Promoting Organizational Learning Through Policy Interpretation: One District's Implementation Of The Massachusetts Model System For Educator Evaluation To Support The Growth And Development Of Principals

Author: AC Sevelius

BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

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PROMOTING ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THROUGH POLICY

INTERPRETATION: ONE DISTRICT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE

MASSACHUSETTS MODEL SYSTEM FOR EDUCATOR

EVALUATION TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

OF PRINCIPALS

Dissertation in Practice
By

AC SEVELIUS

With Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Christine A. Copeland,
Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, and Alexandra Montes McNeil

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Abstract

This qualitative case study examined how, when faced with an externally driven policy, central office administrators worked as an internal team to interpret mandates, match mandates to current needs, and reorient the organization through professional learning opportunities. In order to comply with state mandates, in this case the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE), central office administrators had been called upon to interpret the requirements of the new system, thus impacting professional development, decision-making, relationships, and forcing COAs to consider how best to meet the needs of the mandate and constituents simultaneously. Through interviews with one district's COAs and principals, in addition to a document review, findings revealed a district COA team committed to the full implementation of the MMSEE for teachers, but who were in the middle of figuring out how best to accomplish the mandate's goals to support principal growth and development.

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Dedication

I dedicate my dissertation to my wife, Heather O'Brien, and our children, Esme and Charles. They gave me the gift of space, time, and support so that I could complete my doctoral studies. They are truly at the heart of everything I do.

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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.

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

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

As one of the first winners of RTTT, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations in June of 2011. A premiere feature of the new evaluation regulations was the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE). MMSEE effectively standardized performance expectations and evaluation practices for all educators, including principals, throughout the Commonwealth. Furthermore, these regulations were

designed to support the growth and development of educators and to determine their effectiveness based on multiple measures of student achievement data (MA ESE, 2012).

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

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

Purpose of the Study

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

Table 1.1
Individual Studies

Author	Title	Purpose	Conceptual Framework	Research Questions
AC Sevelius	Promoting Organizational Learning Through Policy Interpretation	To understand how, when faced with an externally driven policy, COAs work as an internal team to interpret mandates, match mandates to current needs, and reorient the organization	Organizational Learning Theory	1. What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE? 2. What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE? 3. How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations?
Christine A. Copeland	How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations of MMSEE to Principals	To explore how COAs make sense of MMSEE and how they communicate their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals	Sensemaking	1. How do COAs and principals make sense of the evaluation process with the new MMSEE standards? 2. When communicating with principals, how do central office administrators frame their understanding

James 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	1. How does the central office team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development? 2. How does each principal's relational trust and connectedness toward central office administrators correlate to his or her perception of district efforts to promote principal growth and development?
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	1. What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors? 2. What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback? 3. How closely is the feedback tied to the work principals' view as central to their practice?
Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom	Supporting 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	1. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal? 2. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs have for principals? 3. How has

				MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals?
Leah Blake McKetty	Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office Support	To examine how principals perceive central office support of their leadership practices	Distributed Leadership	1. What leadership practices do principals view as the most useful for themselves? 2. How are these practices assessed by the MMSEE? 3. How are these practices supported by COAs?

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

As Table 1.1 indicates, the studies examined differing, but overlapping aspects of the district's implementation of MMSEE. With a rich tapestry of perspectives, conceptual frameworks, and modes of analysis, the research team expected that each individual study would complement the others and, when taken together, they would allow the team to observe, interpret, and analyze central office support of principals through the use of MMSEE in a comprehensive manner.

Significance

Since this is the first time Massachusetts has created a comprehensive mandated evaluation system for principals, studying MMSEE in one district – from

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

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

Literature Review

Research into principals' impact on student learning, COAs' support of principals, and effective principal evaluation systems provided the context for this dissertation in practice. The first section, The Principal's Influence on Student

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

The Principal's Influence on Student Learning

Although the principals' role in student achievement is indirect, the influence nevertheless is quite impactful. In a meta-analysis of qualitative and quantitative studies that measured principal impact on student achievement, Waters, Marzano and McNulty (2004) found a significant correlation between principal leadership and student achievement. The study indicated that if principal quality is increased by one standard deviation, student achievement would rise ten percentile points. In a subsequent meta-analysis, Leithwood (2010) concurred that principal leadership is the second most influential factor to improve student performance.

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

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

Central Office Administrators Supporting Principals

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

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

superintendent leadership and student outcomes when superintendents established a collaborative goal setting process resulting in non-negotiable action items that were closely monitored and supported through resource allocation.

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

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

an environment of "internal accountability" that can respond positively to external accountability demands.

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

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

Effective Principal Evaluation

Since building principal performance is vital to the growth of students and teachers, greater emphasis has been placed on evaluation systems to improve

principal practice. A publication of the National Association of Elementary School Principals (2012) claimed that with the increased interest in principal performance in the age of RTTT, "the U.S. Department of Education [now] equates the effectiveness of school principals to student achievement outcomes" (p. 7) and that a coherent, consistent evaluation system is essential to assure principal quality. In crafting standards for evaluation, the Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation (2010), suggested that principal evaluation systems should, at minimum, involve principals in evaluation design, be connected to principal support systems, be aligned with teacher evaluation, include multiple rating categories, use multiple measures, communicate results to principals transparently, and include support and training of principal evaluators. Furthermore, Catano and Stronge (2007) stated: "Evaluation instruments are a powerful tool for influencing the behaviour of principals, reinforcing the adage 'what gets measured is what gets done'" (p. 394).

Evaluation systems should be manageable, targeted, and well-designed and give opportunities to guide practitioners towards meeting the shared goals of the community (Marshall, 2009; Saphier, Gower, Haley-Speca, & Platt, 2008). Additionally, the system should engender a climate that promotes formative feedback essential for improving practice, as summative evaluation is only a small component of the learning process (Stiggins, Arter, Chappuis, & Chappuis, 2009). Danielson (1996) suggested that when evaluating educators, supervisors should look closely at how students learn, specifically how they engage in meaningful work, connect to a community of learners, meet high expectations, shared responsibility, and deepen their understanding of the work at hand. Furthermore, quality

supervision and evaluation has the potential to message what the shared agreements in any school system are, how those agreements are manifested, and how to combat practices that are not in service of student gains. Formative evaluation can shift the focus to the student, ensuring that student achievement, rather than compliance, becomes the driver of adult learning (Saphier et al., 2008).

