and community interactions**: 10% blue, 41% purple, 38% green, 9% yellow, 3% orange
- **My own professional growth**: 27% blue, 28% purple, 23% green, 1% yellow, 1% orange

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About the right amount of time

- Much less / Somewhat less time than I would ideally spend
- Somewhat more / Much more time than I would ideally spend
Principals lack confidence and time in the area nearly 80% say is the most important part of their job: **Instructional Leadership**

**Average confidence by area of leadership**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Confidence Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>School Improvement</td>
<td>3.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management &amp; Decision-making</td>
<td>3.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture &amp; Climate</td>
<td>2.90</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructional Leadership</td>
<td>2.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- **School Improvement** (Motivating staff, analyzing data)
- **Management & Decision-making** (hiring new teachers, establishing discipline practices, explaining decisions to staff)
- **Culture & Climate** (addressing staff mental health challenges, facilitating discussions with staff about gender identity)
- **Instructional Leadership** (creating culturally-responsive assessments, designing culturally-responsive curriculum)
Culturally Responsive School Leadership - a subset of IL and part of Culture and Climate account for 4 of the 5 lowest rated areas of confidence.

- Creating culturally-responsive assessments
- Designing culturally-responsive curriculum
- Addressing staff mental health challenges
- Supporting culturally-responsive pedagogy
- Facilitating discussions with staff about gender identity
Within CRSL, Community Engaged Leadership, primarily involving marginalized families, is infrequently practiced.
Mental health is an overwhelming concern.

Staff and students’ mental health are primary concerns among principals, and they need genuine help in addressing these issues. Additionally, nearly one in ten respondents cited that they need mental health support for themselves.

### School Culture and Climate Activities Posing the Greatest Challenge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Addressing staff mental health challenges</td>
<td>219</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Addressing student mental health challenges</td>
<td>177</td>
<td>37%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Principals need more and better professional development (PD).

There is a deep desire for more professional learning, but the pressure felt to be “in the building” is a key barrier. However, the type of PD opportunities matter: the form of PD principals reported engaging in most often (district sponsored meetings and presentations) was also cited as the least effective.

### Type of PD Engaged In Most Often

1. **Presentations at scheduled school / district meetings**
2. Networking with other educational leaders
3. Other workshops or trainings
4. State or local conferences
5. MESPA provided opportunities
6. Other cohort-based learning experience
7. MASSP provided opportunities
8. Formal coaching
9. Formal mentoring
10. National conferences
11. Minnesota Principals Academy
12. Doctoral coursework

### Rank of Usefulness of PD Experiences

1. Minnesota Principals Academy
2. Networking with other educational leaders
3. Doctoral coursework
4. Formal mentoring
5. Other cohort-based learning experience
6. Formal coaching
7. National conferences
8. MESPA provided opportunities
9. MASSP provided opportunities
10. State or local conferences
11. Other workshops or trainings
12. **Presentations at scheduled school or district meetings**
Recommendations
**THE MINNESOTA PRINCIPALS SURVEY**

**SERIES OVERVIEW**
The Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement (CAREI) at the University of Minnesota conducted the first biennial Minnesota Principals Survey (MPS) in November and December 2020. The survey focused on school leadership and examined the daily work, challenges, and opportunities that principals and assistant principals face.

**CONCENTRATION ON CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE SCHOOL LEADERSHIP**

While educational leaders and community members in Minnesota have become increasingly aware of the importance of culturally responsive school leadership, the MPS survey found that principals and assistant principals continue to report challenges in this area.

**INTRODUCTION TO INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

School-based mental health support is a critical component of educational leadership in Minnesota. The MPS survey highlighted the need for more support in this area.

**PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN MINNESOTA**

In order to maintain their administrative licenses, K-12 administrators in Minnesota are required to engage in professional development activities. The MPS survey examined the types of professional development activities that principals and assistant principals participate in and the challenges they face in this area.

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

June 2023

Authors
Katie Pekel
Sara Kemper

To better understand school leaders’ experiences and solicit their ideas, we conducted a series of focus groups with 50 Minnesota principals in November 2022. The purpose of the Policy and Practice Brief was to summarize our findings and recommendations from the focus groups and identify key areas where professional development, instructional, and school leadership are needed.

