

# Supporting the Shift to Instructional Leadership: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals

Author: Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom

Persistent link: <http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:106798>

This work is posted on [eScholarship@BC](#),  
Boston College University Libraries.

---

Boston College Electronic Thesis or Dissertation, 2016

Copyright is held by the author, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise noted.

BOSTON COLLEGE  
Lynch School of Education

Department of  
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

SUPPORTING THE SHIFT TO INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
ONE DISTRICT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS MODEL  
SYSTEM FOR EDUCATOR EVALUATION TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS

Dissertation in Practice by

TANYA N. FREEMAN-WISDOM

With Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter,  
Christine A. Copeland, Alexandra Montes McNeil,  
and AC Sevelius

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

May 2016

© Copyright by Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Christine A. Copeland,

Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, Alexandra Montes McNeil, and AC Sevelius 2016

© Copyright, Chapter 3: by TANYA N. FREEMAN-WISDOM 2016

SUPPORTING THE SHIFT TO INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP:  
ONE DISTRICT'S IMPLEMENTATION OF THE MASSACHUSETTS MODEL  
SYSTEM FOR EDUCATOR EVALUATION TO SUPPORT THE GROWTH AND  
DEVELOPMENT OF PRINCIPALS

By,

TANYA N. FREEMAN-WISDOM

Father Joseph O'Keefe (Chair)

Dr. Nathaniel Brown

Dr. Jim Marini (Readers)

**Abstract**

Effective instructional leadership is central to principal practice. Thus, the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) mandates that all principals demonstrate proficiency in instructional leadership to be considered proficient overall. Given this mandate, it is imperative that central office administrators (COAs) support principals in this regard. Accordingly, this qualitative single case study examined how COAs in one Massachusetts district supported principals' instructional leadership. Analyses of documents and semi-structured interview data found that COAs supported principals' instructional leadership through professional development for supervising and evaluating teachers, preparation of school improvement plans, and increased staffing of assistant principals and academic coaches. However, principals reported interim feedback and summative evaluations as not supporting their growth as instructional leaders. To address this gap in support with instructional leadership, recommendations included assigning additional COAs to evaluate principals for consistent and targeted feedback, reviewing MMSEE performance expectations with principals, and including principal voice in the district decision-making process.

## Acknowledgements

All praises be to God! Thank you for the gift to write, the ability to think critically, and the desire to attain my doctoral degree. It is my hope that my work ahead is pleasing in your sight.

To my research team, AC, Alex, Christine, Kimo, and Leah, you made the journey worthwhile. Our chemistry allowed us to develop an amazing dissertation. I have learned from each of you, and I look forward to your continued support and friendship.

To my dissertation chair, Father Joseph O'Keefe, thank you for your calming presence and guidance throughout this process. To my committee members, Dr. Jim Marini and Dr. Nathaniel Brown, thank you. Jim, your expertise inspires me. Nathaniel, thank you for the feedback and for joining our team.

To Meredith and Sarah, thank you for the edits and support throughout this journey. I have grown as a writer and will definitely reach out on future projects.

To Nancy (Deluca) McQuaide, Bruce Collotta, Robin Lee, and the entire CASH team, I thank you all. Your support and dedication to our school gave me the time, space, and peace of mind to complete this journey.

To the research participants, thank you for opening your doors and allowing me to learn in your school district. Your experiences have informed my professional practice.

To my family and friends, thank you for believing in me. To the Sibley family, I appreciate you. To my nieces and nephews: Cornell, Tyla, CJ, Michael, Jordan, Jasmine, Dakeyla, Rodney, and Tyrelle, always aspire to reach your life goals and dreams. Never give up!

A major motivator throughout this process was the positive affirmations I received along the way. My sister Cynthia said, “She’s going to be Dr. Wisdom.” My brother Cornelius said, “You will pass.” My aunt Edna said, “How are you Dr. Wisdom? Are you almost done?” My father Lloyd said, “I’m going to be at that graduation,” and my sister-in-law Kenya said, “It’s going to be worth it.” You may not even remember saying these phrases to me, but when I felt like giving up, I remembered, and your love lifted me.

## Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my children, RJ and Nya, my mother, Elizabeth, and my husband, Richard. Nya, you are my sunshine. You inspire me to be better. You exemplify what a young lady should be. Your drive for success coupled with your wit, intelligence, and confidence, will allow all of your dreams to come true. You have purpose, as your namesake speaks. I cherish every proud mommy moment you have given me, and I know your best is yet to come.

RJ, you will always be my most precious heartstring. You are a distinguished young man filled with the wisdom, temperament, and ability to achieve at high levels. As each day passes, I am more and more proud of you. Do as you plan, and change the world. You are built for success. I am and will always be your number one fan.

Ma, you made me who I am. When I was a little girl you said, “Don’t ever use the word can’t. You can do anything.” Those words continuously empower me to strive for my life goals and dreams. I thank God for loving me enough to choose you as *my* mother.

Richard, you are the best husband – ever. I know that I am a lucky lady! I thank you for the late nights and early mornings throughout this process. Your encouragement kept me going, and your unconditional love propels me to do and be more. You are my perfect match. I am grateful that God created the time and space for us to unite. If you look inside my being, you will find the love I have for you in two places – my heart and soul.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ABSTRACT.....	i
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	ii
DEDICATION.....	iv
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	v
I. CHAPTER 1. PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
A. Statement of Problem.....	1
B. Purpose of Study.....	3
C. Significance.....	7
D. Literature Review.....	8
1. The principal’s influence on student learning.....	9
2. Central office administrators supporting principals.....	10
3. Effective principal evaluation.....	13
4. The development of national principal evaluation standards.....	15
5. The development of the Massachusetts model system for principal evaluation.....	16
a. MMSEE goals.....	19
b. MMSEE design.....	20
c. MMSEE components.....	22
i. Standards, indicators, rubric, and rating.....	23
ii. Five-step cycle.....	23
iii. Goals for student learning, professional practice, and school improvement.....	24
iv. Rating the principal’s impact on student learning...	25
II. CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY.....	27

A. Design of the Study.....	27
1. Research context.....	29
a. Purposeful sampling.....	31
b. Research chronology.....	31
B. Data Sources.....	31
1. Interviews.....	32
a. Formulation of questions.....	32
b. Interview protocol.....	33
C. Document Review.....	34
D. Data Analysis.....	35
E. Informed Consent.....	36
F. Validity and Reliability.....	37
G. Limitations of the Study.....	37
1. Sample size.....	38
2. Possible contention.....	38
3. Internal bias.....	38
III. CHAPTER 3. SUPPORTING THE SHIFT TO INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP.....	40
A. Overview: Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions.....	40
1. Key terms and definitions.....	42
B. Literature Review.....	42
1. Instructional leadership.....	43
2. Conceptual framework.....	45
a. Honoring the experiences of adult learners.....	46
b. Involving adult learners in planning.....	47
c. Relating the learning to practice.....	48
3. Shifting roles and responsibilities.....	49

a. Student accountability and new evaluation standards for principals.....	49
b. Transforming the role of COAs to support principals....	51
i. Mentoring.....	53
ii. Job-embedded support and joint work.....	53
iii. Professional development.....	54
iv. Partnerships.....	54
4. Conclusion.....	54
C. Methods.....	56
1. Data collection.....	56
a. Document reviews.....	56
2. Data analysis.....	57
a. Codes.....	57
D. Findings.....	58
1. Preview of findings.....	58
2. A shift in practice for principals.....	60
a. Instructional leadership.....	60
i. School-based professional development and team meetings.....	62
ii. Supervision and evaluation.....	63
b. Connection to adult learning.....	64
3. COAs' support structures for principals.....	64
a. Relating instruction to practice.....	66
i. Professional development.....	66
ii. School improvement plans.....	67
iii. On-site visits from COAs.....	67
b. Honoring experience.....	68

i. Content coaches.....	68
ii. Assistant principals.....	68
iii. Support to Level 3 schools.....	69
4. Involvement in the planning of instruction/professional development.....	70
5. COAs' evaluation of principals.....	70
E. Discussion.....	71
1. Linking support to the adult learning theory.....	72
a. Professional development.....	73
b. Evaluations and feedback relevant to practice.....	73
c. Involving principals in planning.....	74
IV. CHAPTER 4. DISCUSSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS.....	75
A. Synthesis of Findings.....	76
1. Interpretation and implementation of MMSEE.....	77
2. District support with instruction leadership.....	79
a. Research for better teaching.....	79
b. School improvement plans.....	80
c. Content coaches.....	81
d. Assistant principals.....	81
3. Communication.....	82
a. Principal evaluation and expectations.....	82
b. Feedback.....	83
c. Aligning district supports with MMSEE.....	83
d. Problem solving.....	84
e. Weekly meetings.....	84
4. Principals' Perspectives.....	85
a. Relational trust and connectedness.....	85

b. Boundary spanners.....	87
c. Collaboration.....	88
d. Principal voice.....	88
B. Recommendations.....	89
1. Recommendation 1: Develop an evaluation implementation plan for principals.....	89
a. Prioritize and develop formal structures.....	90
b. Increase the number of COA evaluators for effective feedback.....	91
2. Recommendation 2: Ensure effective communication.....	92
a. Collaborative structures.....	92
b. Communication structure.....	92
c. Observation and feedback cycle.....	92
3. Recommendation 3: Restructure professional development for principals.....	93
a. Principal voice.....	93
b. Joint professional development.....	94
c. Learning-centered organization.....	94
C. Recommendations for Policy or Research.....	95
D. Directions for Further Study.....	96
E. Perspectives on District Leadership.....	97
1. The importance of a communication plan.....	98
2. Fair does not mean equal.....	98
3. Joint instructional leadership opportunities.....	99
4. Growth-oriented, reciprocal feedback.....	100
5. The link between relational trust and distributed leadership.....	100

F. Limitations.....	101
1. One district.....	101
2. Timing of study.....	102
3. Limitations to qualitative studies.....	103
a. Interpretation of interview questions.....	103
b. Interpretation of interview data.....	103
c. Knowledge not generalizable.....	103

## REFERENCES

### LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.1: Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement.....	24
Figure 3.1: COAs’ Support Structures for Principals Through Three Principles of the Adult Learning Theory.....	65

### LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.1: Individual Studies.....	4
Table 1.2: Timeline of MMSEE Development and Implementation.....	17
Table 1.3: Principal Standards of Evaluation.....	23
Table 2.1: Individual Studies’ Focuses and Conceptual Frameworks.....	28
Table 3.1: Principals’ Perceptions of MMSEE’s Influence on the Professional Practice of Principals and COAs.....	59
Table 3.2: COAs’ Perceptions of MMSEE’s Influence on the Professional Practice of Principals and COAs.....	60

## APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informed Consent.....	118
Appendix B: Interview Protocol.....	121

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

### **Statement of Problem**

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

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

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

---

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

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

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

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

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

### **Purpose of the Study**

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

Table 1.1

*Individual Studies*

<b>Author</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Purpose</b>	<b>Conceptual Framework</b>	<b>Research Questions</b>
AC Sevelius	Promoting Organizational Learning Through Policy Interpretation	To understand how, when faced with an externally driven policy, COAs work as an internal team to interpret mandates, match mandates to current needs, and reorient the organization	Organizational Learning Theory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What is the degree to which COAs agree with one another on the purpose of MMSEE?</li> <li>2. What qualities of leadership do COAs value in this district and are these aligned with MMSEE?</li> <li>3. How do COAs engage principals in the process of understanding and implementing their policy interpretations?</li> </ol>
Christine A. Copeland	Central Office Administrators: Communicating Policy Understanding and Expectations	To explore how COAs make sense of MMSEE and how they communicate their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals	Sensemaking	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How do COAs and principals make sense of the evaluation process with the new MMSEE standards?</li> <li>2. When communicating with principals, how do central office administrators frame their understanding of MMSEE?</li> </ol>
James A. Carter	Relational Trust, Social	To explore how the	Social Capital Theory	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. How does the central office</li> </ol>

	Connections, and Improving Principal Practice	professional assistance relationships among EPS central office supervisors and school principals both affect and are affected by district efforts to support and develop principals		<p>team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development?</p> <p>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?</p>
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	<p>1. What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors?</p> <p>2. What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback?</p> <p>3. How closely is the feedback tied to the work principals view as central to their practice?</p>
Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom	Supporting the Shift to Instructional Leadership	To examine how COAs support principals in meeting the performance	Adult Learning Theory	<p>1. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal?</p>

		goals of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of the Massachusetts School Level Administrator Rubric		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs have for principals?</li> <li>3. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals?</li> </ol>
Leah Blake McKetty	Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office Support	To examine how principals perceive central office support of their leadership practices	Distributive Leadership	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. What leadership practices do principals view as the most useful for themselves?</li> <li>2. How are these practices assessed by the MMSEE?</li> <li>3. How are these practices supported by COAs?</li> </ol>

---

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

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

### **Significance**

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

The findings highlighted the successes and challenges of the interpretation and implementation of MMSEE. The individual studies provided the lens through which the work was completed; in particular, the team examined the interpretation and communication of policy, the impact on professional relationships, the use of feedback, the support of instructional leadership, and ways to support principals' leadership

practices. Research through the aforementioned lenses enabled the team to provide deeper insight into improving the use of MMSEE to achieve its intended outcomes of impacting principals' professional practice and student achievement in the Commonwealth.

