How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations of MMSEE to Principals: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals

Author: Christine Angella Copeland

Persistent link: http://hdl.handle.net/2345/bc-ir:106800

This work is posted on eScholarship@BC,
Boston College University Libraries.

BOSTON COLLEGE

Lynch School of Education

Department of
Educational Leadership and Higher Education

Professional School Administrator Program (PSAP)

How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations of MMSEE

to Principals: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator

Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals

Dissertation in Practice
By

CHRISTINE A. COPELAND

with Leah Blake McKetty, James A. Carter, Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom, and AC Sevelius

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

May 2016

How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and Expectations of MMSEE to Principals: One District's Implementation of the Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation to Support the Growth and Development of Principals

By

CHRISTINE ANGELLA COPELAND

Father Joseph O'Keefe (Chair)
Dr. Nathaniel Brown (Reader)
Dr. James Marini (Reader)

Abstract

This qualitative case study examined how central office administrators (COAs) and principals in one school district made sense of the new Massachusetts Model System for Educator Evaluation (MMSEE) and how COAs communicated their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals. Specifically, this study utilized the sensemaking property of *enactment* as central to its conceptual framework; thus, sensemaking was defined by what COAs *enacted* to implement MMSEE for principal evaluation. Data gathered from semi-structured interviews with COAs and principals revealed that COAs and principals lacked consistent understanding of MMSEE implementation. The data also illustrated that COAs and principals viewed communication about MMSEE in different ways. The study indicated that the district has invested in developing principals to be instructional leaders but has not yet created coherence between district initiatives and MMSEE expectations. The study recommends that COAs clearly communicate to principals the alignment of *enacted* district level supports with MMSEE evaluation.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my dissertation-in-practice team Leah Blake McKetty, James "Kimo" Carter, Tanya Freeman-Wisdom, Alexandra Montes McNeil and AC Sevelius for their commitment and dedication to this work. I know, in a few months, I will miss our Saturday morning sessions at 36 College Road. Father Joseph O'Keefe, Nathaniel Brown and Jim Marini, thank you for your leadership and guidance throughout this work. This dissertation would not have been possible without the cooperation and collaboration of "Emerson Public Schools." I thank each of the educators who gave his or her valuable time to support this research. I also want to thank my friends and colleagues throughout Boston Public Schools who inquired about my studies and supported me in small and large ways. I feel enormous gratitude towards my sister Hope, whose prayers have sustained me throughout this process. To my sisters and brothers who gave up their weekends to drive to soccer games and cared for my children as their own, I love you all dearly. To my father who fostered in me a deep love of learning and mother, who loves me unconditionally, thank you both for being incredible parents.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my two wonderful children, Josiah and Jacira, and my amazing husband Tony King. Josiah and Jacira, thank you for your love, understanding, and patience as you allowed Mommy to miss a few soccer matches and music lessons to complete her studies. Josiah and Jacira, you are my greatest accomplishment. Tony, my best friend and husband, I could not have asked for a better partner on this journey and I want to take this opportunity to thank you for taking on a few extra responsibilities to provide the time I needed to complete this work.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 3. HOW CENTRAL OFFICE ADMINISTRATORS COMMUNICATE

UNDERSTANDING AND EXPECTATIONS TO PRINCIPALS

TABLE

FIGURE

CHAPTER 1 – PROBLEM STATEMENT AND LITERATURE REVIEW[1]

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, & 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, 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,

---

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

Porter, Elliott, & Carson, 2008; Murphy, Goldring & Porter, 2014; Massachusetts Task Force on

the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators (MA Task Force), 2011). Furthermore, Davis and

Hensley (1999) observed that the lack of consistency and transparency in principal evaluation led

many principals to believe their evaluations reflected local politics rather than their job

performance. With these critiques and a growing understanding of the principal's role in

improving student outcomes, researchers and policy makers focused on evaluation as an essential

tool. With President Obama's 2009 Race to the Top (RTTT) competition, the U.S. Department of

Education required states to develop comprehensive evaluation systems for consistency and

coherency across districts within each state (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and

Secondary Education (MA ESE), 2012).

As one of the first winners of RTTT, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and

Secondary Education adopted new educator evaluation regulations in June of 2011. A premiere

feature of the new evaluation regulations was the Massachusetts Model System for Educator

Evaluation (MMSEE). MMSEE effectively standardized performance expectations and

evaluation practices for all educators, including principals, throughout the Commonwealth.

Furthermore, these regulations were designed to support the growth and development of

educators and to determine their effectiveness based on multiple measures of student

achievement data (MA ESE, 2012).

In terms of principal supervision and evaluation, the intent of MMSEE was to

standardize evaluation practices and provide COAs tools to improve principal practice

consistently throughout the state (MA Task Force, 2011; Chester, 2011a; MA ESE, 2012).

However, district implementation of MMSEE posed a challenge for both COAs and principals,

as standardization of a new system necessitates a substantial change in district culture and

practice (Jacques, Clifford & Hornung, 2012). MMSEE's designers recognized this challenge and knew that many Massachusetts districts would undergo a significant paradigm shift with the implementation of MMSEE (MA Task Force, 2011).