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

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

The Development of National Principal Evaluation Standards

One of the first sets of standards for principal evaluation was developed by the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC). These ISLLC standards, developed in 1996 and updated in 2008, and currently under review and revision by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration (NPBEA), have become the central criteria for many principal evaluation systems across the nation (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). In 2006, another principal assessment, the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED) was developed by Porter, Murphy, Goldring, and Elliott from 2008 to 2012 through funding by the Wallace Foundation and the U.S. Department of Education. This instrument, aligned to the ISLLC standards, contains evidence-based assessments that evaluate principals' leadership behaviors and is widely used in different states (Porter, Murphy, Goldring & Elliott, 2008).

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

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

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

Standards	Explanation
Standard I	*Instructional Leadership.* The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by cultivating a shared vision that makes powerful teaching and learning the central focus of schooling.
Standard II	*Management and Operations.* Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, using resources to implement appropriate curriculum, staffing, and scheduling.
Standard III	*Family and Community Engagement.* 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.
Standard IV	*Professional Culture.* Promotes success for all students by nurturing and sustaining a school culture of reflective practice, high expectations, and continuous learning for staff.

Five-step cycle. Since the goal of MMSEE is to improve professional

practice, the Task Force developed a five-step cycle of continuous improvement

(MA ESE, 2012). Figure 1.1 describes the cycle that is central to the evaluation

process.

Figure 1.1 Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement

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

Educators and evaluators are expected to be in regular communication throughout the cycle in order to receive feedback and reflect on their practice. Before the beginning of the school year, the principal uses the rubric to create a self-assessment and sets goals with his or her supervisor. Once the goals are agreed upon, the principal implements the plan. The supervisor monitors progress both informally and formally through a mid-cycle review and a summative evaluation.

Goals for student learning, professional practice, and school improvement.

All principals are expected to set goals throughout the evaluation cycle: a student

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

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

With the increase in accountability measures, the role of principals has evolved to "leading change on the ground" (Fullan, 2007 p. 156) and the role of

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

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY[2]

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

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

analysis, the case study approach revealed a holistic picture of the district's implementation of MMSEE for principals (Yin, 2009).

Table 2.1

Individual Studies' Focuses and Conceptual Frameworks

Overarching Focus: The Use of MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals		
Author	**Individual Study Focus**	**Conceptual Framework**
AC Sevelius	Policy Interpretation	Organizational Learning Theory
Christine A. Copeland	Policy Communication to Principals	Sensemaking
James A. Carter	Help Relationships Among COAs and Principals	Social Capital Theory
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	Distributed Leadership

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 MA ESE'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-judgemental; 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 –

PROMOTING ORGANIZATIONAL LEARNING THROUGH POLICY

INTERPRETATION

With respect to principal evaluation, the primary intent of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) is to assist central office administrators (COAs) in supporting principal growth and development and, according to Elementary and Secondary Education Commissioner Dr. Mitchell Chester, "promote professional learning" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE), 2012a, p. 1). However, there has been very little research on how the implementation of MMSEE at the district level is helping COAs impact principal quality. In an effort to understand the implementation of the MMSEE this six-member dissertation-in-practice group examined how one central office team in a Massachusetts school district, Emerson Public Schools (EPS), grappled with the expectations of using MMSEE to enact professional growth of principals. This study examined COAs' policy interpretation and the process by which COAs reviewed an externally driven mandate and matched it with internally developed goals.

COAs have long made policy as a matter of course, from personnel issues to graduation requirements. Since 1993's Massachusetts Education Reform Act, interpreting federal and state policy in the Commonwealth has become *de rigueur* as district leaders attempt to make meaning of mandates in order to reduce inequities and increase student achievement (McDermott, 2006). The No Child Left Behind (2001) and Race to the Top (2009) federal initiatives solidified school districts as

"implementing agencies, policy analysts focus[ing] their work on the extent to which … school districts 'put into practice' the policy proposals of higher-level agencies" (Spillane, 2004, p. 19).

The interpretation of policy requires not only an understanding of the policy itself, but also a firm grasp of a district's educational priorities. This sensemaking rarely happens in a vacuum: it would be highly unusual for a superintendent to interpret policy, in this case the new MMSEE, and design a plan for implementation alone. Instead, a district leader leads his or her team in a close examination of the mandates, looking for familiar trends, connecting old ideas with new, deciding collectively what to adopt and what to adapt, and designing timelines for enacting change (Spillane, 2004). This process not only reorients central office leadership, but also begins the process of reorienting the entire organization (Rorrer, A., Skrla, L., & Scheurich, J., 2008) and allows "districts [to] refine organizational structures and processes and alter district culture to align with their educational reform goals" (Rorrer et al., 2008, p. 318).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study is Organizational Learning Theory (OLT), a "learning framework that emphasizes the cognitive and behavioral transformations that occur in individuals and groups as part of the emergence of new organizational patterns" (Louis, 1994, p. 8). OLT provided the framework through which the research questions were considered. Furthermore, the review of the literature illuminated how COAs should employ OLT and message that "learning is an inherent and ongoing process that gives [our] agency its coherence" (Bennett &

Howlett, 1992, p. 290), and that by establishing ways of learning that allow stakeholders to engage in the continuous improvement of an organization and the creation of new knowledge collaboratively, COAs can prioritize the collective understanding and implementation of policy, such as the MMSEE (Marzano, R. & Waters, T., 2009; Senge, 2012; Spillane, 2004).

It is assumed by this researcher that the EPS central office team would be committed to both professional growth and student achievement and find themselves in the middle of figuring out how best to accomplish their strategic goals within the confines of the MMSEE. This study, and related research questions, provides a critical lens on the work.

Research Questions Addressed In This Study

The purpose of this individual study is to understand how, when faced with an externally driven policy, COAs worked as an internal team to interpret mandates, match mandates to current needs, and create learning opportunities that engage professionals in the work of reorienting the organization. Thus, the three research questions that guided the study are:

1. What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE?

2. What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE?

3. How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations?

Review of the Literature

OTL principles – learning is individualized, learning is collective, learning is continuous, learning is connected to organizational goals, and learning is collectively managed – allow practitioners to understand how both new and old systems work independently and collaboratively, allow for the individual to reach mastery cooperatively with others, and form a vision of the shared work (Schein, 2010; Senge, 2012), in this case the implementation of the MMSEE, a new professional evaluation tool.