### **Literature Review**

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

## **The Principal's Influence on Student Learning**

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

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

teachers. Moreover, principal quality is the greatest factor for attracting and retaining good teachers (Milanowski, Longwell-Grice, Saffold, Schomisch, Jones & Odden, 2009).

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

### **Central Office Administrators Supporting Principals**

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

Other scholars, however, argued that a large number of schools could not meet reform expectations on their own and emphasized the role of the district as the primary

driver of top-down change (Hightower, Knapp, Marsh & McLaughlin, 2002). Elmore and Burney's (1998) landmark analysis of New York City's District Two's transformation to one of the highest performing districts in the city presented an example of strong district-level impact on student learning. A meta-analysis of 27 studies by Waters and Marzano (2006) showed a significant correlation between superintendent leadership and student outcomes when superintendents established a collaborative goal setting process resulting in non-negotiable action items that were closely monitored and supported through resource allocation.

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

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

leaders feel they have substantial support from both their colleagues and supervisors to implement the policies, districts were able to leverage external policy mandates successfully. According to Elmore (2003), it is precisely these coherent connections between school and district leaders that create an environment of “internal accountability” that can respond positively to external accountability demands.

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

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

## **Effective Principal Evaluation**

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

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

how they engage in meaningful work, connect to a community of learners, meet high expectations, shared responsibility, and deepen their understanding of the work at hand. Furthermore, quality supervision and evaluation has the potential to message what the shared agreements in any school system are, how those agreements are manifested, and how to combat practices that are not in service of student gains. Formative evaluation can shift the focus to the student, ensuring that student achievement, rather than compliance, becomes the driver of adult learning (Saphier et al., 2008).

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

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

## **The Development of National Principal Evaluation Standards**

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

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

By 2009, there was a broad and growing consensus at the national level among educational researchers, policy makers, and practitioners that principal evaluation needed to be more consistently implemented across school districts, aligned to a more rigorous

codification of leadership standards, and focused more on student and school outcomes (Portin et al., 2006; Murphy et al., 2014). Dovetailing with this was the increased recognition of the principal's critical role both in the school improvement process and in student outcomes, which resulted in a focus on principal training programs, hiring and retention practices, professional development, and principal evaluation (Babo & Villaverde, 2013).

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

### **The Development of the Massachusetts Model System for Principal Evaluation**

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

Table 1.2

*Timeline of MMSEE Development and Implementation*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Event</b>
July, 2009	President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan announce the Race to the Top Funding competition under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
January, 2010	Massachusetts submits its RTTT application. Included in the application is a promise to develop a new educator evaluation system that includes student learning outcomes as a significant measure of teacher and administrator performance.
May, 2010	The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education passed a motion to establish the Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators, charged with reviewing existing regulations for educator evaluation and make recommendations to the board in the winter of 2011.
August, 2010	MA ESE wins 250 million dollars in federal RTTT funds.
August, 2010	The Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators begins its work.
March, 2011	The Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators completes its work and submits its proposal for an educator evaluation system to Commissioner Chester and the general public. MA ESE board discusses the proposal in its March 22, 2011 meeting.
April, 2011	Commissioner Chester submits first a set of draft regulations and then a set of revised draft regulations to the board. The board voted to send the revised draft regulations for public comment until June, 2011.
June, 2011	The proposed regulations were revised again in response to the public comments, and on June 28th, the board voted 9-2 to pass the final regulations.
January, 2012	MA ESE publishes the first components of the model system, which include district implementation guides for district-level planning, school-level planning, the superintendent, administrator and teacher rubrics, model district-level contract language, principal evaluation, and superintendent evaluation.

Spring, 2012	RTTT districts begin the collective bargaining process to adopt or adapt the model system, or to revise existing systems to comply with new regulations.
June, 2012	MA ESE publishes the seventh district implementation guide on rating educator impact on student learning using standardized tests and district-determined measures.
Summer, 2012	RTTT districts begin training evaluators and develop processes to create district-determined measures.
September, 2012	RTTT districts submit their proposed educator evaluation systems to MA ESE for review and begin implementation of educator evaluation for superintendents, administrators and teachers.
January, 2013	All remaining districts begin the collective bargaining process to adopt or adapt the model system, or to revise existing systems to comply with new regulations. Remaining districts begin training evaluators and develop processes to create district-determined measures.
June, 2013	MA ESE publishes the eighth district implementation guide on collecting and using staff and student feedback for administrator and teacher evaluation.
September, 2013	Remaining districts submit their proposed educator evaluation systems to MA ESE for review and begin implementation of educator evaluation for superintendents, administrators and teachers. All districts submit to MA ESE plans for using standardized testing and district-determined measures to rate educators' impact on student learning. All districts submit to MA ESE plans for using student and staff feedback. All districts are implementing the educator evaluation framework consistent with regulations.

The MA Task Force led the first phase in development, proposing a framework to the commissioner and the public in March 2011. At the proposal's core was the use of multiple measures of student learning, observations, and artifacts measured across four standards of professional practice, and a five-step evaluation cycle (MA Task Force, 2011). After strengthening language about the use of student performance data, MA ESE Commissioner Chester proposed regulations recommended by the Task Force on June 21,

2011 (Chester, 2011a; Chester, 2011b). Six months later, MA ESE presented implementation guides of MMSEE for school districts (MA ESE, 2012). Districts receiving RTTT funding were to plan their new evaluation systems in the spring and summer of 2012 for a launch in the 2012-13 school year. Districts not receiving RTTT funding had to implement their evaluation systems in 2013-14 (MA ESE, 2012).

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

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

The fact that MMSEE specifically identified professional growth as a primary goal was relatively rare. According to Jacques et al., (2012), Massachusetts was only one of five states whose principal evaluation system explicitly identified professional growth as a goal in its legislation. Additionally, Commissioner Chester publicly espoused using MMSEE to promote professional learning. In his letter introducing MMSEE’s training guides (MA ESE, 2012), he wrote, “I am excited by the promise of Massachusetts’ new regulations. Thoughtfully and strategically implemented they will improve student learning by supporting analytical conversation about teaching and leading that will strengthen professional practice” (p. 1). Embedded in each stage of MMSEE’s five-step evaluation process are multiple opportunities for professional feedback.

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

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

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

Evaluation is not only similar across districts; it is similar within each district with all types of educators. The MA Task Force elected to use a simultaneous design process for teacher, principal and superintendent evaluation by using consistent evaluation

procedures for all educators, so that school committees evaluate superintendents, superintendents evaluate principals, and principals evaluate teachers all in parallel. Simultaneous design has the potential to provide systematic coordination of communication, implementation, and timelines (Clifford et al., 2012). However, teachers, principals and superintendents have very different professional responsibilities and jobs, and an evaluation system like MMSEE that tries to incorporate all levels of educators has the danger of oversimplifying the complexity of administrators' responsibilities. Furthermore, the simultaneous implementation of both administrator and teacher evaluation can overwhelm school districts (Clifford et al., 2012).

The MA Task Force members decided to use three categories of evidence for educator evaluation: multiple measures of student learning; judgments based on observations and artifacts; and the collection of additional evidence. The MA Task Force's consensus was that student outcomes should play a significant, but supplementary role in the measurement of principal performance, and that measurement of student outcomes should never "mechanistically override the professional judgment of trained evaluators and supervisors, or create an over-reliance of one set of assessments" (MA Task Force, 2011, p. 12). Task Force members did not want standardized assessments to be overly influential in the evaluation process, and thus proposed that districts create district-determined measures in all subject areas in all grade levels so that student growth can be assessed broadly through multiple measures (MA ESE, 2012).

Through its insistence on the use of multiple measures, the MA Task Force prioritized comprehensiveness over feasibility; however, as Commissioner Chester noted in his June 21 memo (2011b), MMSEE incorporates a number of processes designed to

streamline the evaluator's work. These include educators' generated self-assessment plans; short, unannounced observations with minimal written feedback; and teaming around common goals. Nevertheless, under MMSEE, both COAs and principals were generally required to spend considerably more time and energy on evaluation than they had done under their previous evaluation systems.

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

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

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

Table 1.3

*Principal Standards of Evaluation*

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

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

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

Figure 1.1 Five-Step Cycle of Continuous Improvement



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

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

***Goals for student learning, professional practice, and school improvement.*** All principals are expected to set goals throughout the evaluation cycle: a student learning goal, a professional practice goal, and minimum of two other school improvement goals

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

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

With the increase in accountability measures, the role of principals has evolved to “leading change on the ground” (Fullan, 2007 p. 156) and the role of COAs to support that change (Honig, 2012; Honig & Rainey, 2014). MMSEE has clarified the work, but interpretation, communication, and implementation is determined by districts and COAs. For this reason, the dissertation-in-practice team examined how COAs in one district

used MMSEE to promote the growth and development of principals through six individual studies all of which, coordinated together, provide an overall picture. These individual studies focused on six high leverage factors that affect the intent and impact MMSEE had in one district: the interpretation of policy by COAs, the communication of policy to principals, the role of professional assistance relationships, the use of feedback, the support of principals with instructional leadership, and the support of principals' leadership practices to promote growth and development.

## CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY<sup>2</sup>

### **Design of the Study**

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

To ground the study in the overarching focus, each team member utilized a specific conceptual framework for their individual studies; while most team members had unique frameworks, two researchers shared Adult Learning Theory. This allowed research team members to apply a variety of relevant theories to a significant problem of practice. Figure 2.1 shows the purpose of each individual study, the conceptual framework through which the purpose was examined, and the overarching focus of the study. Through the use of multiple conceptual frameworks, the research team's qualitative single-case study provided a nuanced understanding of how EPS is implementing a complex public policy. With the EPS team of COAs and principals as the bounded system and with each of the actors as a unit of analysis, the case study approach

---

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

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

Table 2.1

*Individual Studies’ Focuses and Conceptual Frameworks*

---

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

---

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 apply 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 that 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 – SUPPORTING THE SHIFT TO INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

### **Overview: Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions**

To evaluate the effectiveness of principals, Central Office Administrators (COAs) are required to use the School Level Administrator Rubric of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE). While the School Level Administrator Rubric includes four performance standards, which are Instructional Leadership, Managing and Operations, Family and Community Engagement, and Professional Culture, “Instructional Leadership is accorded primary status: no administrator can be considered to be Proficient overall unless his or her rating on Instructional Leadership is Proficient,” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE), Part V, 2012, p. 6). As a principal’s overall rating is contingent upon the demonstration of proficiency in Standard I: Instructional Leadership, the developers of MMSEE affirm that instructional leadership is a requisite skill and key leverage point in raising student achievement (Hallinger, 1992; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Successful instructional leadership occurs when, “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,” (MA ESE, Part III, 2012, p. B-2).