**Professional Development**

As indicated in the 2021 MPS, the type of PD that principals participated in most frequently were presentations at scheduled school or district meetings (35%), followed by coaching and mentoring (24%) and class attendance (20%).

**Selected Recommendations**

- For Policymakers: Ensure the 125 clock hours for principal re-certification are meaningful and address content areas in which principals indicate low self-efficacy (e.g., Culturally Responsive School Leadership, Instructional Leadership).
- For System Leaders: Invest in developmental approaches to principal learning that are ongoing and collective in nature (e.g., PLCs, collaboratively engaging in problem of practice virtual sessions “sit and get” PD).
- For Building Leaders: Be proactive in developing a resignation structure that allows you to exit the building and secure your successor’s learning.
- For Principal Preparation and PD Providers: Ensure that professional learning programs leverage high-impact strategies such as one-on-one support, learning communities, and job-embedded learning.

**INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP**

A majority of Minnesota school leaders (80%) told us that the 2021 MPS that they spend less time than they would like on instructional tasks (like curriculum, instruction, assessment, and PLC meetings), and a similar proportion (85%) reported spending more time than they would like on administrative tasks (like personnel issues, scheduling, and reports). Furthermore, seventy-nine percent (79%) of respondents also told us that they felt their primary role was...
Across all of these, principals tell us the 4Ts need to be addressed:
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**Time**

Principals told us they spent more time than they would like on administrative tasks and less time than instructional leadership and family and community engagement; that there is not enough time for their own professional growth or engagement in policy influence and that daily ‘urgent’ tasks (e.g., finding substitute teachers, responding to mental health crises) take time away from more strategic tasks like teacher coaching and curricular alignment.
Across all of these, principals tell us the 4Ts need to be addressed:

Training
Better training is needed, especially in instructional and culturally responsive leadership. On one hand, leaders felt their licensure programs had prepared them well to carry out the management and decision-making aspects of their jobs. On the other hand, respondents lacked confidence in instructional leadership.
Across all of these, principals tell us the 4Ts need to be addressed:

**Trust**

Principals wanted their supervisors to trust and support them—to ‘have their backs’ when needing to make an unpopular decision or lead an uncomfortable conversation.
Across all of these, principals tell us the 4Ts need to be addressed:

Transformation

More than half of principals report their workloads are not sustainable. Investments in high-quality, sustained professional development, fundamental restructuring of the use of time and resources, and sustained support will all need to take place. Our recommendations center the transformations that could take place in order to ensure the role of school leader is truly transformational.
Findings

The majority of principals tell us they spend less time on IL than they would like and it is the area they report the least confidence.

Principals tell us they had to prioritize administrative or managerial tasks that crowded out IL tasks.

More district-level support for IL in the form of coaching as well as co-creation of instructional programs would be welcomed.
Recommendations

- **For Policymakers.** Consider funding incentives for districts that offer year-long paid internships for those studying to be principals with a focus on instructional leadership to enhance schools’ instructional leadership capacity.

- **For System Leaders.** Partner with principals to identify administrative tasks that principals do that other — whether at the school or district level — could take on.

- **For Building Leaders.** Prioritize those instructional leadership tasks shown to improve student learning — like teacher coaching and feedback conversations —

- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Continually crosswalk MN Admin competencies with coursework and PD, and use MnPS data to inform offerings.
Findings

Low self-efficacy reported in the areas of CRSL

Frequency of engagement in CRSL activities wavers among principals

Principals report a fear or discomfort, a lack of time, a need for more training, and for district leaders to “have their backs”
Recommendations

- **For Policymakers.** Require CRSL education as part of licensure renewal for school leaders and onboarding for school board members.

- **For System Leaders.** Be prepared to support all leaders, but especially leaders of color in predominantly White schools, when they face resistance to culturally responsive work from staff or families. Use your positionality to explicitly support the decisions and actions of your school leaders.

- **For Building Leaders.** Access and leverage tools to self-assess your own equity leadership and CRSL practice.

- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Require CRSL training in administrator preparation programs to meet or exceed the cultural competency requirement for educator license renewal in Minnesota.
Findings

School leaders lack preparation, experience, and self-efficacy in several domains pertinent to community engaged leadership.