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

Purpose of the Study

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

Table 1.1

Individual Studies

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

James A. Carter	Relational Trust, Social Connections, and Improving Principal Practice	To explore how the professional assistance relationships among EPS central office supervisors and school principals both affect and are affected by district efforts to support and develop principals	Social Capital Theory	1. How does the central office team set a tone of relational trust and interconnectivity through their efforts to promote principal growth and development? 2. How does each principal's relational trust and connectedness toward central office administrators correlate to his or her perception of district efforts to promote principal growth and development?
Alexandra Montes McNeil	Supporting Principal Professional Practice through Evaluative Feedback	To examine how COAs in a district use evaluative feedback to promote principals' professional practice	Adult Learning Theory	1. What feedback do principals receive from their supervisors? 2. What do principals believe is the purpose of the feedback? 3. How closely is the feedback tied to the work principals view as central to their practice?
Tanya N.Freeman -	Supporting the Shift to Instructional	To examine how COAs support principals in	Adult Learning Theory	1. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional

| Wisdom | Leadership | meeting the performance goals of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of the Massachusetts School Level Administrator Rubric | | leadership shifted the role of the principal?
2. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the support structures COAs have for principals?
3. How has MMSEE's focus on instructional leadership shifted the way COAs evaluate the effectiveness of principals? |
| Leah Blake McKetty | Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office Support | To examine how principals perceive central office support of their leadership practices | Distributed Leadership | 1. What leadership practices do principals view as the most useful?
2. How are these practices assessed by the MMSEE?
3. How are these practices supported by COAs? |

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

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

Significance

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

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

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

Literature Review

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

The Principal's Influence on Student Learning

Although the principal's 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 will rise 10 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 are 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, share 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, sensemaking 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, 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 $4 billion 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 (U.S. 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 of federal RTTT money, and concurrently started the process of developing a framework for educator evaluation that fit RTTT guidelines. Table 1.2 outlines the timeline of MMSEE development from its beginnings to district implementation.

Table 1.2

Timeline of MMSEE Development and Implementation

Date	Event
July 2009	President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan announce the Race to the Top Funding competition under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.
January 2010	Massachusetts submits its RTTT application. Included in the application is a promise to develop a new educator evaluation system that includes student learning outcomes as a significant measure of teacher and administrator performance.
May 2010	The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education passes a motion to establish the Massachusetts Task Force on the Evaluation of Teachers and Administrators, charged with reviewing existing regulations for educator evaluation and making recommendations to the board in the winter of 2011.
August 2010	MA ESE wins $250 million 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 votes to send the revised draft regulations for public comment until June,2011.
June, 2011	The proposed regulations revised again in response to public comments, and, on June 28th, the board votes 9-2 to pass the final regulations.

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

The MA Task Force led the first phase in development, proposing a framework to the commissioner and the public in March 2011. At the proposal's core was the use of multiple measures of student learning, observations, and artifacts measured across four standards of

professional practice, and a five-step evaluation cycle (MA Task Force, 2011). After strengthening language about the use of student performance data, MA ESE Commissioner Chester proposed regulations recommended by the Task Force on June 21, 2011 (Chester, 2011a; Chester, 2011b). Six months later, MA ESE presented implementation guides of MMSEE for school districts (MA ESE, 2012). Districts receiving RTTT funding were to plan their new evaluation systems in the spring and summer of 2012 for a launch in the 2012-13 school year. Districts not receiving RTTT funding had to implement their evaluation systems in 2013-14 (MA ESE, 2012).

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

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

The fact that MMSEE specifically identified professional growth as a primary goal was relatively rare. According to Jacques et al., (2012), Massachusetts was only one of five states whose principal evaluation system explicitly identified professional growth as a goal in its legislation. Additionally, Commissioner Chester publicly espoused using MMSEE to promote professional learning. In his letter introducing MMSEE's training guides (MA ESE, 2012), he wrote, "I am excited by the promise of Massachusetts' new regulations. Thoughtfully and strategically implemented they will improve student learning by supporting analytical

conversation about teaching and leading that will strengthen professional practice" (p. 1).

Embedded in each stage of MMSEE's five-step evaluation process are multiple opportunities for professional feedback.

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

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

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

Evaluation is not only similar across districts, it is similar within each district with all types of educators. The MA Task Force elected to use a simultaneous design process for teacher,

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

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

Through its insistence on the use of multiple measures, the MA Task Force prioritized comprehensiveness over feasibility; however, as Commissioner Chester noted in his June 21 memo (2011b), MMSEE incorporates a number of processes designed to streamline the evaluator's work. These include educators' generated self-assessment plans; short, unannounced

observations with minimal written feedback; and teaming around common goals. Nevertheless, under MMSEE, both COAs and principals were generally required to spend considerably more time and energy on evaluation than they had done under their previous evaluation systems.

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

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

Standards, indicators, rubric, and rating. The four standards are: Instructional Leadership, Management and Operations, Family and Community Engagement, and Professional Culture, described in Table 1.3. Each standard has indicators organized into a rubric with

elements that describe the indicators at four performance levels. The performance levels are unsatisfactory, needs improvement, proficient, and advanced. Of the four standards, Instructional Leadership has preeminent status; no administrator can be considered proficient unless his or her rating on this standard is proficient (MA ESE, 2012).

Table 1.3

Principal Standards of Evaluation

_____

Standards   **Explanation**

_____

Standard I   ***Instructional Leadership.*** The education leader promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by cultivating a shared vision that makes powerful teaching and learning the central focus of schooling.

Standard II   ***Management and Operations.*** Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff by ensuring a safe, efficient, and effective learning environment, using resources to implement appropriate curriculum, staffing, and scheduling.

Standard III   ***Family and Community Engagement.*** Promotes the learning and growth of all students and the success of all staff through effective partnerships with families, community organizations, and other stakeholders that support the mission of the school and district.