Accordingly, policymakers strive to establish effective schools for all students and meet the growing demands set forth by internal and external policies, community stakeholders, and multifaceted demographics. Hence, schools need high-quality principals who can effectively respond to these competing demands as well as demonstrate proficiency as instructional leaders (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Goodwin,

Cunningham, & Childress, 2003). Given this charge, it is imperative that COAs develop and employ practices that support principals' instructional leadership. This support is critical because not all principals have the instructional leadership skills to meet the recently developed evaluation mandates and expectations (MA ESE, 2012; Honig, Copland, Lorton, Rainey, & Newton, 2010).

In their support of principals with instructional leadership, it is important for COAs to create the appropriate conditions of learning for principals. The Adult Learning Theory, which served as the conceptual framework for this study, identifies useful strategies COAs can employ to establish these conditions of learning for principals (Blase & Blase, 1998). The Adult Learning Theory holds that facilitators of adult learning relate the problem and need to learn to the adult learners' practice, involve adult learners in the planning of their instruction and development, and honor the experiences adult learners bring. These elements create the appropriate conditions of learning and allow adult learners to fully engage in the learning process. Additionally, application of the Adult Learning Theory increases the likelihood that adult learners will develop a sense of ownership over the learning and make progress toward their goals (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984).

Due to MMSEE's recent development, research on its impact is limited. Therefore, this study aimed to capture current district practices through the lens of the Adult Learning Theory, to determine how one district generates effective support structures for the development of principals as instructional leaders. More specifically, this study examined how COAs in Emerson Public Schools (EPS) supported principals in

meeting the performance goals of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of MMSEE's School Level Administrator Rubric. Three research questions guided this study.

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?

### **Key Terms and Definitions**

- Central Office Administrators (COAs): Superintendent and other district-level administrators.
- School Level Administrator Rubric: MMSEE's rubric used to evaluate the professional practice of principals and other school-based administrators in Massachusetts.
- School Improvement Plan: Required goal and data-based plan aligned to EPS priorities. School Improvement Plans are completed at every school and are intended to serve as a road map for improvement.
- Shift: Change of or influence on the professional practice of COAs and principals.
- Support: Assistance with *and* the process used to improving teaching and learning.

### **Literature Review**

Empirical research on how COAs support principals with instructional leadership through the lens of the Adult Learning Theory provides the context for this study. To

address this context, this literature review includes three main sections. The first section presents how MMSEE's developers and scholars in the field of education define instructional leadership. The second section expands on the Adult Learning Theory, demonstrating how its use can inform COAs' support of principals with instructional leadership. The third and final section reviews research on the factors that prompted a shift in the role of the principal, which resulted in the need for a shift in support from COAs.

### **Instructional Leadership**

It is important to understand how the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MA ESE) policy makers and researchers of educational empirical studies define and classify instructional leadership in order to understand its impact on the role of the principal. In defining *instructional leadership*, MA ESE (2012) categorizes its characteristics under five performance indicators:

1. Curriculum: Ensures that teachers design effective units of instruction.
2. Instruction: Ensures that instructional practices focus on content and quality of effort and work, engage all students, and accommodate diverse learning styles, needs, interests, and levels of readiness.
3. Assessment: Ensures that all teachers use a variety of methods and assessments to measure student learning, growth, and understanding and make necessary adjustments.
4. Evaluation: Provides effective and timely supervision and evaluation.
5. Data-Informed Decision Making: Uses multiple sources of evidence related to student learning to inform school and district goals and improve

organizational performance, educator effectiveness, and student learning.

(Part III, p. B-2 - B-7)

This description of instructional leadership places the traditional roles of managing and operating school buildings as secondary functions of the role of the principal (Hallinger, 1992; Goodwin, Cunningham & Eagle, 2007). According to MA ESE (2012), principals are now responsible for the oversight and implementation of instructional practices that directly impact student learning and performance. This affirms the assertion that next to teachers, principals have the greatest impact on student achievement (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004; Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; Fullan, 2007; Honig, Copland, Rainey, Lorton, & Newton, 2010).

Aligned with MA ESE's definition and characteristics of instructional leadership, Honig (2012) and Wood, Finch and Mirecki (2013), describe instructional leadership as support that improves classroom instruction and the ability to cultivate an environment focused on teaching and learning. In addition, Marks and Printy (2003), draw on the importance of the principal's role in developing the school's mission and goals in their description of instructional leadership. By doing so, principals are able to incorporate the expectations and promise of effective teaching and learning to further promote an environment focused on learning.

There is an agreement that instructional leadership requires principals to not only set the tone and expectations for teaching and learning within the schools they lead, but to also have full command of the classroom practices that lead to high student achievement. Success in this work requires COAs and principals alike, to work collaboratively with the

educators they supervise to examine and improve the quality of professional practice (Davis et al., 2005; Honig et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004).

Given the aforementioned definitions and characteristics of instructional leadership, it is important to examine how COAs can best support principals in meeting these standards and expectations. For principals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, this support is key because a principal cannot be rated as proficient unless proficiency is demonstrated in Standard 1: Instructional Leadership. As a result, it is incumbent upon COAs to support principals in this regard. As principals' skills vary based on experience and context, effective COAs will support principals by employing practices aligned to how adults best learn. Accordingly, the Adult Learning Theory, described in detail in the next section, provides a framework through which COAs can support these multiple responsibilities required of an effective instructional leader.

### **Conceptual Framework**

Malcolm Knowles (1980), was an adult educator who adopted the theory of andragogy, or the art and science of teaching adults. Unlike pedagogy, which is teacher-focused and often associated with teaching children, andragogy is student-focused and linked to adult learning. According to Knowles, adult learning “encompasses practically all experiences of mature men and women by which they acquire new knowledge, understanding, skills, attitudes, interests, or values” (p. 25). In practice, adult learning focuses on the process of teaching as opposed to the content taught (Drago-Severson, 2011; Holyoke & Larson, 2009; McGrath, 2009; Taylor & Kroth, 2009).

In the development of this process, there is a facilitation of learning instead of transference of knowledge. This facilitation is necessary because unlike children who are

dependent on the teacher, adult learners are self-directed and must be allowed to learn and discover knowledge autonomously. However, when adult learners are in need of more direction and explicit instruction, facilitators or instructors of adult learners must be ready to offer support (Taylor & Kroth, 2009).

In addition to the aforementioned conditions of learning, the Adult Learning Theory suggests that facilitators honor the experiences of the adult learners, involve adult learners in the planning of their learning, and relate the learning to adult learners' practice (Knowles, 1980). These three principles of the Adult Learning Theory are presented below and provide the lenses for this study in order to view how COAs support principals with instructional leadership.

**Honoring the experiences of adult learners.** When faced with learning new skills or concepts, adult learners bring their lived experiences, both mistakes and successes, to the learning environment. This can help as well as hinder the learning process. To ensure the experience is positive, facilitators must honor these experiences by using them as a platform for learning. This allows adult learners to engage in the learning process with a sense of respect and confidence (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984).

In addition, facilitators must ensure adult learners have a psychologically safe environment to engage in the learning experience because some adult learners may have low self-concept or esteem around specific topics (Knowles, 1994). Therefore, when adults are responsible for presenting their thoughts and work, they must be praised for their contributions so that they experience success and develop confidence in their practice (Chan, 2010; Taylor & Kroth, 2009).

**Involving adult learners in planning.** Motivation is a primary factor in adult learning. Thus, including adult learners in the planning of their instruction will propel motivation. If this inclusive practice is excluded from the process, adult learners may feel “forced by their employers to attend courses that have little or no relevance to what they are doing in the workplace,” as well as “feel that what is being discussed in class is not going to help them perform better in the workplace,” and enter the learning environment with little to no motivation (McGrath, 2009, p. 106). To engage in this practice, Chan (2010) suggests facilitators of adult learning:

1. Involve learners in mutual planning: The instructor and students can jointly plan the learning process and adjust a syllabus based on learning interests and activities.
2. Involve learners in diagnosing learning needs: The instructor can help students determine the level of competency in the area of interest.
3. Encourage students to formulate the learning objectives.
4. Encourage learners to identify resources to accomplish the learning objectives: The instructor works closely with students to identify resources and sets up strategies to use those resources to reach the objectives. However, this requires students to be self-directed and motivated to achieve the objectives with the instructor’s assistance.
5. Involve learners in learning evaluation. A learning assessment is important in andragogy. Not only does the instructor assess student performance, but students also assess themselves. This process helps reduce bias from a single judgment of the instructor (p. 29).

Use of these inclusive practices will maximize the opportunities for adult learners to develop a strong commitment and ownership of the experience, actively participate in the learning process, and regard the goals of the learning experience as their own (Davis & Leon, 2011; Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984; Merriam, 2008).

**Relating the learning to practice.** Relating the problem to the adult learner's practice is an additional motivating factor in an adult learner's decision to fully engage in new learning experiences. According to Sogunro (2015), adult learners "prefer problem-focused and hands-on-learning activities that are relevant to their immediate needs" (p. 29). Aligned to Sogunro (2015), McGrath (2009) states, "Once students are taught the basic principles of a subject, they could be asked to apply those principles via a work-based project to their company" (p. 102). This practice allows students to demonstrate their understanding as well as identify learning gaps that may present as barriers to optimal performance in their professional practice.

An additional aspect of this principle is the design of learning experiences that allow adult learners to work in groups to examine case studies relevant to their personal and professional practice. Working in groups will also give quieter students and those with low-self concept opportunities to participate and take risks in the learning process (McGrath, 2009).

Collectively, the application of the Adult Learning Theory requires facilitators to ensure adult learners understand the need to learn. They must fully understand why they are learning new skills. Accordingly, honoring adult learners' experiences, including them in planning, and relating learning to their practice will "ensure a 'readiness' to learn

and they will be more willing to participate in discussions in the classroom or learning context” (McGrath, 2009, p. 100).

### **Shifting Roles and Responsibilities**

If principals are to embrace the shift in their role to instructional leadership, application of the Adult Learning Theory suggests that COAs provide an understanding of why this shift is necessary and how it relates to principals’ professional practice. Using this principle of the Adult Learning Theory as a lens will lead to a deeper understanding of how student accountability and new evaluation standards prompted a shift in the principal’s role and why it is necessary to demonstrate proficiency as instructional leaders.

**Student accountability and new evaluation standards for principals.** Increased accountability stemming from the federal government’s No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 has impacted principals across the nation (Wood, Finch, & Mirecki, 2013). There is now a focus on Common Core aligned assessments and college and career readiness standards aimed at closing the achievement gap and improving educational outcomes for all students (Rieckhoff & Larsen, 2012). These measure are now public on state education websites across the nation and closely monitored by state officials. Ultimately, failure to make progress in closing achievement gaps places schools at risk of closure or state takeover.