51% of leaders reported spending somewhat less or much less time than they would like on family and community interactions.

Principals desired to have dedicated staff to assist with CEL.
Recommendations

- **For Policymakers.** Provide community leadership pathways that do not require traditional licensing to ensure community voice is included in school and district leadership.
- **For System Leaders.** Prioritize community engagement as a core component of the district’s work such that it becomes part of the cultural fabric of every school.
- **For Building Leaders.** Develop and institutionalize student, family, and community-focused listening/learning sessions with a plan to respond to input.
- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Ensure course activities include practice in community engagement. Examples might include participatory action research, community-based equity audits, or report card deliveries/home visits.
Findings

Principals cited student mental health (66%) and staff mental health (68%) as the two most significant challenges faced related to the pandemic.
Findings: Students

Challenges manifested as emotional dysregulation, absences and bullying. Leaders felt these were exacerbated by social media, societal upheaval.

Many report needing more personnel, training in concrete practices to respond to emotional dysregulation and resources to direct families to for support.
Findings: Staff

Challenges manifested as compassion fatigue, heightened emotions and retreating

Student behaviors, loss of a sense of purpose and lack of voice in decision making were all cited as contributing to burnout
Recommendations: Students

- **For Policymakers.** Invest in significantly improving the ratios of mental health support personnel including through telehealth partnerships and workforce programs that incentivize careers in mental health.
- **For System Leaders.** Encourage building leaders to adopt an equity-oriented universal mental health screener and establish a schoolwide system for social and emotional learning.
- **For Building Leaders.** Leverage needs assessments, resource mapping, and equity-oriented universal screeners to better understand needs, available resources, and gaps.
- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Provide training on conducting a needs assessment and resource mapping to identify strengths, gaps, and priorities.
Recommendations: Staff

- **For Policymakers.** Require and fund annual school climate surveys.
- **For System Leaders.** Collect data from school staff about their working conditions, and use it to inform strategies to prevent burnout.
- **For Building Leaders.** Work towards reducing staff burnout by addressing the issues of staff planning time and staff coverage.
- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Help aspiring principals develop the skills, mindsets, and behaviors that have been consistently shown to promote positive climate: fostering trust, protecting team planning and learning time, and including staff members in decision-making.
Findings

Type of PD reported most frequently used also cited as least useful

Sustained learning with peers grounded in relevant research was a desire

Principals need to become more comfortable with leaving the building and need a reliable back-up plan to do so
Recommendations

- **Policymakers.** Ensure the 125 clock hours for principal re-licensure are meaningful, and address content areas in which principals indicate low self-efficacy.
- **For System Leaders.** Invest in developmental approaches to principal learning that are ongoing and collective in nature.
- **For Building Leaders.** Develop a delegation structure that allows you to be out of the building and secure your supervisor’s support.
- **For Principal Preparation and PD Providers.** Ensure that professional learning programs leverage high-impact strategies such as one-on-one support, learning communities, and job-embedded learning.
Two Overarching Recommendations
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Developmental Approach to Initial Training, Internship, and Ongoing Professional Development
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Developmental Approach to Initial Training, Internship, and Ongoing Professional Development

A Different School Leadership Model
Developmental Approach to Initial Training, Internship, and Ongoing Professional Development

**Initial Training**
A more personalized approach to coursework vs competencies.

**Internship**
True internship that is year-long, paid, and placement with effective leaders.

**Ongoing Professional Development**
Should respond to the needs of principals. Tied to evaluation, CEUs should reflect a requirement in broad categories like teachers.
A Different School Leadership Model

**Operational Leader**
Leads the operational systems and work of the school

**Instructional Leader**
The ‘licensed’ K-12 Principal

**Community Leader**
Leads the work that supports a humanizing culture of belonging in the school community
Operational Leader

- This role would lead the operational systems and work of the school. They would have primary responsibility for things like: communication, scheduling, HR functions, budgeting, safety and security, busing, reporting, and sustainability of the building.
- As an example of the value this kind of role may have for a district, in the 5,000 student district of Acton-Boxborough in Massachusetts, investing in an ‘energy manager’, something the operations leader could do, netted the district $500,000 in annual savings in energy costs (Lieberman, 2023).
Instructional Leader