This review of the literature provides an analysis of policy interpretation research and OLT principles as they relate to public schools, both on a more global scale and specifically in the school district of study, EPS. Again, this study seeks to illuminate how policy interpretation can drive organizational learning.

Policy Interpretation Can Offer Coherence

Policy change is the natural byproduct of education reform and the MMSEE is no different (Bennett, C. & Howlett, M., 1992). When decisions related to MMSEE are made, COAs should seek to match the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE) policy to existing district educational programs and priorities (Marzano & Waters, 2009). Catano and Stronge (2007) contribute that, "Evaluation instruments are powerful communication tools that serve to articulate the responsibilities deemed important for principals to execute, [message the values of the district, and set the standards of expected performance]" (p. 394). In other words, COAs should use evaluation tools to communicate this is what we do here, why, how it is measured, and to what degree

of expected excellence.

Policy is often personal, especially when tied to professional evaluation. New ways of looking at – and ultimately judging – professional leadership practice has the potential to transform education in Massachusetts if managed well. If mismanaged, the potential for confusion, misjudgments, or an exodus of capable practitioners increases. This dissertation-in-practice looks at a district central office team striving to serve its principals in becoming better leaders with a deeper understanding of what is at stake both professionally and for students. Additionally, this entire dissertation in practice illuminates how COAs leverage the MMSEE to focus on relationships, feedback, organizational learning, communication, and adult learning while meeting the demands of MA ESE policy, not in spite of such mandates. The MMSEE has, in short, restructured how performance evaluation is conducted and leveraged in public schools in the Commonwealth. When policy is as personal as the MMSEE, an organization and its members can thrive when trust-building and learning are purposefully included at the core of all decision-making (Marzano, 2009; Senge, 2012; Spillane, 2004).

Indeed, Schein (2010) shares, "the human mind needs cognitive stability" (p. 29) and changes can breed feelings of instability and confusion. OLT combats these feelings by allowing impacted stakeholders (principals) to engage in a personalized process of policy implementation. Schein goes on to say, "Because the processes that build and develop the group occur at the same time as the processes of problem solving and task accomplishment, ultimately the culture of the group will reflect both externally and internally oriented processes." Through this engagement, the

policy can achieve its desired coherence with a cadre of supporters ensuring its ongoing health.

OLT: A Preoccupation with Understanding

Until recently, COAs in Massachusetts have been left to the tasks of developing or adopting principal evaluations tools independently, despite the fact that roles and responsibilities of principals are almost uniform across the Commonwealth, if not the nation (Catano & Stronge, 2007). These tools, created in district vacuums or based on leadership standards developed in other states, have produced inconsistent evaluation instruments (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008; Superville, 2015). This inconsistency therefore "produce[d] role conflict and subsequent role strain as principals strive to comprehend which expectations they should focus their work upon" (Catano & Stronge, 2007, p. 394). The MMSEE offered a relief from "the worst kind of paradigm peddling … and [broke] the futile cycle of continuous innovation-implementation-discontinuation of many small innovations which reinforce[d] [the] sense that 'nothing will really change'" (Louis, 2006, p. 18). The MMSEE, with its emphasis on both federal compliance and a uniform shift in educator evaluation practice, offers COAs opportunities to shift existing paradigms by matching the must-dos of the mandate with the "knowledge, beliefs, and attitudes" present in the organization (Spillane, Reiser, and Reimer, 2002, p. 388). These attitudes often message directly or indirectly *how we do business here*, for better or worse. Senge (2012) shares, "If [COAs] want to improve a school system, before [they] change the rules [they] must look first to the ways that people think and interact together" (p. 25). Senge goes on

to say, "Changing the way we interact means redesigning not just the formal structures of the organization but the hard-to-see patterns of relationships among people and other aspects of the system" (p. 26).

In that vein, when deciding how to implement new programming or policies, district leaders should decide on a process that fosters organizational learning; OLT offers a framework for this work. Regardless of mandate, "stakeholders are more likely to adopt a new idea or an innovation when they understand it as better than what it replaces" (Marzano, 2009, p. 110). This kind of understanding and acceptance of policy is nurtured in communities that prioritize learning, create new cultural norms, and rethink individual and shared assumptions (Senge & Sterman, 1990). COAs, when presented with policy mandates, must connect the policy's intent with the educational goals of the district; by applying the processes embedded in OLT – "intuiting, interpreting, integrating, and institutionalizing" (Crossan, Lane, & White, 1999, p. 524) – the chances that the mandates of the policy stick, improve practice, and help practitioners meet the learning goals of the district increase (Crossan et al, 1999; Senge, 2012).

Typically, each individual school within a district is a loosely coupled systems (LCSs) allowed to grapple with daily issues on their own in service of maintaining the individuality of the teacher or school (Weick, 1976). Targeted organizational learning can, in short, provide a rigorous alternative. While LCSs allow for organic dissemination of practices, "if a major change needs to be introduced into a school, that change is more likely to occur quickly when the system is tight," Weick (1976) shares (p. 674). Thus, change requires not only

mediation and monitoring, but also carefully managed opportunities to learn that, when well designed, can provide the tight structure necessary to understand the new mandate deeply, connect its intent to shared values, and predict the possible impacts on professional practice moving forward. Through this process a thinking organization can emerge and new collective understandings can take hold (Schein, 2010; Senge, 2012; Senge & Sterman, 1991).

A preoccupation with understanding through an OLT framework allows for collective monitoring of progress when implementing new policies and practices; "the best [organizations] enable simultaneous adaptive learning and reliable performance" (Weick, Sutcliffe, & Obstfeld, 1999, p. 31) allowing for a mindfulness to emerge in which participants learn and grow from failure, and are always working towards the organization's improvement. This mindfulness, another cornerstone of OTL, is crafted by COAs and fostered through professional development in which school leaders can be equipped to "act as shapers, promoters, and well-informed critics of reform. The most robust professional development options will locate problems of 'implementation' within this larger set of possibilities" (Little, 1994, p. 130). Professional development refers to learning opportunities that engage professionals in opportunities to refine their craft; in this study, the professional development subjects are school principals.

MMSEE: Collective Conversations

NCLB ushered in high-stakes accountability, opening the door to rigorous implementation of high-stakes education reform policy in districts and schools in an effort to increase uniform student achievement across all categories of learners,

particularly those at risk of failure (Bellamy, Crawford, Marshall, & Coulter, 2005).