Additionally, as a result of years of using locally developed evaluation systems that focused on outdated skills and a lack of standardization, policy makers are now requiring states to implement standardized educator evaluation systems (Goldring, Cravens, Murphy, Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2008; Massachusetts Task Force on the

Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators, 2011; Murphy, Goldring & Porter, 2014; Ponticell & Zepeda, 2004; Superville, 2015). A major driver in this push for new evaluation standards is President Obama's 2009 Race To The Top Funding Competition. This funding competition requires states to develop comprehensive evaluation systems to establish consistency (MA ESE, Part I, 2012).

For the assessment of principals, evaluation developers are using the Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education (VAL-ED), developed by Drs. Porter, Murphy, Goldring, and Elliott (2008) and the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards to design evaluation systems. The ISLLC standards are one of the first sets of standards used to evaluate principals. It is used by more than 40 states (Davis et al., 2005). VAL-ED and ISLLC standards include evidenced-based assessments to measure leadership behaviors that improve academic achievement (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2008). These behaviors include the assurance of high standards for student learning, rigorous curriculum, quality instruction, performance accountability, and connections to external communities. Throughout the standards, there is a resounding trend of principals creating a culture of learning within the schools they lead (Porter et al., 2008). In developing MMSEE, Massachusetts incorporated VAL-ED and ISLLC standards in the design of the School Level Administrator Rubric (MA ESE, Part I, 2012).

This national reform movement has “led to a renewed focus on instructional improvement and the leadership that fosters it” (Burke, Marx, & Lowenstein, 2012, p. 113). Leaders must “navigate and establish their positions with other district and

community leaders within the framework of national and state educational agendas calling for higher levels of achievement by every student” (Burke et al., 2012, p. 113).

Given this context, there is a call to action for COAs in Massachusetts and elsewhere to relate the expectations of the national reform efforts to principals’ practice so that principals are able to demonstrate effective instructional leadership and meet these new expectations and performance standards. Based on this literature, it is worth investigating how COAs are designing their supports and the extent to which they incorporate the aspects mentioned herein.

**Transforming the role of COAs to support principals.** While there is a limited body of research to determine COAs’ direct impact on student achievement, multiple scholars have surmised that principals’ impact on student achievement comes second to only teachers (Fullan, 2007; Honig, 2012; Honig et al., 2010; Leithwood et al., 2004; Marzano et al., 2005; Wood et al., 2013), above and beyond the impact of student background and home characteristics. As a result of principals’ impact on student achievement, school districts across the country are transforming their central offices to improve teaching and learning (Enfield & Spicciati 2014; Honig, 2012). One aspect of this central office transformation is the development of Instructional Leadership Directors (ILDs) (Honig et al., 2010). In the three transforming districts presented in Honig’s study, Atlanta, New York and Oakland, specific COAs are classified as ILDs. This same model is used in Denver where, “Instructional superintendents and executive directors are expected to both evaluate principals and provide coaching and some direct assistance in areas such as instruction, hiring, budget, and developing and monitoring school improvement plans” (Corcoran, Casserly, Price-Baugh, Walston, Hall, & Simon, 2013, p.

13). These districts shifted to supporting district-wide teaching and learning. They moved from being regionally based to working in small networks (Enfield & Spicciati 2014; Corcoran et al., 2013; Honig, 2012). ILDs were given the task of focusing all of their time on supporting principals with improving their practice in instructional leadership. To ensure ILDs were equipped with the requisite skills to meet the expectation of their new role, four intentional activities were implemented:

1. Providing ILDs with on-going professional development focused on working with principals and strengthening their practice;
2. Taking issues off of ILDs' plate that interfered with principals in instructional leadership;
3. Other COAs worked through the ILDs as opposed to around them, and;
4. The system as a whole, not just ILDs holding principals accountable for school improvement (Honig et al., 2010).

Given the level of accountability placed on principals, transforming the role of COAs for the sole purpose of supporting principals as instructional leaders is a necessary shift. It promotes consistent expectations for COAs and principals. This transformation demonstrates the use of the Adult Learning Theory as COAs are receiving professional development that provides an understanding of their new role and how it contributes to the ultimate outcome of increased student achievement. In practice, COAs are honoring principals' current skill set through coaching and direct assistance. The following sections will present specific mechanisms, identified by the research, that allow COAs to support principals best.

***Mentoring.*** Mentoring emerged as an important support for principals in their development as instructional leaders. One model includes training former principals to provide, “hands-on coaching and leadership development for both principals and assistant principals” (Corcoran et al., 2013, p. 15). Taking a different approach, in their 2001 study, Fink and Resnick not only supported new principals with mentors, but also supported those principals who needed instructional development. These mentors were practicing principals considered to have solid instructional leadership skills. Both of these approaches allow principals to learn without the threat of a negative performance evaluation, which is more likely to result in active engagement and a deeper commitment to skill development.

***Job-embedded support and joint work.*** Honig’s (2012) study on developing principals as instructional leaders presents job-embedded support as an effective strategy. Job-embedded support includes “on-site coaches and other professional development that takes place in schools as part of principals’ regular day” (Honig, 2012, p. 737). A common past practice was a more hands-off approach, but the era of accountability is moving COAs to working directly with principals to improve instructional leadership. In doing so, Honig suggests that COAs focus on *joint work*, or specific activities that are of value to principals and closely aligned to their practice. When COAs engage in joint work by working alongside principals, they will see the work of improving practice as instructional leaders as their responsibility in addition to that of principals. An important aspect of this work is allowing principals to co-construct the design of their support with COAs based on individual needs. This inclusive practice allows principals to have greater ownership over their learning (Honig, 2012; Fink & Resnick, 2001).

***Professional development.*** Continuous professional development is critical in supporting principals with instructional leadership. According to Fink and Resnick (2001), “Few individuals enter the school principalship fully skilled in all the elements of instructional leadership” (p. 7). Acknowledging this, in their study of Highline Public Schools, Enfield and Spicciati (2014) found brokering professional development based on collective and personal learning needs as an effective support structure. This differentiation was done to accelerate principals’ instructional leadership capacity. Therefore, ongoing, targeted, and relevant supports are necessary to ensure that principals are astute in their practice and can foster a school community focused on teaching and learning. (Catano & Stronge, 2007; Corcoran et al., 2013; Goodwin et al., 2003; Honig et al., 2010).

***Partnerships.*** Rieckhoff and Larsen (2012) suggest school districts partner with local universities to collaborate on job-readiness skills. This is key, as there is a belief that principal preparation programs are not adequately preparing prospective principals to enter the workforce as instructional leaders. This partnership will inform university programs and enable them to assess their programs through principal feedback, thereby filling the gaps of their program design and better preparing principals for their roles as instructional leaders (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007).

## **Conclusion**

While mentoring, job-embedded support and joint work, professional development, and partnerships emerged as effective structures to support principals with instructional leadership, each requires COAs to utilize the principles of the Adult

Learning Theory. In their design of support, COAs must harness the experiences principals bring to ensure there is ownership over the goals and outcomes.

In addition, COAs must consider school context in their design of support with instructional leadership (Ricciardi, 1997). Honig (2012) presents effective practices geared toward these aspects of the Adult Learning Theory. In her study, support for principals was differentiated based on their needs as instructional leaders. COAs determined these needs by conducting classroom observations with principals to assess how they identified high-quality instruction using performance standards and by collecting evidence through attending professional development sessions with principals' staff. During these professional development sessions, COAs problem-solved with principals and their staff around instructional issues and then determined the types of instructional supports needed. These collaborative mechanisms of support highlight the Adult Learning Theory because their use influences the adult learner's decision to truly own the development needed to deepen their professional practice (Fink & Resnick, 2001).

As evidenced in this literature review, conducting research on how COAs support principals with instructional leadership is timely, significant, and relevant. MMSEE requires principals to perform at the proficient level or higher. Therefore, COAs must evolve in their role to support this mandate. This study captures current district practices and through the application of the Adult Learning Theory, offers employable strategies for COAs' in their support of principals with instructional leadership.

## Methods

A qualitative case study was used to examine how COAs in EPS supported principals in meeting the performance goals of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of MMSEE's School Level Administrator Rubric (Yin, 2009). To examine this support, COAs and principals were interviewed and document reviews were conducted. For the background about the study design including the study district, the interview protocol and informed consent, refer to Chapter 2. For study limitations, refer to Chapter 4.

### Data Collection

In approaching this work, interviews and document reviews were conducted. However, interviews served as the primary source of data. Document reviews and interviews were conducted to capture participants' perceptions of MMSEE's influence on practice, more specifically, to gain a deeper understanding of how MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of the principal, the support structures COAs have for principals, and the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals.

**Document reviews.** Document reviews were conducted before entering the research field to gain an initial understanding of EPS' goals and practices around the supports COAs provide to principals with instructional leadership. These documents included School Improvement Plans, the districts' website, state accountability and demographic data, and the 2015 MA ESE Fall Convening PowerPoint. When analyzing interview data, information gathered from the document review allowed for a comparison of the written district priorities around COAs' support of principals with instructional leadership to research participants' perceptions of these supports.

## Data Analysis

After each interview and document review, analytical memos were written to summarize major findings and to capture comments and reflections about the data (Creswell, 2014). The section below describes the codes used for analysis.

**Codes.** After transcriptions were completed, they were coded and analyzed using Dedoose, a data software program. Codes were determined *a priori* based on the research questions, which served as parent codes. Each research question was assigned sub-codes using three principles of the Adult Learning Theory: relating the problem to the adult learner's practice, involving the adult learner in the planning of instruction, and honoring the experience the adult learner brings.

The first research question related to how MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the role of principals. The parent code was *shift for principals* and the sub-codes were *relating, involving, and honoring*. The second research question related to how MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs had for principals. The parent code was *shift in support*. The sub-codes were *relating, involving, and honoring*. The third research question related to how MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluated the effectiveness of principals. The parent code was *evaluation of principals*. The sub-codes were *relating, involving, and honoring*. As each transcript was analyzed, data were categorized under specific codes and relevant principles of the Adult Learning Theory were tagged. Figure 1 in the findings section provides an illustration of the aforementioned principles of the Adult Learning Theory and the interview data related to each of these principles.

## **Findings**

The findings presented below include emergent themes resulting from analyses of interview data and documents. In addition, the findings provide insight into how principles of the Adult Learning Theory apply to the processes used and actions taken to support principals as instructional leaders. The Adult Learning Theory principles include (a) relating the problem to the adult learner's practice; (b) involving the adult learner in the planning of instruction; and (c) honoring the experience the adult learner brings.

The findings are presented in three sections and aim to answer the following research questions:

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?

### **Preview of Findings**

Table 3.1, below, provides a snapshot of principals' responses to the research questions. Based on the interview data, 10 out of 14 principals reported a shift in their role, 13 out of 14 principals reported a shift in support from COAs, and 6 out of 14 principals reported a shift in COAs' evaluation of their practice.

Table 3.1

*Principals' perceptions of MMSEE's Influence on the Professional Practice of Principals and COAs*

School Level	Range of Years in Current Role	Shift in the Role of the Principal?	Shift in Support From COAs?	Shift in COAs' Evaluation of Principals?
Elementary	1 – 3	No	Yes	Yes
Elementary	4+	Yes	Yes	No
Secondary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elementary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Elementary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	No
Elementary	4+	Yes	Yes	No
Preschool	4+	No	No	Yes
Secondary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	No
Elementary	4 +	No	Yes	No
Secondary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	Yes
Secondary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	No
Elementary	4+	Yes	Yes	No
Elementary	1 – 3	Yes	Yes	No
Elementary	4+	No	Yes	Yes

*Note:* Years in the current role are presented in ranges and secondary represents schools with grades 6 – 12 to protect participants.

In the interviews of COAs, illustrated below in Table 2, 5 out of 7 COAs reported a shift in the role of the principal, 7 out of 7 COAs reported a shift in the support they provide principals, and 6 out of 7 COAs reported a shift in their evaluation of principals.