- (The ‘licensed’ K-12 Principal) This role would lead the academic systems and work of the school. They would have the primary responsibility for curriculum, instruction, assessment.
- The instructional leader would work with teachers to determine and execute the academic continuous improvement agenda in the building.
- Things that likely would fall in this leader’s portfolio would be MTSS, curricular selection, instructional coaching, data analysis, and professional learning related to academics.
Community Leader

- This role would lead the work that supports a humanizing culture of belonging in the school community. They would have primary responsibility for student and staff wellbeing, engagement of student voice and activism, social and emotional learning (SEL), school climate, and family and community engagement.

- As the leader who interfaces with organizations and the broader community in which the school is situated, they would champion the desires of the community, bring the ancestral knowledge of community members not only into the school, but also into the curriculum, and could lead resource mapping efforts to better integrate school and community.

- Ideally, this individual would see themselves—and be seen—as a member of the surrounding school community.
College of Education and Human Development

The University of Minnesota is an equal opportunity educator and employer.
Developmental and Impact Evaluation Results and Lessons Learned

Drs. Ava Yang-Lewis and Mark Lewis

ACT Research
Developmental and Impact Evaluation

Results and Lessons Learned

ACT Research

July 25, 2023
About Us

- Research
- Evaluation
- Strategy
- Design & Development
Participatory, Developmental, and Impact Evaluation Approaches

We supported schools in:

• Piloting and learning from small aspects of their potential programs during a smaller grant phase before the “Bold” grants even began
• Designing high-level theories of change and working models for their programs
• Designing and iterating their programs
• Co-designing learning and evaluation plans and tools
• Adapting to emerging learning and events
This looked like:

- Design sessions for program theories/models
- Co-designing flexible yearly evaluation plans that allowed for emerging needs & developments
- Co-creating data collection tools
- Helping schools gather and analyze qualitative and quantitative data, including tracking operational data through a research agreement with the district
- Providing frequent and actionable feedback to the schools by participating in meetings, team step-backs, presentations, and short action-focused reports
Benefits and Limitations of the Evaluation Approach

• The relational nature and long-term engagement can increase an evaluation’s credibility, use, and effectiveness for driving development and innovation.

• The relational nature and long-term engagement means that we have also come to personally know the Foundation and schools and have a strong commitment and personal interest in their overall successes.
A case study on the impact of a partnership between community, educators, and a family foundation through two student-centered learning grants in North Minneapolis.
Connected
Community
Academy
(Henry High)

My Story
My Brilliance
(Olson Middle)
Community Connected Academy (CCA)

A mostly insulated, community-connected, student-centered pathway for 11th and 12th graders. It consists of four core teachers, a counselor, and a special education teacher. Students spend most of their day in CCA with a cohort of other students, only leaving for electives. The key components of CCA are:

- cohorts of students
- a project-based curriculum with a social justice emphasis
- a focus on students’ futures including experiential real-world learning and internships
- a focus on social emotional learning (including identity development and advocacy)
- intentional culture and relationship building
- an integrated team of teachers and an embedded counselor
- deliberate connections to North Minneapolis through the curriculum, internships, and other programming

The CCA pathway at Henry continues and is currently being adapted to work within school and district realities and budget.
My Story My Brilliance (MSMB)

Founded on the core assumption that “our students possess inherent brilliance and a strong capacity for learning, but that conditions met within traditional schools frustrate, rather than cultivate these capacities”, MSMB aimed to “reconnect students with their agency (My Story) and their unique talents (My Brilliance)”. The key components of MSMB are:

❖ the creation of interdisciplinary teams of teachers and counselors
❖ a transformative counseling model that featured counselors at each grade level
❖ journaling
❖ a school wide commitment to intentional teaching and social-emotional learning
❖ a more relevant curriculum and interdisciplinary projects

and a focus on three student-centered questions: “Who am I now? From where did I come? Who am I becoming?”

For all intents and purposes, MSMB ended in the fall of 2021. The results and lessons that we’ll share are focused on the fall of 2017 through the spring of 2021.
Impact & Results
Challenges

• District budget cuts challenged these programs and overall school operations every year

• A global pandemic severely disrupted both schooling and lives

• All in the context of generations of racism and new tragedies
Shortcomings

- **Unrealized program elements.** Some elements of the schools’ intended program designs were never fully or sustainably implemented.