RTTT continues this drive towards closing achievement gaps and the principal

evaluation portion of the MMSEE is a tool towards this end.

The MMSEE lays the foundation for the standardization of performance

expectations and evaluation practices for principals throughout the Commonwealth.

Since the intent of MMSEE is to standardize evaluation practices to support

principal growth, the implementation of MMSEE gives COAs tools to leverage

principal support and improve principal practice consistently throughout the state

(MA ESE, 2012). COAs, at the launch of the MMSEE, had the choice to adopt or

adapt the system, but that it was implemented was not in question. The *how* of

implementation, however, was left up to each individual central office team,

bringing districts into a tightly coupled, statewide system while allowing for

personalization at the district level. This tension between tightly coupled systems

(TCSs) and LCSs can produce opportunities for "organizational self appraisal"

(Huber, 1991, p. 92) during which stakeholders (COAs) interpret policy and design

explicit ways for constituents (principals) learn a new way of conducting business as

usual. Huber (1991) goes on to state that organizational learning practices when

matched with new initiatives have the potential for learners/principals to gain

knowledge, learn new ways of sharing and using that knowledge, and collaboratively

create new organizational memory. The MMSEE replaces the myriad principal

evaluation tools in the Commonwealth and, in turn, replaces the shared

understandings of how principal evaluation was done in the past with new ways of

approaching evaluation that improves principal performance in service of student

learning. The TCSs transcend the tool itself; indeed, as COAs are having more tightly coupled conversations across districts about principal performance, principals are equally engaged in conversations about performance and evaluation on a state level. These joint conversations using common language about a shared tool allow for better systems monitoring (a cornerstone of OLT) at both the state (MA ESE) and school level, helping to determine *Is the MMSEE having its intended impacts on principal practice? Are COAs interpreting the policy as intended? What are the principal's perceptions of the MMSEE?* and more.

In the section below are descriptions of the three research questions as tied to the concepts of policy interpretation and OLT, and the potential for this individual study to present understandings tied closely to the purpose of this study: 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 create learning opportunities that engage professionals in the work of reorienting the organization.

What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE? As discussed, the implementation of the MMSEE in any school district in Massachusetts has not been optional. Spillane (2004) recognizes that in the past COAs could often fail to notice or purposely ignore federal mandates if they fell too far afield from the work of the district. NCLB and RTTT have made these intentional or unintentional failures to recognize policy shifts nearly impossible. COAs cannot choose to ignore policy anymore, but must instead "construct an understanding of the policy message" (Spillane, 2004, p. 6) in a

proactive way so that the interpretations do not simply meet what policy makers intended, but what is best for the district doing the implementation. In this way COAs can ensure that the path from "the Capital to the classroom" (Spillane, 2004, p. 8) is crafted on their own terms and that the district's central office remains the seat of power of the work.

A superintendent must guide the work of policy interpretation at the central office level; indeed, "the organizational leaders, or 'dominant elite' have the primary influence over both the opportunity to reframe the underlying metaphysical assumptions," (Louis, 1994, p. 12), confronting, again, that idea of *how we do business around here*. When interpreting policy, it would behoove COAs to engage in a collaborative meaning-making process based on the tenets of OLT, looking beyond the text of the policy and into the various perspectives embedded in the policy.

Every policy has an intended audience, specific set of goals, embedded values, and intended context (Naidu, 2011). In the context of this study, the implementers of the MMSEE policy are COAs, who will be evaluating principals using the tool, and principals, who will be evaluated; the stated goals are tied to improving principal performance (MA ESE, 2012); and the intended context is all public schools in the Commonwealth. Once these context elements are made clear, the central office team can begin to match the MMSEE to the current mission, strategies, and goals already present in the district (Schein, 2010). State policymakers did not ask for district leaders to discard previous practices to make room for the MMSEE. Instead, MA ESE gave little guidance; a superintendent had

the leeway and power to match policy with practice. For that matching to be meaningful, Bennett and Howlett (1992) believe the COAs must engage in a process that goes beyond the policy itself so that interpretations can become "the glue that holds together learning agents … no longer defined by institutional or structural boundaries but by 'core beliefs' or 'discourse' or shared values' … [so] the agency is defined in terms of learning activity" (p. 290). Under the auspices of learning together, COAs can begin the process of agreeing with one another on what is a match between the MMSEE and current evaluative practices and core values, what is not a match, and how to negotiate the tension between the two in service of supporting principals, offering professional and personal feedback, and connecting principal performance with student achievement. When the time comes for COAs to teach principals the new tools of evaluation they will be better able to discourse with principals on core beliefs and shared values, not just the minute details of rubrics and the scheduling details of who will be evaluated when, if they've reflected on their own learning processes and have collectively applied their new understandings of the policy to constructing an organizational learning framework that supports all practitioners moving forward (Fullan, 2007).

What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE? During COAs' discussions regarding the MMSEE policy, not only are team members interpreting policy and matching it to existing best practices, but they are also reviewing the evaluation rubrics to be used during professional evaluation. These rubrics (MA ESE, 2012) outline what MA ESE believes are the roles and responsibilities of principals. It is up to COAs to determine

what qualities of leadership best serve the students in their care and match them to the MMSEE and shared vision. Indeed, according to the principles of OLT, everyone should have a shared understanding of these leadership qualities and, ideally, should have been a part of creating or giving input on those expectations. No longer should COAs buffer or shield principals from policy (Honig, 2012), but instead interpret the policy so that principals can know exactly what leadership skills and beliefs are valued in the district, why, and the supports they will receive to enhance, improve, or acquire these skills, and in the long run "improv[e] instructional practice … change beliefs, norms, and values about what is possible to achieve, as well as the actual practices that are designed to bring achievement" (Elmore, 2004, p. 110).

How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations? Honig (2012) suggests, if COAs want to engage principals in learning it is essential that they view the activities as important, see the connections to their own practice, understand the new expectations, and are immersed in a new social context; Honig's ideas align tightly with the principles of OLT. The processes associated with organizational learning, when cultivated by COAs in this context, allow the possibility of principals creating new mental models, or new ways of "becoming more aware of the sources of their thinking" (Senge, 2012, p. 97), so that discourse concerning expectations, practice, and culture can take place in service of developing new understandings. If COAs purposefully engage principals in learning that supports the individual and the organization at the same time, then "new beliefs and assumptions begin to form" (Senge, 2012, p. 71) and these new skills and capabilities, awarenesses and

sensibilities, and attitudes and beliefs begin to reinforce one another and reorient the organization (Senge, 2012). In the case of EPS, COAs are matching the MMSEE policy with agreed upon leadership skills in a way that promotes the ongoing learning of the entire organization.