Table 3.2

*COAs' Perceptions of MMSEE's Influence on the Professional Practice of Principals and COAs*

COA Roles	Shift in the Role of the Principal?	Shift in Support From COAs?	Shift in COAs' Evaluation of Principals?
Director of Curriculum & Staff Development	Yes	Yes	Yes
Director of Bilingual Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Assistant Superintendent	Yes	Yes	Yes
Director of Special Education	Yes	Yes	Yes
Superintendent	No	Yes	No
Chief Academic Officer	No	Yes	Yes
Director of Professional Development & Academic Support	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note:* The roles of COAs provide additional insight into their perspectives on MMSSEE's influence on practice.

**A Shift in Practice for Principals**

The majority of principals in EPS, 10 out of 14, agreed that MSSEE's focus on instructional leadership prompted positive shifts in their role. Falling under the umbrella of instructional leadership, they identified supervision and evaluation of teachers and the focus of school-based professional development and team meetings as key areas where these shifts occurred. The sections below capture these shifts in practice from the perspectives of COAs and principals.

**Instructional leadership.** MMSEE's instructional focus requires principals to demonstrate proficiency in instructional leadership. Due to this focus, 10 out of 14 principals and 6 out of 7 COAs identified instructional leadership as being a more pronounced function of the principals' role. According to one Secondary Principal, "I'm

more thoughtful now, and I think more about the instructional leadership piece. I want my staff to see me caring about the curriculum and caring about what's going on in their classrooms, not just keeping the building calm.” Similarly, another Secondary Principal stated, “Instructional leadership frames everything. I’m now having professional conversations with teachers about what students are learning and finding out how I can support them. It’s all about student performance and achievement.”

Through the Central Office lens, the Director of Professional Development and Academic Support discussed the shift in the role of the principal from the traditional operational and managerial foci to one of instruction. She connected the instructional focus to its prevalence in the development and implementation of the School Improvement Plans that all EPS principals are required to complete on an annual basis. These plans require principals to review their school’s state assessment data as well as school-based data including attendance and retention rates; course grades; and English language development, literacy, and numeracy levels. After review, principals must develop goals and action steps to improve data points that present the greatest challenges. She stated, “I think this is an example to the School Improvement Plan as well. Being held accountable on student performance. It's not simply the attendance record for the day, and the behavioral information, it's truly, are we seeing student growth?” The Director of Professional Development and Academic Support believes principals are focusing on student learning, “Now, more than ever.”

When reviewing MMSEE’s influence on the role of the principal from the 4 out of 14 principals who reported no shift in practice, there was a general consensus among

COAs and principals that while there was no shift, the rubric clearly outlined the expectations for principals. The Chief Academic Officer stated:

In the past, I'm not sure there was a consistent measure to identify somebody who could be a good principal. I think this really streamlines that and really identifies the key areas where if you're looking for a really good principal, let's talk about what your vision is. Let's talk about what you think is good instructional practice. Let's talk about your commitment to high standards. How do you make that come alive and how do you see that in palpable ways in classrooms?

While all COAs and principals did not perceive MMSEE's focus on instruction as prompting a shift in the role of the principal, they all found MMSEE's focus on instruction beneficial to identifying expectations and the overarching work of improving the educational outcomes for all students. This work included increases in the number of classroom observations conducted, debrief sessions with teachers, and interactions with students centered on their learning during the instructional period.

*School-based professional development and team meetings.* Principals reported a significant shift in focus for the content team meetings, leadership team meetings, and after school professional development sessions. Past meetings and after school professional development sessions were driven by operational information. Teachers and other school-based administrators were not growing in their practice or collaborating with each other by focusing on teaching and learning.

However, as a result of MMSEE's instructional focus, content team meetings and after school professional development sessions are now focused on instruction. One Secondary Principal reported, "Our professional development moved from informational

to instructional.” They now spend the first 30 minutes reviewing an indicator from MMSEE’s Teacher Rubric or a new teaching strategy. Then, they go into their content teams to unpack the information and plan for implementation. This principal also reported the shift in how her school-based leadership meeting time is now spent. As of mid-November, over 200 class visits via learning walks were conducted during some of this meeting time. While they are looking at multiple teacher rubric indicators and teaching strategies, their overarching goal of all professional learning time is to deepen their practice to actualize the district’s goal of “Making Thinking Visible.”

***Supervision and evaluation.*** An overwhelming 14 out of 14 of principals reported a drastic improvement in their supervision and evaluation of teachers. Principals are now able to look at the teacher rubric indicators and discuss what was observed as it relates to specific indicators, thus, allowing for an evidenced-based conversation to occur. An Elementary Principal reported:

My feedback is usually tied back to the rubric. Any type of walk-through I do, even if it's not an official one that I'm going to put in Teach Point, I can tie it back to the rubric. I'm telling you, that's great. It really removes teachers getting defensive or thinking I'm being personal about something.

This principal also discussed the shift of his focus during classroom observations. In the past, he would go into classes to evaluate whether or not students were well behaved and doing their work. However, given MMSEE’s instructional focus, he is now focusing on the quality of the work students are doing and discussing the required tasks with students.

In addition to focusing on learning during classroom observations, the vast majority of principals reported that the increase in the frequency of their class visits has added value to their role and contributed to their collaboration with teachers.

**Connection to adult learning.** In accordance with the principles of the Adult Learning Theory, interview data revealed principals' use of adult learning with their teachers. This was even evident in the practice of the 4 out of 14 of principals who reported MMSEE as not prompting a shift in their role. The observation debrief sessions, taking place across all schools, allow principals to link evidence from classroom observations directly to a rubric indicator, and thus, relate the problems, successes, and areas for development to teachers' practice, thereby demonstrating their own facilitation of their learning.

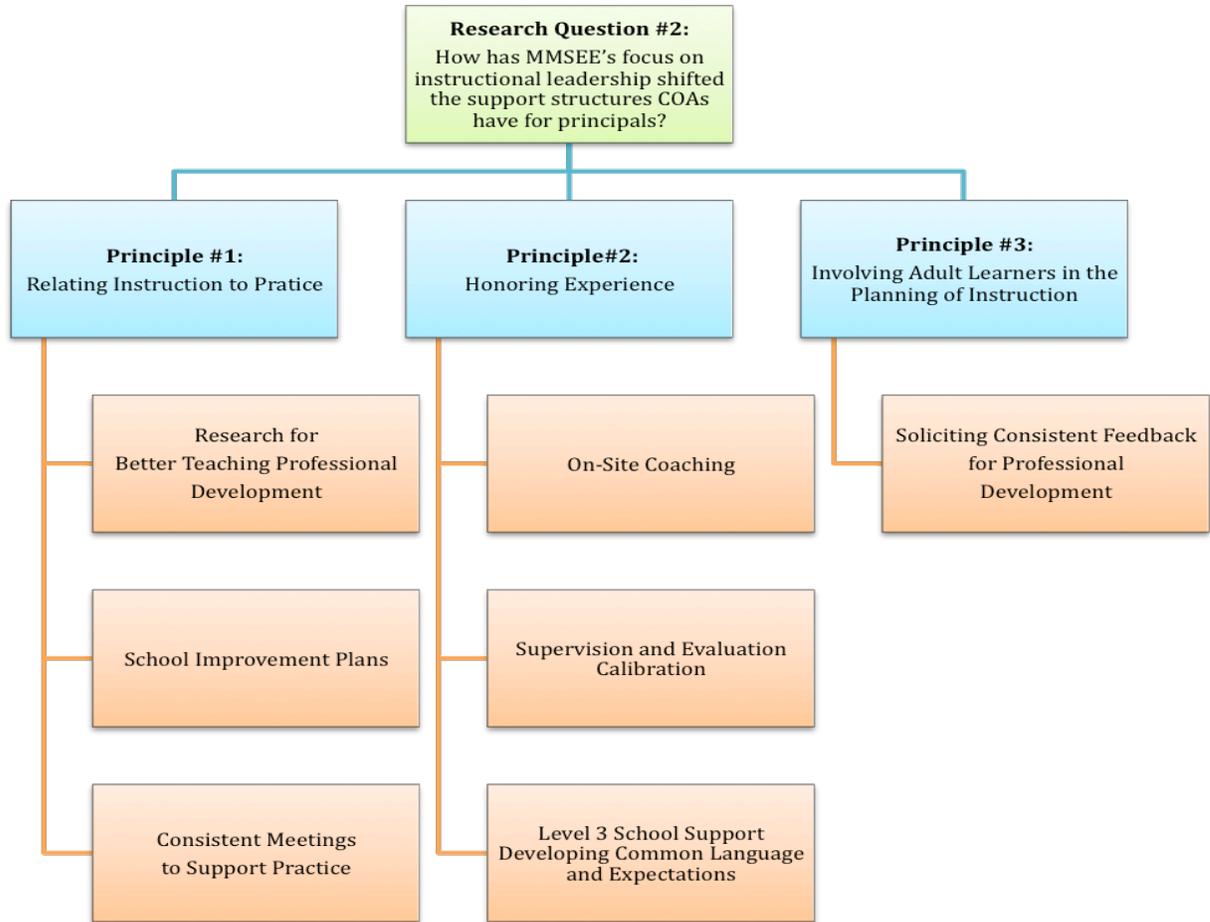
Principals in EPS are collaborating with teachers to the degree that teachers are involved in planning professional development sessions. Additionally, teachers are members of school-based leadership teams. As a result, principals are embracing teacher-voice and including them in decision-making. These practices lead to ownership over the important work of improving student achievement, which is directly related to the practice of all educators.

### **COAs' Support Structures for Principals**

The second research question related to the support structures COAs have for principals in light of MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership. All COAs reported a shift in this area and 13 out of 14 principals agreed. Figure 1 is included to illustrate these support structures under the relevant principle of the Adult Learning Theory used in this study.

Figure 3.1

*COAs' Support Structures for Principals Through Three Principles of the Adult Learning Theory*



According to the interview data illustrated above in Figure 1, there is only one explicit example of how COAs are including principals in the planning of instruction/professional development. However, COAs have done extensive work to ensure principals are able to effectively supervise and evaluate teachers. This falls under the evaluation indicator of Standard I: Instructional Leadership. Additionally, COAs are filtering support to Level 3 schools to improve student achievement.

In what follows, the reported support structures identified above in Figure 1 are presented under the relevant principle of the Adult Learning Theory used in this study.

**Relating instruction to practice.** As shown above in Figure 1, interview data revealed that COAs relate the instruction/learning to practice through professional development, the School Improvement Plans, and through monthly site visits where School Improvement Plans are reviewed. These monthly meetings also provide time for principals to discuss successes and challenges in their role as school leaders.

**Professional development.** The district hired Research for Better Teaching as a consultant to support and train principals to use MMSEE's Teacher Rubric for supervision and evaluation. This specific support with instructional leadership is highly valued, as all but one research participant, inclusive of COAs and principals, discussed Research for Better Teaching and noted its effectiveness. This professional development included a course with district-wide calibration, site-based walkthroughs, the opportunity to work and problem-solve alongside colleagues, and access to one of the Research for Better Teaching facilitators who emerged as a go-to person among principals and COAs. Research for Better Teaching was also extended to teachers at Level 3 schools to ensure a common language around practice and expectations existed between teachers and administrators in these schools.

The design of this professional development was directly aligned to the Adult Learning Theory because the learning was relevant to principals' practice. As MMSEE is a mandated evaluation system, principals needed to be aware of the expectations. This professional development extended the opportunity for principals to learn alongside

fellow principals and their evaluators. They were able to recognize the relevance and apply their new learning to practice. According to the Superintendent:

Through that resource and others like it, it's helped us to build quality of instructional leadership, and building a sense of the rubrics, that we are moving toward, in terms of what principals need to be doing, in terms of being in the classroom, in terms of managing good observations, and supporting higher quality instruction.