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

_____

Five-step cycle. Since the goal of MMSEE is to improve professional practice, the Task Force developed a five-step cycle of continuous improvement (MA ESE, 2012). Figure 1.1 describes the cycle that is central to the evaluation process.

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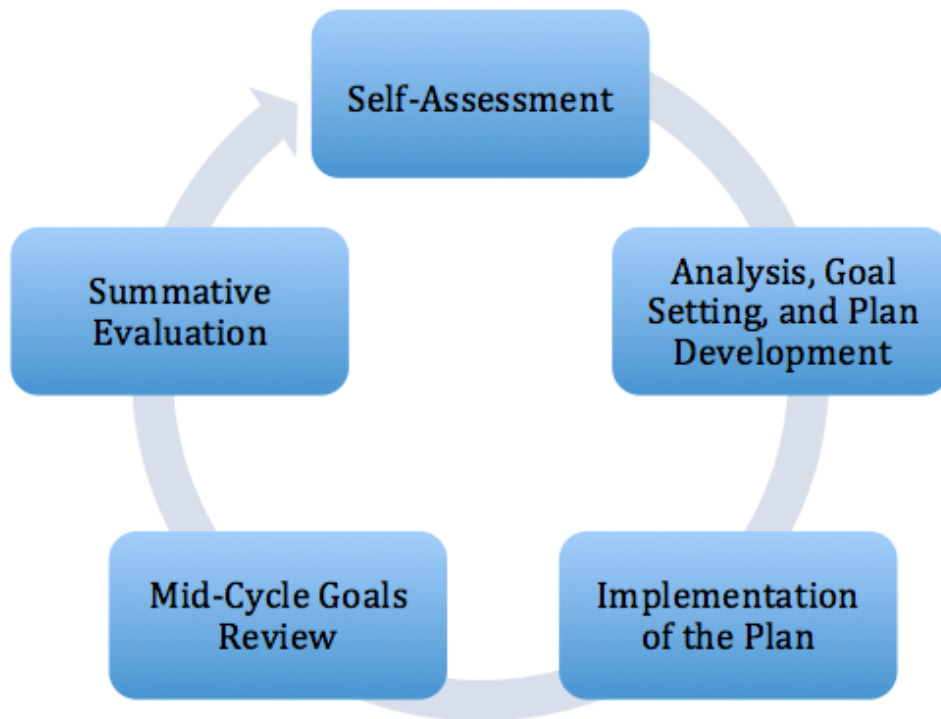
Figure 1.1. This cycle of improvement is meant to be continuous. The summative evaluation completes the cycle and then is incorporated into the next evaluation plan as part of the self-assessment. Adapted from "MMSEE Part V: School-Level Planning and Implementation Guide," by the Massachusetts Department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

Educators and evaluators are expected to be in regular communication throughout the

cycle in order to receive feedback and reflect on their practice. Before the beginning of the

school year, the principal uses the rubric to create a self-assessment and sets goals with his or her

supervisor. Once the goals are agreed upon, the principal implements the plan. The supervisor

monitors progress both informally and formally through a mid-cycle review and a summative

evaluation.

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

principals are expected to set goals throughout the evaluation cycle — a student learning goal, a

professional practice goal, and a 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 principal's input — in particular, principal artifacts — to determine the principal's proficiency rating, the system is designed, at its core, to incorporate feedback between COAs and the principal, as well as provide opportunities for principals to improve their practice through professional development. All principals in Massachusetts will also be held accountable for student performance measures on standardized tests based on student growth and, in the case of English language learners, English proficiency ratings and growth, putting student learning at the core of professional conversations.

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

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

CHAPTER 2 – METHODOLOGY[2]

Design of the Study

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

To ground the study in the overarching focus, each team member utilized a specific conceptual framework for his or her 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 revealed a holistic picture of the district's implementation of MMSEE for principals (Yin, 2009).

Table 2.1

---

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

Overarching Focus:
The Use of MMSEE to Promote the Growth and Development of Principals

Author	Individual Study Focus	Conceptual Framework
AC Sevelius	Policy Interpretation	Organizational Learning Theory
Christine A. Copeland	Policy Communication to Principals	Sensemaking
James A. Carter	Help Relationships Among COAs and Principals	Social Capital Theory
Alexandra Montes McNeil	Feedback to Principals on Performance	Adult Learning Theory
Tanya N. Freeman-Wisdom	Support with Instructional Leadership	Adult Learning Theory
Leah Blake McKetty	Principal Perceptions of Needed Supports	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 school districts. Therefore,

the findings could be applied to many school districts throughout the state.

EPS has a total enrollment of approximately 8,000 students with substantial populations

of Latino, black, and Asian students; low-income families, students with disabilities; and English

language learners, reflecting wide racial, ethnic and socioeconomic diversity. Like many

Massachusetts cities, Emerson contains a variety of neighborhoods that vary according to

ethnicity and social class. Consequently, there is a wide variety of neighborhood schools, some

taking on the characteristics of the wealthy suburban communities surrounding Emerson and

others reflecting an urban environment.

Challenges principals face vary according to the demographics of each school community

population. Therefore, it is not surprising that MA ESE has designated a wide range of levels

based on schools' overall proficiency and growth rates for student performance on standardized

tests. In EPS, there are Level 1, 2, and 3 schools, ranging from those Level 1 schools 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 14 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 is 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, examining available online resources pertaining to EPS, and conducting an initial meeting with the 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 14 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 that 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 improvement 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 student 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.

<div align="center">

Data Analysis

</div>

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 by law; respecting participants by being honest, fair, and nonjudgmental; 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 14 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.