Methodologies Employed to Address the Research Question

This study focused on how COAs in one medium-sized Massachusetts school district worked as an internal team to interpret new and mandated policy – in this case, the School Level Administrator Rubric of the MMSEE – before messaging the policy more broadly to stakeholders. Accordingly, interviews were conducted with COAs, and a document review was conducted to better understand the interpretation process at the central office level.

Interviews

As fully described in Chapter 2, interviews were semi-structured to allow researchers the flexibility to explore ideas as the arose during the sessions; select members of the central office team that were actively involved in the interpretation and implementation of MMSEE were included in the sample specific to this study. Interview questions tied to this study were:

- 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 leadership qualities do you look for in your principals?
  - How do they know these are the preferred qualities?

- How do you support principals with instructional leadership?

- How are you developing principals as instructional leaders?

For the purpose of this study, the priority data was tied tightly to information gathered on COA perspective. Data from principal interviews was reviewed and, when relevant to the intent of this study, were incorporated into pertinent analysis.

Chapter 2 discusses how the interview protocols were created, piloted, screened for bias, and eventually conducted in EPS.

Document Review

Catano and Stronge (2007), who relied heavily on document reviews for their work, share that in addition to studying the text itself in any document, a qualitative researcher "will study the author's purpose in writing the text, the intended and actual audience and the audience's reason for reading it" (p. 386). In the case of this study, the document review was intended to illuminate these very things, helping practitioners understand a policy's interpretation and reception from various perspectives (Honig, 2012).

The intent of conducting a document review was to examine professional development agendas, school improvement plans, internal memos, and documents that established a vision for the leadership team. The document review was conducted in an effort to capture the process by which COAs interpreted the MMSEE, the supporting learning opportunities that were afforded principals during the rollout, and connect intended messages to perceived messages. It is in these documents that COAs could have promoted the expectations for principal

performance; it was critical to see if the intended messages were matched with principal understanding and how the match was made. If during interviews respondents referred to or alluded to other particular documents (evidence), then a micro-document review was conducted to look specifically at documents referred to during the interview. The interview responses, on occasion, provided a shortcut to information not examined while the initial document review was conducted (Yin, 2009).

Approach to Data Analysis

Chapter 2 of this dissertation-in-practice describes the team's approach to data analysis. Any data analysis this occurred for this particular study happened in keeping with the team's overall data analysis strategies. For more on data collection, analysis, data storage and privacy, and coding, please refer to Chapter 2.

Limitations

Finally, there are potential limitations to the overarching dissertation-in-practice study; these limitations are present in this particular study, as well. The limitations particular to this study are consistent with the limitations of the overarching study (see Chapter 2).

Findings

The results of interviews and a document review are reported here in three parts, each part tied to the research questions associated with this study. Research in this Massachusetts school district revealed how COAs came to interpret the MMSEE policy, whether or not there is agreement on what qualities are expected of

school leaders, and the opportunities to learn each school leader is afforded in order to meet both external and internal expectations in EPS.

Central Office Agreement on the Value of MMSEE

When MMSEE was introduced statewide, the EPS superintendent saw an opportunity to make immediate impacts on how principals evaluate teachers, and recalled the process of introducing MMSEE to teachers and principals. "In EPS, when I got here, there was such conflict … so the notion of [a new, top-down] evaluation system … was going to be a little difficult, so we decided not to rush it." He continued to discuss the extended time table for interpretation, a year longer than most districts, because of the shared work with a joint labor committee, including teacher union representatives and key administrators. He shares that, "For the principals, I never actually negotiated with them. I just said, 'This is the [Administrator Rubric] we're going to use,' partially because they serve at will, so it's not really something that they're bargaining over." The EPS superintendent saw it as a tool that serves them well, not a tool to punish, thus made a decision and implemented it without principal input. "They're going to experience it as something that is about figuring out how to build upon their strengths, which is something they're not going to grieve against."

The Director of Special Education, who was the only other COA in the district when the MMSEE mandate was announced, shared that trust building was essential in the launch of MMSEE for teachers, and once established, she could see "some people start to have some light bulbs go off, saying, 'This is just good teaching.'"

"EPS," she continued, "ended up adopting [the MMSEE], instead of adapting it (which was an option). [Instead], we created language within the contract to adapt certain things in our contract. That joint labor group, that I'm still on, meets monthly. That's been going on since we started it."

From these perspectives it is clear that the MMSEE's impact on teachers became paramount in the implementation of the mandate, which sought to ensure every educator at every level received an evaluation each year. EPS, after much negotiation through joint committee work, chose to adopt the program and implement as the Commonwealth intended. If there was interpretation, it was only to understand the Commonwealth's demands; the bulk of any interpretation, it seems, came in re-examining the language in the teacher's contracts to see where MMSEE was a match and where adaptations to the contract needed to be made.

The MMSEE rubric for administrators is only now, as of this writing, being examined with the same scrutiny as the teacher rubrics. That said, during interviews each COA was able to speak directly to their understanding of the MMSEE in a way that produced a unified agreement. While the understandings pertained specifically to teacher evaluation, each COA could speak to how principals were being trained to evaluate teachers in a specific, calibrated way, and had a strong working knowledge of the professional development offered each principal to promote a more uniform system of evaluation in EPS.

Preferred Leadership Qualities

The MMSEE's principal evaluation rubric was discussed in detail in Chapter 1 of this dissertation-in-practice. In brief, the rubric is composed of four

standards that include Instructional Leadership, Management and Operations, Family and Community Engagement, and Professional Culture. Each standard then is defined by indicators organized into a rubric with descriptors of each indicator at four different performance levels that are unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient and advanced. In order for any school leader to be considered proficient in his or her work, they must score a proficient rating on Instructional Leadership, the standard that receives priority status (MA ESE, 2012).