In addition to Research for Better Teaching, COAs hold a mandatory two-hour professional development session with all principals every Wednesday. COAs also host an Aspiring Leadership Academy for educators in pursuit of leadership roles. These sessions, alongside the weekly principal professional development sessions, often feature guest speakers noted within the field of education locally and abroad, who give lectures on effective leadership practices.

***School improvement plans.*** All principals are required to complete a School Improvement Plan based on the aforementioned criteria (see the Instructional Leadership section under MMSEE's Influence on the Role of the Principal). The development of School Improvement Plans are relevant to practice because they guide the work of the principal throughout the school year. To ensure this expectation is met and to inform the community about the work done at each school, COAs require all principals to present their School Improvement Plans at school committee meetings every year.

***On-site visits from COAs.*** The Chief Academic Officer makes monthly visits to principals to support the development of School Improvement Plans as well as impromptu visits to conduct class visits and give principals the opportunity to discuss

practice. Evaluating COAs, the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, visit schools on a bi-weekly to monthly basis when possible for purposes similar to the Chief Academic Officer. Principals value these visits as 13 out of 14 reported the need for additional site visits from COAs.

**Honoring experience.** Due to the fact that adult learners bring a range of experiences affect their learning style and how they process and apply knowledge, facilitators of adult learning must honor the experiences, both successes and failures, adult learners bring (Knowles, 1980). COAs in EPS demonstrated this by providing content coaches to all schools and assistant principals to all elementary schools, calibrating teacher evaluation practices (see previous section titled Professional Development), and by filtering additional support to Level 3 schools.

**Content coaches.** COAs understand that principals may not have the content-specific expertise to provide the content-specific support classroom teachers need to improve practice. Therefore, COAs assigned math and ELA coaches to all schools. Level 3 schools have full-time coaches while Level 1 and 2 schools have part-time coaches. This practice also honors the experience of teachers, as they are able to build on their current knowledge and skill set through coaching and modeling in a non-evaluative setting.

**Assistant principals.** In addition to coaches, COAs provided all elementary schools with assistant principals. Their primary role, as stated by the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, is to “support with instructional leadership.” With the new evaluation regulations requiring formative and summative evaluations for all school personnel with licenses, principals needed additional support to meet this expectation.

The Director of Bilingual Education stated, “Principals felt they couldn’t keep up with this work.” Elementary school principals reported this support as timely and necessary, specifically, when it comes to having a thought partner to learn and grow with in the work. Prior to this support, elementary school principals were the only administrators in their buildings.

***Support to Level 3 schools.*** The Superintendent is on a mission to make EPS a Level 1 school district. In his approach, the four Level 3 schools are filtered support through a lens of equity, thus, giving schools what they need as opposed to giving all schools the same support. For example, the Level 3 schools have higher populations of special education students and English language learners. Regardless of the prior experience principals in these schools have, full-time English language learner coaches, ELA coaches, and math coaches are needed to improve teacher practice. This improved teacher practice leads to academic gains in student performance. In addition to the coaches, Level 3 schools have student interventionists who work directly in the classrooms and pull out students who need intensive support.

As previously mentioned, to emphasize performance expectations and to develop a common language around instructional practices, teachers in Level 3 schools received the Research for Better Teaching training. While this training may have proved beneficial to teachers, it implies that teachers who work in Level 1 and 2 schools have a better understanding of performance expectations and the common language around instructional practices. This practice may need further examination to ensure teachers who work in Level 3 schools are not pegged as sub-par. Moreover, while the Superintendent has students’ best interest at heart and is operating through a lens of

equity, principals in Level 1 and 2 schools have concerns about the level of support Level 3 schools are given as opposed to what they receive.

### **Involvement in the Planning of Instruction/Professional Development**

Involvement in planning is a key principle of the Adult Learning Theory as it allows the adult learner to have ownership over their learning. It also allows the adult learner to apply the learning to their practice (Knowles, 1980). Currently, only two principals, one Secondary and one Elementary, are involved in planning district sponsored professional development for principals.

### **COAs' Evaluation of Principals**

The third research question related to how COAs' evaluation of principals' effectiveness shifted as a result of MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership. Of the three research questions, this one presented the largest difference between principal and COA responses. While 6 out of 7 COAs reported a shift in their evaluation practices, only 6 out of 14 principals agreed.

When evaluating the effectiveness of principals, if COAs were guided by the Adult Learning Theory, then one would expect to see COAs including principals in the evaluation process, honoring leadership practices prior to MMSEE's School Level Administrator Rubric, and relating expectations to practice. According to principals' interview data, COAs are not guided by the Adult Learning Theory in this area. While 6 out of 14 principals agreed that a shift in evaluation practices were made, the shift created compliance due to MMSEE's mandates, not collaboration between COAs and principals. Currently, principals only receive summative evaluations. According to an Elementary Principal, the summative evaluations "are very nice," but they are not reflective of the

work happening in schools. Echoing the Elementary Principal's response, a Secondary Principal stated, "You are only as good as your feedback, and if I only get this one summative at the end of the year that is not reflective of the work I am doing, how effective is that? How do I improve?" This dissatisfaction with how principals are evaluated emerged as a significant trend in principals' interview data. In fact, only three principals were able to speak to MMSEE's School Level Administrator Rubric. Additionally, most principals felt entirely excluded from the evaluation process.

From the Central Office perspective, COAs felt their evaluation practices promoted growth for principals. For example, the Superintendent stated:

My weekly meetings with them are much more about supervision than evaluation, and it's much more about getting into the classrooms if at all possible. It's about monitoring their instructional leadership and looking for opportunities to support them around a teacher who is weaker, going to them and seeing their teachers that are stronger, seeing how they think about them, and how they are attempting to promulgate their strengths throughout their buildings. My visits with them are much more about looking for ways to support them in critical challenges, or maximizing their strengths.

Principals were able to speak to the weekly meetings and site-visits from various COAs; however, they did not perceive the site visits or weekly meetings as a shift in the evaluation of their effectiveness.

### **Discussion**

The overarching purpose of this study was to examine how COAs supported principals with Standard I: Instructional Leadership of MMSEE's School Level

Administrator Rubric. While the findings of this study highlight COAs' success in supporting principals for the supervision and evaluation of teachers through the Research for Better Teaching training as well as supporting principals with data-informed decision-making through the development of School Improvement Plans, which are two of the five elements of this performance standard (MA ESE, 2012), the findings also revealed gaps. These gaps included a lack of principals' awareness as to how MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of their practice and gaps in their awareness of the way COAs evaluate their practice irrespective of MMSEE. Moreover, principals reported summative evaluations conducted by COAs as not supporting their growth and development as instructional leaders nor reflective of the work taking place in their schools. Lastly, the findings revealed a critical need for COAs to create additional opportunities to include principals in their decision-making and evaluation processes to address the undertone of a lack of trust in COAs.

### **Linking Support to the Adult Learning Theory**

To address these concerns, the following sections provide recommendations through the application of the Adult Learning Theory. These recommendations address concerns in professional development, evaluations and feedback relevant to practice, and the involvement of principals in planning. Effective use of the Adult Learning Theory will provide the structures needed to support principals with instructional leadership and thereby aid principals in meeting MMSEE's required proficiency rating in this standard; because no principal can be rated proficient overall unless they are rated proficient in Standard I: Instructional Leadership.

**Professional development.** To ensure all principals have a clear understanding of the standards by which they will be measured, it is recommended that COAs utilize the Wednesday professional development sessions to train principals on MMSEE's evaluation process for principals and thoroughly review the expectations outlined in the School Level Administrator Rubric.

In their design of these professional development sessions, it is important for COAs to ensure that the previous experiences of principals are honored. This may require COAs to differentiate these professional development sessions because of the range of experiences and skills principals have as well as due to each principal's school context. In determining principals' individual needs, COAs can develop and administer surveys that require principals to rank elements of the School Level Administrator Rubric by highlighting areas where they feel proficient as well as those areas where there is a need for additional support. Because some principals may feel threatened, their existing skill set cannot be seen as a deficit, but rather harnessed as a platform for learning (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984).

**Evaluations and feedback relevant to practice.** Currently, only two COAs evaluate principals, the Superintendent and the Assistant Superintendent. As a result, effective and relevant feedback on practice emerged as a void among principals. Given the demands on the role of the superintendent (Aguilar and Edwards, 2014; Dickson and Mitchell, 2014) and the time supervision and evaluation requires, additional COAs, where appropriate, could begin to engage in this work. With additional evaluators, principals are more likely to receive consistent and targeted feedback that supports their growth and development as instructional leaders. Additionally, being in the field with

principals on a consistent basis will allow COAs to see first-hand the myriad challenges principals face and reallocate support and resources where and when needed (Enfield & Spicciati, 2014). COAs will also be able to affirm principals for the significant work they do to improve teaching and learning, which emerged as lacking in EPS.

In order to prepare for this shift, it is incumbent upon COAs to undergo supervision and evaluation training as a cohort to engage in calibration sessions. This will help to ensure performance ratings and evaluation practices inclusive of site visits and feedback are consistent among COAs. In addition, COAs will be able to collectively identify the preferred leadership qualities in EPS.

**Involving principals in planning.** There are 14 principals in EPS and only two are on the Critical Management Team. Being a member of this team allows principals to have voice in the district decision-making process as well as voice in the content and design of professional development opportunities for principals. To address this access gap, COAs should consider allocating time during the weekly professional development sessions and site visits to work alongside principals to co-construct upcoming professional development sessions that are differentiated to meet the needs of all principals (Enfield & Spicciati, 2014; Chan, 2010). This will help in building trust, cohesion, and district-wide buy-in. Combined, these efforts will empower principals in EPS to meet as well as exceed MMSEE's mandate that requires all principals in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts to demonstrate proficiency in Standard I: Instructional Leadership (MA ESE, 2012).

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

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

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

---

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

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 crosscutting through the six studies, to make recommendations to EPS based on these themes, to describe areas for further research, to discuss the implications of this research on policy and policymakers beyond EPS, and to and reveal the limitations of this work.

### **Synthesis of Findings**

While each individual study employed various conceptual frameworks, the findings from the six studies overlapped to produce common themes. The following sections explore these themes. First, the Interpretation and Implementation section discusses the complex district context, the relatively low priority of principal evaluation, and the separation of principal evaluation and support. Next, District Support with Instructional Leadership outlines alternative ways COAs supported principals, including training on the supervision of teachers, support for school improvement plan

development, and additional administrative staffing. The third section, Communication, describes how effectively COAs and principals communicated with each other throughout MMSEE evaluation cycles 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 MMSEE provided similar supports for COAs to supervise and evaluate principals, the superintendent placed a low priority on principal evaluation.

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

Additionally, during the absence of an assistant superintendent the previous year, principal evaluation responsibilities were not distributed to other COAs while the search for a new assistant superintendent was underway. Instead, the superintendent, by himself, attempted to supervise and evaluate all fourteen principals. Even with the arrival of the new assistant superintendent, there still remained a central office divide between principal evaluation and principal support. Although there were a number of EPS COAs who were capable of supervising and evaluating principals in either a primary or

secondary role, only the superintendent and assistant superintendent evaluated principals. In fact, other COAs went out of their way explaining to interviewers that while they frequently supported principals' practice, they have absolutely no role in principal evaluation. This is inconsistent with the superintendent's belief that all COAs, operating as an extension of his leadership, should have a role in both evaluating and supporting principals. While EPS teacher evaluation has integrated well with other district efforts to support teachers, principal evaluation has remained isolated from the district efforts to support principals with instructional leadership, which will be described in detail in the following section.