<div align="center">**Limitations of the Study**</div>

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 14 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 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 Three: How Central Office Administrators Communicate Understanding and

Expectations of MMSEE to Principals

Overview: Problem, Purpose, and Research Questions

In 2011, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education adopted new evaluation regulations for teachers and principals. The goal of MMSEE is two-fold as it relates to COAs: first, to assist them in supporting the growth and development of teachers and leaders in the commonwealth; second, the tool is expected to develop consistency and coherency across districts, systematizing the ways in which teachers and leaders are supported and evaluated in the state of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012).

The MMSEE, a state level, federally funded initiative is a clear example of a top-down policy and the research literature has many examples of the challenges of implementing top-down policy (Cuban, 2012; Fullan, 2007; Honig &Hatch, 2004; Odden, 1991). Therefore, using the conceptual framework of sensemaking to examine how COAs and principals make sense of MMSEE and communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals provided valuable data. Further, this study's concentration is timely and relevant because supporting and evaluating principals is at the heart of educational improvement, and understanding the interplay between COAs and principals sheds light on the most effective ways to support those leaders.

The two research questions explored in the study focus on the complexities of sensemaking and communication in the relationship between COAs and school principals. Each

question probes an aspect of the relationship and the understandings that inform the relationship. The two research questions are:

1. How do central office administrators and principals make sense of the evaluation process with the new MMSEE standards?

2. When communicating with principals, how do central office administrators frame their understanding of MMSEE?

The first question focuses on developing the understanding of the relationship between COAs and principals. Mitchell Chester, the Commissioner of Education for the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, explicitly stated that the purpose of the regulations outlined in MMSEE is first and foremost to promote the growth and development of leaders and teachers (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). Through semi-structured interviews, this study explored the ways in which both COAs and principals described their understanding of MMSEE. This data helped to examine the synergies and inconsistencies in the interpretation of MMSEE by CAOs and principals. Furthermore, it examined how those interpretations relate to the Commissioner's expectations.

The second question builds on the first by examining how COAs frame and prioritize elements of MMSEE in their communication with school principals. The framers of MMSEE provided district leaders with the freedom to adopt the model as a whole, adapt it to their local context or revise their existing system to ensure that it aligns to the educator evaluation regulations (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012). The flexibility allows for a range of potential outcomes, and it is valuable to know how COAs framed their priorities to principals. The interviews of COAs and principals demonstrated the degree to which the areas that have been prioritized match the supports provided to principals by CAOs.

These two research questions helped to uncover how COAs and principals in EPS made sense of MMSEE and how they communicated understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals. The data gathered through interviews of COAs and principals provided an understanding of how COAs framed their understanding of MMSEE and how they communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals.

Literature Review

This single case study of how COAs communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals is informed by the research literature on sensemaking. The conceptual framework of sensemaking provides a deep understanding of the cognitive process that COAs use to communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals. Weick (1995) theorizes that sensemaking is well named because, literally, it means the making of sense. In essence, sensemaking is how we come to understanding and how we give meaning to things in our daily lives. Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) define sensemaking theory as "turning circumstance into situation that is comprehended explicitly in words and that serves as a springboard into action" (p. 409). Simply put, sensemaking is just what its name connotes; it is how we make sense of things in our world. Sensemaking is how we give meaning to things that are ambiguous through our words and actions.

In Weick's (2001) work on sensemaking in organizations, he explains that, "to make sense is to focus on a limited set of cues, and to elaborate those few cues into a plausible, pragmatic, momentarily useful guide for actions that themselves are partially defining the guide that they follow" (Weick, 2001, p.460). Weick (2001) also makes the case that it is impossible to separate sensemaking from decision-making because decision-making is essentially a result of how we make sense of things. Weick (2001) explains that sensemaking is usually an attempt to grasp a developing situation in which the observer affects the trajectory of that development.

Weick (1995) writes about the seven properties of sensemaking as being "grounded in identity construction, retrospective, enactive of sensible environments, social, ongoing, focused on and by extracted cues, and driven by plausibility rather than accuracy" (Weick, 1995, p. 17). Although sensemaking includes all these components, the aspect of sensemaking that is explored in this study is enactment. Weick (1998) explains that, "the term enactment is used to present the central point that when people act they bring events and structures into existence and set them in motion" (p. 306). In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of how COAs and principals in EPS are making sense of MMSEE, it is important to learn what COAs have put into action to implement MMSEE. The literature shows that one does not arrive at action in isolation but that one's prior knowledge, beliefs and values influence how one makes sense of the world and are the factors that contribute to action. Finally, unpacking the ways in which COAs enact the policy of MMSEE by examining how they communicate their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals will provide a broader understanding of the topic.

Prior Knowledge

Expanding on the research of Weick, Spillane, Reiser and Gomez (2006) make the argument that when we make sense of situations, we do not approach those situations from a blank slate; how we make sense of events is deeply influenced by our prior knowledge. Spillane et al. (2006) contend, "An individual's prior knowledge and experience, including tacitly held expectations and beliefs about how the world works, serve as a lens influencing what the individual notices in the environment and how the stimuli are processed, encoded, organized and subsequently interpreted" (Spillane et al. 2006, p. 49). Prior knowledge and experience serve as an important part of how we make sense of the world, and often this is why common language does not equate common understanding. Each person's interpretation depends on his or her prior

knowledge and schema that he or she brings to new situations which influences the sensemaking process.