According to MMSEE regulations, COAs must use the MMSEE rubric to guide their feedback to principals and their assessment of a principal's performance. A research question connected to this study asks, "What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE?" If COAs in a district share responsibility for evaluating principals, then, according to OLT principles, they should have a shared understanding of the qualities – the attributes considered essential to leading a public school in EPS – they are looking for in leaders so that the process of evaluation can support the organization and its participants as it develops (Senge, 2012; Schein, 2010). COAs were asked, *What qualities do you look for in your principals?* Interviews revealed that each COA in Emerson Public Schools did indeed have a set of qualities they preferred in principals. Qualities were then culled out and located, or not located, in the School Level Administrator Rubric of the MMSEE (MA ESE, 2012). These findings are represented in Table 1.1.

Table 3.1

Central Office Administrators' Preferred Principal Leadership Qualities

Role	Preferred Leadership Qualities	Aligned with MMSEE?
Superintendent	Can ask for help when help is needed, able to "manage up," trusting, building management, able to lead autonomously, sensitive to stakeholders, empathetic	Somewhat
Assistant Superintendent	The proper certification, courage, integrity, passion, empathy, ability to connect and build relationships, experience with instruction and developing curriculum, building systems (development and management), a flexible thinker, able to set strategic priorities	Yes
Chief Academic Officer	Building management, budgeting, a servant leader, ability to evolve and grow into emerging responsibilities, collaborative, instructional leader, resilient, good writers/communicators (in particular, able to avoid miscommunication)	Yes
Director of Curriculum & Staff Development	Collaborative, open to learning, able to build teams to support teaching and learning, does not impose authority to get work done, carries out both school and district priorities	Yes
Director of Professional Development & Academic Support	Excellent collaboration skills, able to build a leadership team, excellent communication skills, goal oriented/vision setters, able to build capacity around action plans	Yes
Director of Bilingual Education	Belief that all students can achieve, diverse perspectives/cultural awareness, can develop relationships with myriad stakeholders, equity-focused with keen eye on high-needs populations	Yes
Director of Special Education	Not established	NA

When asked during interviews if and how principals knew the preferred

qualities, COAs shared the following:

- "I don't know."

- "I speak with principals about that. *In a previous district*, we would talk about when we're hiring a new principal, for example. When you talk to the staff, you talk about qualities that they're looking for. You try to find that match. You can find a lot of qualified people, it's about fit, it's about context."
- "I think that I tend to talk about those things a lot."
- "I think as a district there is a sort of common understanding, and through the different goals that the superintendent has outlined [certain qualities are] a priority."

Interviews showed that there had been no concerted effort to explicitly identify and articulate the qualities COAs would emphasize during supervision. Additionally, as outlined in Table 1.1, there was no consistent vision among COAs, thus each designed their work with principals based upon agreed upon district goals ("EPS," 2014), but varying beliefs about what it actually takes to lead a school in EPS.

While principals were asked during interviews, *Do you have a common understanding of what kind of leadership skills COAs are looking for?*, these responses are not under analysis here and are looked at more closely in dissertation-in-practice team member's studies and also in Chapter 4.

Understanding and Implementing Policy Interpretations Through Collective Learning

A tenet of OLT is that the learning happening in an organization is collective, that people learn the same new ideas or refine learned concept together. In this way, Senge (2012) says, people are learning "a clear and honest

understanding of current reality that is accessible to the whole organization" (p. 556), no one member of the organization is left behind, and new ideas are understood by all. "The payoff," Senge (2012) continues, "is the more creative and insightful realizations that occur when people combine multiple perspectives" (p.105).

While attitudes toward learning opportunities were mixed in EPS, a document review and interviews with both COAs and principals reveal that EPS has created myriad collective learning opportunities for their principals, as outlined in Table 1.2. Key district learning initiatives for principals included, but are not limited to:

- Research for Better Teaching (RBT): A school support and improvement organization founded in the late 1970s by John Saphier with a particular reputation for naming the qualities and practices of skillful teaching and leadership (Saphier & Gower, 1997). EPS's relationship with RBT has been ongoing for several years and principals have undergone extensive training on how to supervise and evaluate teachers through the RBT model and tied to the MMSEE rubrics.
- School Improvement Plans (SIPs): SIPs are documents that set forth an individual school's goals for school improvement and the strategies that will be implemented to ensure the goals are met. The document review revealed that in EPS, SIPS are lengthy, emphasize both depth and breadth, and are carefully co-crafted by each building principal in concert with the chief academic officer.

- Supervision and Evaluation: Beginning in fall of 2015, all principals were on track for completing the entire MMSEE cycle as intended, as documented in interviews and the document review. The EPS assistant superintendent was assigned to supervise all elementary principals, while the superintendent supervised middle and high school principals. Accordingly, no data was gathered in regards to the effectiveness of the cycle, which would be completed once research in this district was complete. In recent years, since the implementation of MMSEE statewide, principals received a mid-summer summative review of their practice and little else. During one interview, a principal shared his experience of being called back from summer vacation for his end of year evaluation meeting that lasted about one hour. He looks forward to enacting the MMSEE more fully moving forward and receiving feedback that is timelier and on point with the ongoing work in his school.

- Weekly leadership meetings: In EPS, COAs and principals gather weekly to discuss emerging issues in the district, receive updates and/or clarification on policies from COAs, or plan for upcoming events. One principal shared in their interview that principals are scheduled for 2½-hour meetings every week and, from their perspective, these meetings are "to get district updates and listen to presentations. That interaction [is] really compliance and just listening. The intention is communication, but we're not solving problems as a team. Some of our interactions are ineffective; sometimes not pleasant."

Table 1.2 shows the many opportunities to learn that principals in EPS have offered them and whether or not these opportunities universally meet the criteria set by organizational learning theorists. In many cases, 4 of 7, COAs are indeed creating opportunities to learn that have the potential to increase principal and district capacity at once through an organizational learning framework. While not all tied directly to MMSEE, many are – the partnership with RBT, SIPs, supervision and evaluation cycles, and weekly meetings – and COAs and principals alike in interviews reference these most frequently.

Table 3.2

Opportunities that Engage Principals Through the Tenets of Organizational Learning Theory

Learning Opportunity	Learning is Individualized?	Learning is Collective?	Is this learning opportunity continuous? (Yes or No)	Connected to organization goals? (Yes or No)	COAs Collectively Manage? (Yes or No)
The MMSEE: *Evaluation/Supervision/ Feedback of Principals (launching fall 2015)*	No data	No data	No data	No data	No data
Learning Walks/Walk Throughs	Yes	No	No	Yes	No
"Future Leaders" Speakers Series~	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Research for Better Teaching (RBT)*	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Annual Leadership Retreat	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Weekly Leadership Meetings	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
School Improvement Planning Process	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

~ Offered to all staff, but designed to "identify highly qualified internal leadership candidates and create a pathway to district leadership" ("EPS," 2013).