### **District Support with Instructional Leadership**

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

**Research for Better Teaching (RBT).** In order to support principals with the supervision and evaluation of teachers, which is one of five indicators under the MA ESE definition of instructional leadership, COAs contracted services from RBT. RBT training

was offered to principals, school-based administrators, and teachers at Level 3 schools. For principals and school-based administrators, COAs sought to create a collaborative learning opportunity to develop a shared understanding of effective instruction through calibration and thereby improve instruction throughout the district. For teachers at Level 3 schools, COAs wanted to ensure that teachers and administrators shared a common language about practice and had similar expectations.

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

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

COAs interviewed considered the SIP development process to be an extremely effective way to support principals. On the other hand, principals' perceptions of the SIP process were divided.

**Content coaches.** To address academic performance, COAs hired English language arts, English as a second language, and math coaches. These coaches were assigned to schools to provide direct assistance to teachers. Level 3 schools had full-time coaches while Level 1 and 2 schools had part-time coaches. COAs differentiated this support to ensure schools with high-needs populations such as students with disabilities and English language learners, had adequate staffing to improve teacher practice and student performance. While all principals were appreciative of the extra staffing, principals in Level 1 and 2 schools expressed concerns regarding unequal levels of support.

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

RBT, SIPs, content coaches, and assistant principals – all initiatives guided by EPS's MMSEE implementation – emerged as useful supports to principals' development as instructional leaders. However, it seems that principals were not able to connect each

of these supports to their work in meeting the district's priorities. The following section focused on communication will highlight this disconnect.

## **Communication**

From the previous two sections, it is clear that both COAs and principals worked to develop initiatives that would reshape professional practice and positively impact student learning. That said, there remained a number of disconnects between COAs and principals in terms of intent, perception, and outcomes of MMSEE implementation and principal support. A pervasive theme that emerged across all studies was the lack of effective communication between COAs and principals. According to principal interview data, COAs did not explicitly communicate their plan of action with respect to principal evaluation. The disconnect between COAs and principals manifested itself in several ways. Principals were not well versed in 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 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 mid-year 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 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 14 principals trusted and felt connected with central office. For the most part, principals expressed very strong opinions about whom they were connected to or disconnected from, and about whom they trusted and whom they did not. Coding and analysis revealed a dichotomy among principals: those who trusted and felt connected to COAs and those who distrusted and felt isolated from central office.

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

One major factor that affected principal trust toward COAs was the differing priorities and expectations for principal and teacher evaluation dating back to EPS's launch of MMSEE implementation. Findings indicated that the superintendent wanted MMSEE to be utilized for teachers immediately. A joint labor committee, including teacher representatives and administrators, was involved in the rollout of MMSEE for teachers, which created an environment where principals and teachers fully understood the teacher evaluation process. Conversely, the EPS superintendent did not come to a formal agreement with principals. Rather, he determined the principal evaluation process

himself. Principals, in turn, often did not understand the process and expectations of their own evaluations.

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

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

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

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

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

### **Recommendations**

Through observation, interpretation, and analyses of the studies, the research team found that there were specific needs of the district that should be addressed if 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 development opportunities contribute to and align with these new agreements. From the principal perspective, the professional development guided them through tightly coupled systems, as RBT did, was instrumental in the successful rollout of 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 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 MMSEE went, in their opinion. COAs could also be re-interviewed to see if their perceptions of the tool and its usefulness had changed. Beyond the tool itself, researchers could understand if through this collective work, relationships had improved, feedback had a more desirable impact on practice, and principals had an increased voice in the design of their professional growth and development opportunities.

### **Perspectives on District Leadership**

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

## **The Importance of a Communication Plan**

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

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

## **Fair Does Not Mean Equal**

In districts like EPS, where there is such a diversity of families, neighborhoods, and schools, it is important for COAs to understand individual school context and needs. The dissertation-in-practice team saw first-hand the dilemma COAs faced between allocating resources for each school on an equitable basis and providing for the lowest performing schools. Every school has specific needs that are dependent upon its

accountability status, needs of its students, and extended community. A superintendent and his or her leadership team must strategically prioritize resources for the most needy schools, and at the same time, transparently communicate to other stakeholders the reasons behind resource allocation.

### **Joint Instructional Leadership Opportunities**

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

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

### **Growth-Oriented, Reciprocal Feedback**

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

### **The Link Between Relational Trust and Distributed Leadership**

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

evolving. In this way, distributed leadership and social capital operate within the organization similarly, as both flow and spread non-linearly and reciprocally through interrelationships.

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

### **Limitations**

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

#### **One District**

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

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

## **Timing of Study**

The fall of 2015 marked a time of transition in EPS, which included the hiring of a new assistant superintendent and the rollout of the 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 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 the 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, interpretation of interview questions, interpretation of interview data, and 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 researchers were occasionally 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 used in 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.

## References

- Aguilar, I., & Edwards, D. (2014). Superintendents and Professional Development: Voices from the Field. *School Leadership*, 44.
- American Education Research Association. (2011). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from <http://www.aera.net/AboutAERA/AERARulesPolicies/ProfessionalEthics/tabid/10200/Default.aspx>.
- Anderson, S. E. (2003). *The district role in educational change: A review of the literature*. Toronto, Canada: International Centre for Educational Change, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Babo, G. & Villaverde, C. (2013). Principal evaluation using a comprehensive portfolio development approach to facilitate professional growth and renewal. *ISEA*, 41(2), 93-102.
- Blake McKetty, L. (2016). One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals: Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office Support (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Blase, J. & Blase, J., (1998). *Handbook of instructional leadership: How really good principals promote teaching and learning*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Bogdan, R. C. & Biklen, S. K. (1998). *Qualitative research in education*. Needham Heights, MA: A Viacom Company.
- Bryk, A. S., Sebring, P. B., Allensworth, E., Luppescu, S., & Easton, J. Q. (2010). *Organizing schools for improvement: Lessons from Chicago*. Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

- Burke, W., Marx, G. E., Lowenstein, E. (2012). Leading, leadership, and learning: Exploring new contexts for leadership development in emerging school environments. *Planning and Changing*, 43(1-2 ), 113-126.
- Carter, J. A. (2016). Relational Trust, Social Connections, and Improving Principal Practice: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Catano, N., & Stronge, J. H. (2007). What do we expect of school principals? Congruence between principal evaluation and performance standards. *International Journal of Leadership in Education*, 10(4), 379-399.  
doi:10.1080/13603120701381782
- Chan, S. (2010). Applications of andragogy in multi-disciplined teaching and learning. *Journal of Adult Education*, 39(2), 25.
- Chester, M. D. (2011a, April 16). Proposed regulations on evaluation of educators, 603 CMR 35.00 [Memorandum]. Malden, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Chester, M. D. (2011b, June 21). Proposed final regulations on evaluation of educators, 603 CMR 35.00 [Memorandum]. Malden, Massachusetts: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.
- Chhuon, V., Gilkey, E. M., Gonzalez, M., Daly, A. J., & Chrispeels, J. H. (2008). The little district that could: The process of building district-school trust. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 44, 227-281.

- Clifford, M., Hansen, U. J. & Wraight, S. (2012, April). A practical guide to designing comprehensive principal evaluation systems. Washington D.C.: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.
- Copeland, C. A. (2016). How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals of MMSEE to Principals (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Copland, M. A., & Honig, M. I. (2010). From operations to teaching and learning. *School Administrator*, 67(11), 11-14.
- Corcoran, A., Casserly M., Price-Baugh, R., Walston, D., Hall, R., Simon, C. (2013). *Rethinking leadership: The changing role of principal supervisors*. (A report to the Wallace Foundation). Council of the Great City Schools.
- Council of Chief State School Officers. (2008). Educational leadership policy standards: ISLLC 2008, as adopted by the National Policy Board for Educational Administration. Washington D.C.
- Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches (4th ed.)*. Thousand Oaks, California: Sage Publication, Inc.
- Danielson, C. (1996). *Enhancing professional practice: A framework for teaching (2nd edition)*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., Meyerson, D., Orr, M. T., & Cohen, C. (2007). *Preparing school leaders for a changing world: Lessons from exemplary*

- leadership development programs*. Stanford, CA: Stanford University, Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Davis, S., Darling-Hammond, L., LaPointe, M., & Meyerson, D. (2005). *Review of research. School leadership study. Developing successful principals*. Palo Alto: Stanford Educational Leadership Institute.
- Davis, S. H. & Hensley, P. A. (1999). The politics of principal evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education*, 13(4), 383-403.
- Davis, S. H., & Leon, R. J. (2011). How not to prepare principals. *Planning and Changing*, 42(3), 274-287. Retrieved from <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1508227997?accountid=9673><http://search.proquest.com/docview/1508227997?accountid=9673>
- Desimone, L. M. & Le Floch, K. C. (2004). Are we asking the right questions? Using cognitive interviews to improve surveys in education research. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 26(1), 1-22.
- Dickson, J., & Mitchell, C. (2014). Shifting the role: School-district superintendents' experiences as they build a learning community. *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 158.
- Dodman, S. (2014). A vivid illustration of leadership. *Journal of Staff Development: National Staff Development Council*, 35(1), 56-58.
- Dowley, R. G. & Kaplan, N. (2014). Evaluating evaluation: Assessing Massachusetts school districts' implementation of educator evaluation requirements. *Journal of Law & Education*, 43(4), 485-502.

- Drago-Severson, E. (October 2011). How adults learn forms the foundation of the learning designs standard. *Journal of Staff Development*, 32(5), 10-12.
- Elmore, R. (2003). Accountability and capacity, in M. Carnoy, R. Elmore, and L. S. Siskin, *The new accountability: High schools and high stakes testing*. New York and London: Routledge Falmer.
- Elmore, R. F. (2005). Accountable leadership, essays. *The Educational Forum*, 69(2), 134-142.
- Elmore, R., & Burney, D. (1998). *Continuous improvement in Community District #2, New York City (Report to the Office of Educational Research and Improvement)*. Pittsburgh, PA: High Performance Learning Communities Project, Learning Research and Development Center, University of Pittsburgh.
- Enfield, S. & Spicciati, A. (April 2014) Reculturing the central office. *School Administrator* (pp. 27-30).
- Fink, E., & Resnick, L. B. (2001). Developing principals as instructional leaders. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 82(8), 598-610.
- Fullan, M. (2007). *The new meaning of educational change*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Goldring, E., Cravens, X., Murphy, J., Porter, A., Elliott, S., & Carson, B. (2008). The evaluation of principals: What and how do states and urban districts assess leadership? *The Elementary School Journal*, 110(1), 19-39.
- Goodwin, R. H., Cunningham, M. L., & Childress, R. (2003). The changing role of the secondary principal. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin*, 87(634), 26-42. Retrieved from

<http://search.proquest.com/docview/216032451?accountid=9673>  
<http://search.proquest.com/docview/216032451?accountid=9673>

- Goodwin, R. H., Cunningham, M. L. & Eagle, T. (2007). The changing role of the secondary principal in the United States: An historical perspective. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 37(1), 1-17.
- Hallinger, P. (1992). The evolving role of American principals: From managerial to instructional to transformational leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 30(3), 35.
- Hallinger, P., & Heck, R. H. (1998). Exploring the principal's contribution to school effectiveness: 1980-1995. *School Effectiveness and School Improvement*, 9(2), 157-191.
- Harris, A. (2012). Distributed leadership: implications for the role of the principal. *Journal of Management and Development*, 31, 7-17.
- Hart, A. W. (1992). The social and organizational influence of principals: Evaluating principals in context. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 68(1), 37-57.
- Hightower, A. M., Knapp, M. S., Marsh, J. A., & McLaughlin, M. W. (2002). *School districts and instructional renewal*. New York and London: Teachers College Press.
- Holyoke, L., & Larson, E. (2009). Engaging the adult learner generational mix. *Journal of Adult Education*, 38(1), 12.
- Honig, M. I. (2008). District central offices as learning organizations: How sociocultural and organizational learning theories elaborate district central office