Contributing to this body of research, Coburn (2005) and Rigby (2015) examine the role of prior knowledge in principals' enactment of reading polices in their respective schools. In studying how two principals enacted reading policies in their school, Coburn (2005) makes the argument that the decisions that principals make are deeply influenced by their prior knowledge. She writes, "More specifically, school leaders drew on their own understanding of reading instruction as they interpreted the meaning and implications of policy messages" (Coburn, 2005, p. 489). For example, one principal who believes that reading should be taught as a discrete set of skills based on her experience creates a culture in her school for that work to happen. This principal's prior knowledge from her years as a reading instructor caused her to believe that reading should be taught through a specific set of instructional practices. This principal believed that the best way to ensure proper sequence and coverage of the necessary reading skills was to follow the textbook, which she characterized as an instructional tool (Coburn, 2005). Her understanding of reading instruction was shaped by her background of teaching reading in the late 1980s and early 1990s when this kind of approach to the teaching of reading dominated in schools (Coburn, 2005).

Another principal, who had a different understanding of how reading should be taught, framed her understanding to teachers based on her prior knowledge and her previous work in schools. This principal viewed teaching as providing students with strategies to make meaning and encouraged her teachers to use the textbooks as a resource. She informed her teachers that they should be positioning the standards as the curriculum and not focus all their attention on the textbook (Coburn, 2005). Coburn (2005) explained that the principal drew on her expertise as a

math facilitator to help her understand the teaching of reading. In this interpretation, the principal used the socio-constructivist theories of learning guiding mathematics reform during that time and emphasized that reading instruction should be similar to how students are expected to approach solving mathematical problems. In that, teachers should provide students with the skills and strategies to make meaning of text similar to how they approach mathematical problem-solving (Coburn, 2005). Coburn (2005) contends that school leaders' prior knowledge shapes the social, structural and cultural conditions for teacher learning in schools.

In another study, Rigby (2015) illustrates that principals' prior knowledge also influenced how they enacted teacher evaluation. In examining how two principals use their prior knowledge to enact teacher evaluation in their schools, Rigby (2015) writes that how principals approach the task of evaluating teachers is rooted in their conception of what it means to be an instructional leader. Often their knowledge of the role of an instructional leader is grounded in their learning and prior experience in schools. Rigby (2015) contrasts the experiences of two principals whose training to become principals influences how they enact teacher evaluations in their schools. In one school, the principal's sensemaking was shaped by his participation in training led by noted school leader Kim Marshall, whose philosophy around teacher evaluation is for principals to engage in the work of developing teachers' practice instead of evaluating them out of the profession (Rigby, 2015). In this study, the principal's prior knowledge and belief that teacher evaluation is a process of supporting teachers in developing their craft and pedagogical skills was instrumental in him revising the teacher evaluation process in his school (Rigby, 2015). The principal's training with the New Leaders program deeply influenced how he enacted teacher evaluation in his school. Instead of following the district's punitive evaluation program, he enacted an evaluation system similar to his teaching from the new school.

Rigby (2015) presents the case of another principal whose enactment of teacher evaluation was shaped by her prior knowledge. Principal Sabina's view of teacher evaluation was directly influenced by her participation in the Principal Preparation program at the University of California, Berkeley (Rigby, 2015). Rigby explains that this principal, who completed her administrative training at a graduate school focused on social justice, brought that experience to her work as a principal (Rigby, 2015). As a result of this training, Principal Sabina enacted an evaluation program for her teachers focused on teacher growth and not on student outcomes, an idea rooted in her social justice teaching (Rigby, 2015). In these two case studies of how principals enacted teacher evaluation, their ultimate decision-making was based on their prior knowledge, which was grounded in their principal training program. Thus, it is evident that one's prior knowledge plays a large factor in how one makes sense of a situation that ultimately influences what gets enacted. Prior knowledge is not the only factor that impacts sensemaking; individuals' work in collaborative groups also plays a major role in the sensemaking process.

Collaborative Work

Adding to the body of research on sensemaking, Coburn (2006) and Louis and Robinson (2012) separately make the argument that sensemaking results when individuals work in collaborative groups. They note that sensemaking is an ongoing interaction among members of one's community. Coburn (2006) argues that, "Sensemaking does not refer solely to individual processes; rather, it is social in two key respects" (Coburn, 2006, p. 345). The two aspects being that sensemaking is collective in the sense that it is shaped by one's interaction in groups and situated in the context in which the sensemaking occurs (Coburn, 2006). In this way, one's social interactions and peer group, along with the context in which an individual is working, influences how they make sense of the world around them. Louis and Robinson (2012) argue that

sensemaking is an ongoing interaction, offering the notion that sensemaking is a collective process that one engages in with members in one's community. Ancona (2012) also contributes to this understanding of sensemaking by making the argument that sensemaking is inherently collective and not effective when individuals work in isolation.

Coburn (2001) discusses that the ways in which teachers work in professional learning communities impacts the ways in which they make sense of reading policies. Coburn (2001) argues that teacher networks in schools both in formal and informal settings play an important role in shaping the sensemaking process and the kinds of sense that is made about new policies to be enacted (Coburn, 2001). When teachers are confronted with new messages about how they should enact a new initiative, they talk with their peers to make meaning of new information. In one example, Coburn (2001) discusses how, after attending a district-level professional development on reading instruction, teachers left the professional development and made decisions about how they were going to teach reading to their students based on their conversations with colleagues and not what they had learned at the training. The fact that teachers attended a professional development with an expert on reading instruction did not influence what was implemented in the classroom. What teachers implemented in their classrooms was based on the shared understanding that they arrived at with their colleagues about what constitutes appropriate reading instruction. Coburn and Russell (2008) posit that teachers working in groups play an important role in policy implementation in schools. They support the notion that teachers in schools with strong professional communities are more likely to make changes to their instructional practices.