- **Finding time to plan.** Even with financial support for additional positions, finding time to plan during the summer and especially during the school year was a challenge.

- **Building systematic, repeatable processes.** Building systematic, repeated processes, was also a challenge, with schools designing creative new approaches but not always making them a regular, repeatable part of how they teach or support.
Building a sense of community and strong support

“...I think this larger sense of community, like we've had some tumultuous times in CCA where there's been conflict over the years between students and we've worked through it. ... And I think that's super important, that sense of community and what it means to be a part of a community.” – CCA Educator

- Students feel that they belong at CCA/school
- Teachers are interested in getting to know their students
- Teachers care about their students
- Students have friends at school

% responding “Often” or ”Almost Always”

- CCA Spring 2019: 88%
- All Henry Spring 2019: 56%
- CCA Spring 2019: 95%
- All Henry Spring 2019: 58%
- CCA Spring 2019: 98%
- All Henry Spring 2019: 78%
- CCA Spring 2019: 95%
- All Henry Spring 2019: 77%
Preparing students for college, career, and real life

95%
Of students agree or strongly agree that CCA is helping them be ready for college, career, and real life

Helping students understand who they are

“CCA helps me develop my identity because it gives me an opportunity to work on projects that reflect on who I am.” – CCA Student

“CCA made me learn that there were many opportunities to choose from.” – CCA Student

“Before CCA, I knew I was going to college. Didn’t know what I wanted to go for and [I was] not motivated … North News [internship] helped me find a passion and do a double major. It helped me focus on what I want to do …” – CCA Student
Strong retention and graduation

Graduation Rate

Other Henry Students: 78%
CCA: 91%
Promising Lessons for Schools

Cohort models, insulated pathways, and teacher-counselor teams can build community and provide strong support.

Project-based learning and internships engage and excite students and help prepare them for the real world.
"The staff went from running away every year to coalescing and being here and really having a sense of mission." – Olson Educator

“They [teachers] know, okay, if this is going on in my classroom and I've tried to handle it myself but it's not working, I know I've got somebody who can come and either just step out in the hall with the student, maybe just sit down next to the student in the classroom. I know that if I make a phone call to a parent as a teacher, I know that I've got my counselor on my teaching team to help support me.” – Olson Educator
Promising academic and disciplinary outcomes with room for growth in standardized test scores

I think the academic piece came along because … [if] you don't get suspended so much, you are present in school more, you're probably going to be more successful. – Olson Educator
New levels of student support

“I feel like I have good relationships, they know me, they know I do my work. If I don't do my work, they know there's something going on in my life and help.” – Olson Student

“Counselors at Olson have helped me to get through the times where it feels like the world is crashing down, and where you feel trapped.” – Olson Student

“They’ve helped me become a better person – I can always go to them when I need them. They always encourage me to do my work and will actually help me do work, and that’s a good thing.” – Olson Student
Promising Lessons for Schools

The journaling and counseling models (including the educator teamwork components) are concrete and reproducible ways to build foundational relationships and improve climate.

This type of change can have a significant impact on climate and outcomes in a short period of time.
The journaling and counseling models (including the educator teamwork components) are concrete and reproducible ways to build foundational relationships and improve climate.

This type of change can have a significant impact on climate and outcomes in a short period of time.
Key Lessons Learned for Grantmaking in School Change

• Engage deeply and commit to long-term partnerships

• Invest in learning

• Investing directly in educators may be a game changer for designing new ways of teaching, learning, and supporting students; AND they need time and capacity to do this work.

• This work is not possible without strong school leaders who empower and actively support their staff to design and implement change
A case study on the impact of a partnership between community, educators, and a family foundation through two student-centered learning grants in North Minneapolis.
A Conversation with School Leaders

Yusuf Abdullah
Associate Superintendent, Minneapolis Public Schools and former principal of Patrick Henry High School

Dr. Steve Emerson
Assistant Professor, St. Cloud State University and former principal of Olson Middle School
How School Leaders Sustain Student-Centered Innovation:

Lessons from North Minneapolis