- administrators' participation in teaching and learning improvement efforts.  
*American Journal of Education*, 114(4), 627-660.
- Honig, M. I. (2012). District central office leadership as teaching: How central office administrators support principals' development as instructional leaders.  
*Educational Administration Quarterly*, 48(4), 733-774.
- Honig, M. I., Copland, M. A., Rainey, L., Lorton, J. A., & Newton, M. (2010). *School district central office transformation for teaching and learning improvement (A report to the Wallace Foundation)*. Seattle, WA: The Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Honig, M. I., Lorton, J. S. & Copland, M. A. (2010). Urban district central office transformation for teaching and learning improvement: Beyond a zero-sum game.  
*Yearbook of the National Society for the Study of Education*, (108)1, 21-40.
- Honig, M. I. & Rainey, L. R. (2014). Central office leadership in principal professional learning communities: The practice beneath the policy. *Teachers College Record*, 116(4), 1-48.
- Jacques, C., Clifford, M. & Hornung, K. (2012, June). State policies on principal evaluation: Trends in a changing landscape. Washington D.C.: National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality.
- Johnson, B. & Christensen, L. (2008). *Educational research: Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches*. Sage Publications
- Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation. (2010). Retrieved March 23, 2015, from <http://www.jcsee.org/>

- Knapp, M. S., Copland, M. A., Honig, M. I., Plecki, M. L., & Portin, B. S. (2010). Urban renewal: The urban school leader takes on a new role. *Journal of Staff Development, 31*(2), 24-29, 58.
- Knowles, M. S. (1980). *The modern practice of adult education: From pedagogy to andragogy*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall/Cambridge.
- Knowles, M. and Associates (1984). *Andragogy in action: Applying modern principles of adult learning*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Kochanik, J. R. (2005). *Building trust for better schools: Research-based practices*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- Ladd, H. F. (2009) *Teacher perceptions of their working conditions: How predictive of policy relevant outcomes?* Working paper 33. National Center for Analysis of Longitudinal Data in Education Research.
- Leithwood, K. (2010). Characteristics of school districts that are exceptionally effective in closing the gap. *Leadership and Policy in Schools, 9*, 245-291.
- Leithwood, K., Harris, A., & Hopkins, D. (2008). Seven strong claims about successful school leadership. *School Leadership & Management, 28*(1), 27-42.
- Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *Review of research: How leadership influences student learning*. Minneapolis, MN: Center for Applied Research and Educational Improvement, University of Minnesota.

- Leithwood, K., Patten, S. & Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 46(5), 671-706.
- Leithwood, K., & Riehl, C. (2005). What we know about successful school leadership. In W. Firestone & C. Riehl (eds), *A New Agenda: Directions for Research on Educational Leadership*. New York: Teachers College Press, 22-47.
- Louis, K. S., & Robinson, V. M. (2012). External mandates and instructional leadership: School leaders as mediating agents. *Journal of Educational Administration*, 50, 629-665.
- Marks, H. M., & Nance, J. P. (2007). Contexts of accountability under systemic reform: Implications for principal influence on instruction and supervision. *Educational Administration Quarterly*, 43(1), 3-37.
- Marks, H. M., & Printy, S. M. (2003) Principal leadership and school performance: an integration of transformational and instructional leadership. *Education Administration Quarterly*, 39(3), 370.
- Marshall, K. (2009). *Rethinking teacher supervision and evaluation: How to work smart, build collaboration, and close the achievement gap*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2012). Massachusetts model system for educator evaluation. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eval/model/>.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012).

Massachusetts model system for educator evaluation part I: District-level planning and implementation guide. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartI.pdf>.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012).

Massachusetts model system for educator evaluation part III: Guide to rubrics and model rubrics for superintendent, administrator, and teacher. Retrieved from [http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartIII\\_AppxB.pdf](http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartIII_AppxB.pdf).

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2012).

Massachusetts model system for educator evaluation part V: Implementation guide for principal evaluation. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/model/PartV.pdf>.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2015). Educator evaluation. Retrieved from <http://www.doe.mass.edu/eeval/>.

Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators (2011).

Building a breakthrough framework for educator evaluation in the Commonwealth. Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. Retrieved from <http://aftma.net/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/TF-Report-Final-Building-a-Breakthrough-Framework-3-16-112.pdf>.

Maxwell, J. A. (2009). Designing a qualitative study. In Bickman, L., & Rog, D. J. (Eds.). *The SAGE handbook of applied social research methods*. Los Angeles: SAGE.

May, H., & Supovitz, J. A. (2011). The scope of principal efforts to improve instruction.

- Educational Administration Quarterly*, (47), 332-352.
- McGrath, V. (2009). Reviewing the evidence on how adult students learn: An examination of Knowles' model of andragogy. *Adult Learner: The Irish Journal of Adult and Community Education*, 99-110.
- McNeil, A. M. (2016). Supporting Principal Professional Practice through Evaluative Feedback: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Merriam, S. B. (2008), Adult learning theory for the twenty-first century. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, 2008: 93–98. doi: 10.1002/ace.309
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Milanowski, A. T., Longwell-Grice, H., Saffold, F., Jones, J., Schomisch, K., & Odden, A. (2009). Recruiting new teachers to urban school districts: What incentives will work? *International Journal of Education Policy and Leadership*, 4(8), 1-13.
- Murphy, J., Goldring, E. & Porter, A. (2014). Principal evaluation takes center stage. *Principal*, 93(3), 20-24.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals. (2008). *Leading learning communities: Standards for what principals should know and be able to do*, second edition. Alexandria, VA.
- National Association of Elementary School Principals: Serving all elementary and middle-level principals. (2012). Retrieved March 19, 2015, from

<http://www.naesp.org/rethinking-principal-evaluation-new-paradigm-informed-policy-and-improved-practice>

- Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.)*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications.
- Ponticell, J. A., Zepeda, S. J. (2004). Confronting well-learned lessons in supervision and evaluation. *National Association of Secondary School Principals*, 88(639), 43-59.
- Porter, A. C., Murphy, J., Goldring, E. & Elliott, S. N. (2008). Vanderbilt Assessment of Leadership in Education: Assessing learning centered leadership [presentation]. Retrieved from <http://www.valed.com/about.html>.
- Portin, B. S., Feldman, S. & Knapp, M.S. (2006). *Purposes, uses, and practices of leadership assessment in education*. Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy.
- Ricciardi, D. (1997). Sharpening experienced principals' skills for changing schools. *National Association of Secondary School Principals. NASSP Bulletin*, 81(585), 65-71.
- Rieckhoff, B. S., Larsen, C. (2012). The impact of a professional development network on leadership development and school improvement goals. *School-University Partnerships*, 5(1), 57-73.
- Saphier, J., Gower, R., Haley-Speca, M. A., & Platt, A. D. (1997). *The skillful teacher: Building your teaching skills (5th ed.)*. Acton, MA: Research for Better Teaching.
- Schein, E. H. (2010). *Organizational culture and leadership*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Sevelius, A. (2016). 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 (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.
- Spillane, J. P. (2010). *Distributed leadership: What's all the hoopla?* Evanston, IL: Institute for Policy Research, School of Education and Social Policy, Northwestern University. Retrieved from <http://allianceprincipalresources.files.wordpress.com/2011/07/distributed-leadership-article.pdf>.
- Spillane, J. P. (2004). *Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Sogunro, O. A. (2015). Motivating factors for adult learners in higher education. *International Journal of Higher Education*, 4(1), 22-37.
- Stewart, V. (2013). School leadership around the world. *Educational Leadership*, 70(7), 48-54.
- Stiggins, R. J., Arter, J. A., Chappuis, J., & Chappuis, S. (2009). *Classroom assessment for student learning: Doing it right, using it well*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice-Hall.
- Stronge, J. H. (2013). Principal evaluation from the ground up. *Educational Leadership*, 70(7), 60-65.
- Superville, D. (2015). Redefining the role of principal supervisors. *Education Week*, 34(18), 5-6.
- Taylor, B., & Kroth, M. (2009). Andragogy's transition into the future: Meta-analysis of andragogy and its search for a measurable instrument. *Journal of Adult Education*, 38(1), 1-11.

- US Department of Education. (2009). Race to the Top program executive summary.  
Retrieved March 22, 2015, from [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf).
- Waters, J. T. & Marzano, R. J., (2006). *School district leadership that works: The effect of superintendent leadership on student achievement*. Denver, CO: Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning.
- Waters, J. T., Marzano, R. J., & McNulty, B. A., (2004). Leadership that sparks learning. *Educational Leadership*, 61(7), 48-51.
- Wood, J. N., Finch, K., Mirecki, R. M. (2013). If we get you, how can we keep you? Problems with recruiting and retaining rural administrators. *Rural Educator*, 34(2).
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods*. Los Angeles: Sage Publications.

## Appendix A



### **Boston College Professional Administrators Program**

#### **Informed Consent to be in study:**

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

#### **Researchers:**

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

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

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

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

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

**Alexandra Montes McNeil: Principal Leader, Boston Public Schools**

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

### **Adult Consent Form**

#### **Introduction**

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

#### **Purpose of Study:**

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

**What will happen in the study:**

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

**Risks and Discomforts of Being in the Study:**

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

**Benefits of Being in the Study:**

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

**Payments:**

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

**Costs:**

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

**Confidentiality:**

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

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

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

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

**Getting Dismissed from the study:**

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

**Contacts and Questions:**

- The researchers conducting this study are:

Leah Blake-McKetty: [leahmblake@gmail.com](mailto:leahmblake@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

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

Christine Copeland: [copeland.boston@gmail.com](mailto:copeland.boston@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

Tanya Freeman-Wisdom: [tfwisdom@gmail.com](mailto:tfwisdom@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

Alexandra Montes McNeil: [amontesu25@gmail.com](mailto:amontesu25@gmail.com) Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

AC Sevelius: [ac.sevelius@gmail.com](mailto: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](mailto:irb@bc.edu).

**Copy of Consent Form:**

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

**Statement of Consent:**

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

**Signatures/Dates:**

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

## Appendix B

### Interview Questions for Central Office Administrators and Principals

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

#### *Interview Questions, Principals*

##### **Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:**

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

- How are they determined?

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

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

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

- Formally? Informally?

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

What are your interactions with COAs, in general?

##### **Questions on instructional leadership:**

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

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

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

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

- What are conversations with COAs about?

How do central office administrators support you with instructional leadership?

- What other support do you receive?

Describe the type of support you need with instructional leadership.

#### **Questions on leadership practices:**

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

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

How do these leadership practices align with MMSEE?

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

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

#### **Questions on feedback:**

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

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

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

What is the purpose of the feedback?

- What is the nature of the feedback?

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

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

#### **Questions on professional relationships:**

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

How has MMSEE affected your professional relationships with your supervisors?

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

you go to him or her?

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

### *Interview Questions, Central Office Administrators*

#### **Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:**

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

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

What leadership qualities do you look for in your principals?

- How do they know these are the preferred qualities?

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

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

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

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

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

How do you negotiate differences in understanding with principals?

#### **Questions on instructional leadership:**

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

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

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

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

How do you support principals with instructional leadership?

- How are you developing principals as instructional leaders?

**Questions on leadership practices?**

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

**Questions on feedback:**

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

How and how often do you give feedback to principals?

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

What is the purpose of the feedback?

- What is the nature of the feedback?

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

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

**Questions on professional relationships:**

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

How has MMSEE affected your professional relationships with principals?

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

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