Enactment

Weick, Sutcliffe and Obstfeld (2005) make the argument that, "if the first question of sensemaking is, 'what is going on here?' the second, equally important question is directly about action" (p. 412). Weick explains that, "Enactment is used to preserve the central point that when people act, they bring events and structure into existence and set them in motion" (Weick, 1988, p. 306). Therefore, enactment is essentially about what individuals do to put their understanding in motion. Although Weick (1988) agrees with the notion that enactment is putting understanding into action, he cautions a simplistic explanation of enactment. He makes the argument that enactment is more nuanced because enactment is more than producing visible results and the process of enactment is not fixed. In examining the complexities of enactment in the sensemaking process, Weick (1995) writes that the first caution of enactment is operating on the assumption that all actions are tangible and visible. "First, remember that creating is not the only thing that can be done with action" (Weick, 1995, p. 37). He argues that action can be stopped, abandoned or postponed or those actions may be simply confined to the planning process. "The caution, then is to be careful not to equate action with a simple response to a stimulus, or with observable behavior, or with goal attainment" (Weick, 1995, p. 37). The sensemaking aspect of enactment is crucial in that enactment is not necessarily about successful implementation but that one has attempted to put one's thinking into motion.

The second warning that Weick (1995) issues when examining the property of enactment in the sensemaking process is that enactment is not a fixed process. "People seem to need the idea that there is a world with pregiven features or ready-made information, because to give up this idea of the world as a fixed and stable reference point is to fall into idealism, nihilism, or subjectivism, all of which are unseemly" (p. 37). Weick challenges the concept of requiring

certainty, instead suggesting that, to understand sensemaking, one needs to give up the expectation of a fixed process.

Lastly, Weick (1995) makes the contention that, "People who study sensemaking pay a lot of attention to talk, discourse and conversation because that is how a great deal of social contact is mediated" (Weick, 1995, p. 41). This aspect of sensemaking plays a very strong role in the larger process. Further, Weick et al. (2005) discuss the interdependence of talk and action in the sensemaking process.

> Talk occurs both early and late, as does action, and either one can be designated as the starting point to the destination. Because acting is an indistinguishable part of the swarm of flux until talk brackets it and gives it some meaning, action is not inherently any more significant than talk, but it factors centrally into any understanding of sensemaking (Weick et al., 2005, p. 412).

As Weick describes here, the actions associated with sensemaking are closely tied to the communication of understanding.

Communication

The research on sensemaking provides a strong argument that one's prior knowledge and one's social group influence how an actor makes sense of situation, and communication is also an essential factor in the sensemaking process. According to (Weick et al., 2005), "When we say that meaning materializes, we mean that sensemaking is importantly, an issue of language, talk, and communication. Situations, organizations and environments are talked into existence" (p. 409). Sensemaking is how we give meaning to things that are ambiguous through our words and actions. According to the authors, sensemaking theory further states that talk and action are not

activities that happen in isolation but simultaneously. In this conception of sensemaking, action

and talk are treated as cycles rather than as a linear process. Sensemaking further connotes that

one is constantly in the process of making meaning as one continues to engage in discourse and

uses words as a catalyst for action. In her discussion of the implementation process, Hill (2006)

writes about the role that language plays in how individuals and organizations construct meaning

or make sense of policy. Their understanding is closely related to how policy creators deliver

their messages. She asserts that, "linguists observe that particular terms have no inherent

meaning. Instead, they signify ideas or actions ascribed to them by communities whether those

communities are speakers of a language, workers in a technical field or children on a playground

(Hill, 2006, p. 67). As individuals work to make sense of situations, one has to also be cognizant

of how language is used and what gets communicated because those factors also contribute to

how we make sense of situations.

Ancona (2012) writes that sensemaking is more than how we structure the unknown to

operate in it, but it is also how we use conversation to make meaning of situations. In essence,

we don't know what we think until it is communicated (Anderson, 2006). Viewed in this way,

communication is not simply an event that takes place inside an organization where people

transmit oral and written messages; rather, it is a continual process of creating and/or affirming

the social reality that makes the organization (Rafferty, 2003). As MMSEE is a new policy, it is

important to gain a deep understanding of how COAs are making sense of the system and how

they are communicating their understanding and expectations in order to improve the practice of

COA evaluation of principals' work in EPS.

Methodology

Qualitative methodology best addresses the nuances and complexity of how COAs communicate their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to support the growth and development of principals in EPS; it was therefore the appropriate methodology for the study. The study utilized purposeful sampling to gather the data necessary to answer the research questions. Purposeful sampling best met the needs of the study because the questions required a focus on specific district roles. It was important to ensure that the focus was on COAs who are responsible for supporting the work of principals' growth and development in EPS. Maxwell (2013) supports the notion that purposeful sampling is essential to ensure that the researcher is not relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance but focusing on individuals who can provide the answers to their research questions.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

Data collection and data analysis were conducted simultaneously. Maxwell (2013) asserts that the benefit of analyzing data while it is being collected is that it gives researchers the opportunity to test emerging themes. The initial stage of analysis began by listening and reading the interview transcripts (Maxwell, 2013). After listening and reading the data, an analytical memo was completed and then the coding process began. All interview data were coded through the conceptual framework of sensemaking. Specifically, there were codes for how COAs enacted MMSEE and how they communicated their understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals. The first set of questions focused on what the district's priorities were for principal support and evaluation. The goal of these questions was to focus on the message that was being

communicated from COAs to principals about the evaluation process. Secondly, the goal was to

compare the message that COAs were making about the evaluation process and then comparing

how principals were understanding that message. In short, it was important to note if COAs and

principals have a common language and common understanding about the district's priorities for

principal support and evaluation. Additionally, interviews were coded for professional

development opportunities that EPS was conducting to ensure implementation of MMSEE. The

interviews were also coded for support systems that COAs had put in place to ensure that

principals were focusing on their responsibilities as school leaders. To assist with the coding

process, Dedoose was used to facilitate data analysis.