Of particular interest is the district's partnership with RBT, the primary form of professional development afforded all principals. Looking at Table 1.2, it is clear that RBT inculcated the principles of OLT: learning was individualized through coaching; learning was collective in that each principal is trained through the same methodologies and by the same coach; the learning had been continuous over several years; the learning was connected to the overarching goals of EPS ("EPS," 2014); and COAs were involved in the management of the program.

All EPS principals have for several years received direct coaching and ongoing support from RBT to promote getting better at supervising teachers in service of fully implementing MMSEE. Through the work with RBT principals have calibrated their understanding of what constitutes quality teaching, how to spot it in action, and how to deliver feedback that moves teacher practice closer to shared expectations.

During interviews, all principals spoke highly of their RBT coach and shared that she has been transformational in their work with teachers. This work is an example of where EPS is getting it right and principals, according to interview data, universally appreciate the support.

That said, one member of the central office team reported during an interview that she would have liked to have begun conducting learning walks with principals at all schools, but feared that without the RBT coach present during the walks principals would be hesitant to allow them to happen. The interpretation and implementation process in EPS, the same COA reported, did little to strengthen trust relationships, despite the initial goodwill alluded to in interviews with another COA. In her interview she shared that district-wide learning walks cause principals to worry "that they're going to be judged or their teachers will be judged, so there's a lot of fear and mistrust around conducting [them]." She believed one way to get momentum behind learning walks was to invite the RBT coach in to conduct the walks collaboratively. "There's a high level of trust with her, that they will feel that it's okay because our RBT coach is here. There's a part of me thinking that we need to use her, use her to build that trust in the district."

One elementary school principal shares her perspective in a separate interview, saying: "[The RBT coach] would come to our schools, and she would sit with us and do an observation, and then we would take the observation apart, and look at the whole lesson. I would like to do stuff like that with my supervisor."

The learning walks quandary highlighted a very specific missed opportunity for educators to have shared experiences in classrooms, make decisions collectively about what is acceptable practice in the district and what is not, and ensure that practices are aligned to district goals. COAs should recognize this practice is one of many that, if implemented well, provide opportunities to monitor the entire system over time, appraise the health of the network and all of its pieces, and then refine

shared practices based on evidence – essential traits of OLT and tightly coupled systems both. The perceived inability to conduct COA-principal learning walks *without* an outside moderator is an example of one barrier to creating an organization of people who can learn together, undoing or stalling the progressive movement initially made in the early days of the implementation of MMSEE through joint work and a focus on reorienting the organization to align with the new mandate.

Discussion

Senge shares (2012) that, "Great teams are learning organizations – groups of people who, over time, enhance their ability to create what they truly desire in their lives" (p. 74). Therefore, COAs must design the opportunities to learn so that principals understand what is expected moving forward and how they will learn to implement the policies themselves (Bennett & Howlett, 1992). By applying the principles of OLT to the collective work of reorienting the organization to meet the needs of the MMSEE, both the intent of the mandate and ongoing district specific goals are both honored. Based on the review of the literature and associated research findings, three essential discussion points emerge:

- Ensure that supervision and evaluation trainings occur in EPS for all COAs; these should be aligned with or akin to the type principals underwent with RBT

- Include all COAs and principals in a collective process designed to promote agreement on the preferred leadership qualities in EPS

- Create opportunities, aligned with the tenets of OLT, for central office leadership and principals to learn together

Conduct Supervision and Evaluation Trainings

COAs in EPS have done well by teachers when implementing the MMSEE, and, in this vein, have equipped principals with the tools necessary to ensure teachers are meeting new evaluative standards and serving the children in their care according to State mandates. At the core of this work is the partnership with RBT. COAs should apply the same learning structures to their work with principals. RBT is a trusted partner and could help COAs design the appropriate professional development and/or facilitate the understandings that will allow the kind of partnering happening between principals and teachers to happen between the principals and the superintendent's team. The MMSEE was designed to serve all educators and it would behoove EPS COAs to take the evaluation system for principals as seriously as they took it for teachers, regardless of contract type.

Come to Agreement on the Preferred Leadership Qualities in EPS

COAs and principals need to come to agreement about the leadership qualities that are valued in EPS. Each COA can talk fluently about what they like to see in a principal, but they are not talking to each other and, according to interview data from principals, principals do not know what is expected at that more meta cognitive level. Open communication, agreement, and calibration about preferred leadership qualities could additionally drive trust-building efforts. In interviews, principals report being surprised by feedback or receiving no feedback at all. With agreement on *what makes a good leader in EPS*, principals could rely on a shared understanding of leadership ideals and have richer conversations not only in regards to the MMSEE evaluation cycle, but weekly in leadership team meetings, as well.

Furthermore, this conversation and calibration can create opportunities for collective learning and understanding that strengthens the work done at myriad levels of the district while empowering the specific relationship between evaluator (a COA) and the evaluated (a principal).

In the COAs' responses (see Table 1.1) there is a noticeable lack of focus on Standard 1: Instructional Leadership, which emphasizes curriculum (unit design and lesson development), instruction (practices, quality, and the needs of diverse learners), assessments of and for learning, evaluation of educators, and data-informed decision making (MA ESE, 2012). While the qualities outlined by COAs are essential in school leadership, the emphasis seems to be on breadth rather than depth. Furthermore, if principals are required by the Commonwealth's policy to be proficient in Standard 1 in order to be considered to be in good professional status, then it is reasonable that a central office team would tune in on these practices and provide specific guidance in this area.

A systematic process of coming to agreement on preferred leadership qualities – through self-examination, unpacking group dynamics, revealing tensions between leadership styles and levels of hierarchy, and collectively prioritizing Standard 1: Instructional Leadership – could help all players create a shared understanding of more global needs in EPS, a district with unique character and concerns, and create a safer space to discuss these qualities in service of increased teacher and student performance.