Findings

COAs and Principals Lack Consistent Understanding of MMSEE Implementation

The data from the study provided important insights into the sensemaking property of

enactment that is crucial to this study. The findings from the interview data reveal that COAs and

principals lack consistent understanding of the ways in which MMSEE is being implemented in

EPS in three major ways: the professional development offered by Research for Better Teaching

(RBT), development of the School Improvement Plans (SIP) and additional administrative staff

at the elementary level. COAs have made sense of MMSEE by enacting RBT, SIP and adding

assistant principals at the elementary level. Although principals spoke eloquently about the

changes that have happened in the district, rarely did they make the connection between these

initiatives and the implementation of MMSEE. Thirteen of the 14 principals interviewed spoke

positively about RBT, but only seven of the principals were able to make the connection between

the district's use of RBT to facilitate the implementation of MMSEE. All six of the COAs

interviewed were able to describe the impact of RBT and its connection to the implementation of

MMSEE. Similarly, there was a disparity between the use of the SIP process and the implementation of MMSEE. COAs talked about the SIP process as facilitating the implementation of MMSEE, whereas principals rarely spoke about the work that they were doing with the SIP process. Lastly, COAs spoke about adding additional staff at the elementary level to ensure that principals can focus on the instructional work but, again, few principals made the connection between additional administrative staff and the implementation of MMSEE.

Research for Better Teaching. Research for Better Teaching (RBT), a professional development organization with over 30 years of work focused on improving teacher practice and school leadership, was chosen by the Superintendent of EPS to support the implementation of MMSEE. RBT is connected to two facets of sensemaking theory because it provides an opportunity for principals in EPS to engage in collaborative learning and it is the professional development that COAs are enacting to support the implementation of MMSEE. The superintendent has a global understanding of the relationship between implementation of MMSEE and the district's professional development priorities. The superintendent has made sense of MMSEE by focusing on professional development related to instruction, a key element of Standard I: Instructional Leadership of MMSEE standards rubric. Specifically, the superintendent stated that his first step was to bring RBT, a well-known professional development provider, to engage principals in a collaborative learning opportunity to ensure that they have common language and a shared understanding of the elements of effective instruction. More explicitly, the superintendent stated, "through RBT, we have been able to work on calibrating instructional leadership. That's been one of the most important things that we have done." The superintendent sees an explicit link between professional development about instruction and implementation of MMSEE. This understanding is shared by other members of

the central office team. The Director of Curriculum and Staff Development stated that, in order to bring consistency to leaders' understanding of effective instructional practices in EPS, RBT was leveraged as a partner to ensure that all principals were trained in analyzing teaching for student results. "That was the first thing to have a common language about, what good teaching and learning looks like. I think that has been a huge driver." This focus on examining effective instruction is a significant feature of MMSEE because all principals must be proficient in Standard I: Instructional Leadership of MMSEE in order to meet overall proficiency. Additionally, the Director of Bilingual Education stated that EPS has invested in quality professional development focused on improving instruction for all students. She further added that the professional development from RBT is directed at improving the practice of principals and administrators in EPS. As indicated, all of the COAs were able to articulate the relationship between RBT and the implementation of MMSEE, but most principals were not able to connect the RBT professional development focused on improving teacher practice with their development as instructional leaders.

Table 2.2

CAO and Principal Understanding of RBT

Role	Usefulness of RBT Professional Development	RBT Connected to MMSE Implementation
Elementary School Principal	X	X
Elementary School Principal	X	X
Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal	X	

Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal	X	
Elementary School Principal		
COA	X	X
COA	X	X
COA	X	X
COA	X	X
COA	X	X
COA	X	X
COA		
Secondary School Principal	X	X
Secondary School Principal	X	X
Secondary School Principal	X	X
Secondary School Principal	X	X

Thirteen of the 14 principals interviewed spoke highly of the training that has been provided by RBT, but they didn't make the connection between the teacher-focused professional development and their development as instructional leaders. For example, an elementary school principal stated that he had no idea what the district priorities were in terms of the implementation of MMSEE. "The short answer is I don't know what the district's priorities are because there's very mixed messages. For instance, we were a year behind the state, so everyone in the commonwealth or most everyone implemented that change a year before we did." Later in the interview, that same principal stated, "They sent us to RBT training with Cassandra Sperber (a pseudonym) who is wonderful. I learned a tremendous amount. The work that Cassandra did with us led to us training our staff on writing objectives. Now we are focused on writing language objectives through WIDA." These statements suggest that the principal does not see a direct link between the coaching and support through RBT as part of the district's strategy to implement MMSEE. Other elementary principals also shared this view of applauding the work of

RBT in the EPS but not seeing how the work of RBT is connected to the district's efforts to implement MMSEE.