Learn Together

Learning together is a key principle of OLT. In order to maximize opportunities to learn together, COAs must be willing to move to a learning-centered mindset and away from an authority-centered position. By reorienting an organization to become more learning-centered, teachers (COAs), the arbiters of learning in EPS, begin to ask different questions. When reflecting on a policy implementation or meeting that didn't go well, instead of asking, *Why didn't they learn it? I taught it, so they should have learned it!,* members of a learning-centered organization will instead ask, *How could I have taught that differently? What about the structure made it more difficult for my intent to get across? Did I create a space in which everyone had a voice and felt like they belonged?* (Senge, 2012).

The interview data gathered in EPS suggests that COAs and principals in EPS have a shared vision, that when principals are better able to lead teaching and learning initiatives – here, getting better at conducting teacher evaluation – student achievement has a greater potential to take root. Evidence shows, however, that because of mistrust and poor communication, COAs and principals cannot come to understand each other's perspective. This evidence shows that EPS, despite the myriad professional development opportunities offered that meet the criteria for OLT, has yet to become a learning-centered organization. For example, learning walks, as discussed in the findings section, have the buy-in of district leaders at the central office and school level, but are unlikely to happen without a trusted outside facilitator. In light of these early findings, leadership should create professional

space to engage in conversations about both the need for learning walks and the need for increased trust. Learning walks are only one example of an initiative that has not reached fruition due to mistrust and missed opportunity that have been revealed during the collective research into Emerson Public Schools and their implementation of MMSEE.

Additionally, COAs and principals should collaborate to repurpose how the time during weekly leadership meetings is used. Interviews revealed that principal's feelings on these meetings were mixed. With time a rare commodity in public schooling, ten hours a month could be used to build trust, reflect on the quality of leadership, tackle problems of practice, and more. Buy-in, regardless of agenda, is essential. Until this buy-in can begin to stick, it will remain difficult for EPS leaders to learn together.

To recap, a crucial component of the MMSEE was to establish expectations and evaluation practices for principals throughout the Commonwealth, offering a tool that would bolster principal support and improve principal practice consistently throughout the state (MA ESE, 2012). The space between the launch of a mandate this complex and the result of its implementation is often years-long and complicated, as it is in Emerson Public Schools. Spillane shares that "Cognition is complex, and misunderstandings commonplace. Hence, local officials' failure to do what policymakers ask can result from honest misunderstandings rather than willful attempts to adapt policy to suit their own needs" (2004). This seems to be the case in EPS, where efforts toward the good have been valiant, but impact has been shy of the bull's-eye. Organizational learning theory offers a kind of antidote to these

"honest misunderstandings," a path to mitigate some of the complexities inherent in such a roll-out by focusing on how people work together towards a shared vision, collectively make-meaning about new ideas, and support each other in getting better at their craft (Senge, 2012) rather than hyper-focusing solely on the policy itself.

CHAPTER 4 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS[3]

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'

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

practice, there were only limited opportunities to involve principals' voices in decision-making and the planning of their professional development. McNeil (2016) found a disconnection between principals and 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.

<div align="center">**Synthesis of Findings**</div>

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 itself 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.

<center>**Recommendations**</center>

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 rollout 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 district 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.

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Perspectives on District Leadership

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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 decision-making was aligned with the emerging needs of their school communities, but often felt at a loss as to how to get better. Many relied on their COAs to present learning opportunities to them that could

enhance their practice. When such opportunities were presented to principals, they were appreciative; however, when those opportunities fell short or seemed disconnected to their overall professional mission, frustration and feelings of failure took hold.

Knowing this, a COA should adopt a strength-based approach to principal development and assume that each principal is invested in professional development to bolster instructional leadership. COAs should not assume what instructional leadership professional development is best for principals; rather it is essential for principals and COAs to plan learning opportunities together. With principal input, a COA can support school leaders with confidence knowing that learning will target each leader's growing edges.

Growth-Oriented, Reciprocal Feedback

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

The Link Between Relational Trust and Distributed Leadership

The dissertation-in-practice team found that the fundamental building blocks of the organization's leadership team were not the individual actors, but the relationships between and among district and school leaders. A crucial component of successful district leadership is building strong relationships and leveraging the resulting social capital to promote collective action. Specifically, distributed leadership plays a strong role as COAs strive to build social capital with principals. Spillane (2010) described distributed leadership using the metaphor of a partnered dance, the Texas Two-Step. Although the actions of the individuals in the dance are important, it is the interaction between the individuals in the context of the music that defines the activity of the dance. Just as with dancing, distributed leadership is defined by the interactions among multiple leaders and followers in various situations. When viewed globally, distributed leadership can be seen as a network of relationships among leaders and followers, ever adapting and evolving. In this way, distributed leadership and social capital operate within the organization similarly, as both flow and spread non-linearly and reciprocally through interrelationships.

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

capacity and capabilities of others, and thus transforming schools to meet twenty-first century needs.

Limitations

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

One District

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

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

Timing of Study

The fall of 2015 marked a time of transition in EPS that 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 rollout 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 analyzed 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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Appendices

APPENDIX A – INFORMED CONSENT

Boston College Professional Administrators Program
Informed Consent to be in study:
How Do Central Office Administrators in One School District use MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals?

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

Leah Blake-McKetty: Principal, John Winthrop Elementary School, Boston Public Schools
J. Kimo Carter: Principal, Watertown Middle School, Watertown Public Schools
Christine Copeland: ELA and History Specialist (9-12), District Academic Response Team, Boston Public Schools
Tanya Freeman-Wisdom: Headmaster, Community Academy of Science and Health, Boston Public Schools
Alexandra Montes McNeil: Principal Leader, Boston Public Schools
AC Sevelius: Principal, Heath School, Public Schools of Brookline

Adult Consent Form

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

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

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leadership, and support of principals' leadership styles all promote principal growth and development.

- People in this study are principals and central office administrators in "EPS" located in Massachusetts.

What will happen in the study:

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

Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:

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

Benefits of Being in the Study:

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

Payments:

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

Costs:

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

Confidentiality:

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

Choosing to be in the study and choosing to quit the study:
- Choosing to be in this study is voluntary. If you choose not to be in this study, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University.
- You are free to quit at any time, for whatever reason.
- There is no penalty or loss of benefits for not taking part or for quitting.
- During the research process, you will be notified of any new findings from the research that may make you decide that you want to stop being in the study.
- Participants can skip any questions they don't want to answer.

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

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

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

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

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

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

Signatures/Dates:
Study Participant (Print Name) _____   Date _____
Participant or Legal Representative Signature: _____   Date _____

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.*