Secondary school principals echoed the sentiments of the elementary school principals in recognizing the impact of RBT, but not seeing an alignment to MMSEE implementation. When describing the RBT professional development, one principal stated, "Probably the best thing that happened was that they developed a real, strong relationship with Research for Better Teaching, hands down the most impactful thing." Although this principal viewed the work of RBT as effective in the district, he stated that the district does not have a clear mechanism for how it communicates understanding and expectations of MMSEE implementation. He stated, "There's no dialogue, there's no conversation, there's an assumption that I'm connected to the district." Another secondary principal lauded the work of RBT but again did not see the correlation between RBT and the district's efforts to implement MMSEE. This principal credited RBT with giving her the vocabulary and the tools to support her teachers in improving their instructional practice. Specifically, she stated, "About three years ago I took Analyzing Student Results, it's an RBT course. That's developed my language about how to do that." Although, this principal talked about the ways in which RBT provided her with the vocabulary to engage teachers in conversation about their practice, she also claimed that she does not know the district's priorities for supporting and evaluating principals. Thus, it appears that the central office team and principals lack consistent understanding of MMSEE implementation. The central office team views the district's work with implementing MMSEE and the related professional development as a way of providing resources and support to school principals. They understand the professional development as direct support to the principals and expect that their ownership of the focus on instruction will positively impact their practice and in turn their evaluation. COAs

and principals also lacked consistent understanding of how the SIP is being used to facilitate the implementation of MMSEE.

   School Improvement Plan. The interviews demonstrated that the School Improvement Planning process is directly related to the enactment property of sensemaking because it is a strategy that COAs have used to facilitate MMSEE implementation. Principals in EPS are required to develop a robust SIP, in which they create goals and action steps based on their school data and discuss ways in which they will enact those goals to improve student performance in their school as part of the district's implementation of MMSEE. The Chief Academic Officer meets with principals monthly to discuss and provide support to ensure that they are meeting the goals outlined in their SIP. She discussed her work with principals in this way:

> They have to do a profile of the school. They have to analyze data. They have to look at the leading and the lagging indicators in terms of student performance. They have to encourage and create that momentum along school improvement, and so much of this connects back to the different elements here.

This focus of using data to drive instructional practice is an essential component of MMSEE implementation that is also shared by other members of the central office team. The Assistant Superintendent views the work of developing the SIP as bringing coherence to the process of the MMSEE implementation in EPS. He sees the SIP working in the following ways:

> There's at least two to four specific goals that should be part of the school improvement plan. Every goal that I look at should be tied to what they're looking to do as a school, which is tied to the district improvement plan." You should be able to see that thread ... If we're working on making students' thinking visible, if we're working on communication

with parents, if we're working on name the topic, you should see that, it should be a

priority for the district.

The Assistant Superintendent later stated that the goal of SIP process is not to create additional

work for principals but rather to ensure alignment between the school's improvement efforts and

the district's priorities. Four of the seven COAs interviewed made explicit connections between

the School Improvement Planning process and the implementation of MMSEE, but only five of

the14 principals interviewed were able to make this same kind of connection.

Table 2.3

COA and Principal Understanding of SIP and MMSEE Implementation

Role	SIP and MMSEE Implementation
COA	Y
COA	Y
COA	Y
COA	Y
COA	N
COA	N
COA	
Elementary School Principal	Y
Elementary School Principal	Y
Elementary School Principal	Y
Elementary School Principal	Y
Elementary School Principal	N
Elementary School Principal	N
Elementary School Principal	N
Elementary School Principal	N
Elementary School Principal	N
Secondary School Principal	N
Secondary School Principal	N
Secondary School Principal	N
Secondary School Principal	N
Secondary School Principal	Y

As a result of this disconnect, principals do not recognize how COAs are framing their understanding of MMSEE. Several principals noted that they do not have a clear understanding of how COAs are implementing MMSEE after stating that they are developing SIP in which all stakeholders in their school community are participating. One elementary school principal stated, "My teachers are great and sometimes they have better ideas than I do, so I do ask for their participation in the School Improvement Planning process." At the secondary level, a principal stated that she used the SIP to focus on the needs in her building. "I always try to take a look in the building, what's missing. These are all the things that we're doing well, but then at the end of the day who are we not serving?" Standard I of the evaluation rubric for principals calls for schools to use data to drive instructional practices and, by completing the SIP and putting it in action, EPS is doing that work. Although principals are creating the SIP with members in their community, they did not view the correlation between SIP and implementation of MMSEE. Another area of disconnect between COAs and principals with the implementation of MMSEE was through the additional support that is provided within the elementary schools.

Additional administrative staff. In addition to the professional development that has been provided through RBT and schools' efforts with the School Improvement Planning Process, EPS has also provided assistant principals in all elementary schools to ensure that principals can focus their attention on the work of improving teachers' practice. Although, this shift has happened at the elementary level, elementary school principals still contended that they were unaware of the ways in which MMSEE is being implemented. One school principal at the elementary level stated that, initially, he did not have additional administrative support. He stated, "I didn't have that (assistant principal) for the first 2 1/2 years. I also have a behavior specialist in the building that I didn't have. So we've built in some supports that have then helped

me to focus more on big picture things." Another principal at the elementary level stated that the help of the assistant principal has helped her to focus more of her time on being an instructional leader. The MMSEE indicators call for principals to focus their efforts on improving instructional practices by observing teachers and providing feedback on a regular basis; providing all principals with an assistant principal allows them to get this work done.

COAs and Principals have Different Views on Communication of MMSEE

The study revealed that CAOs and principals interpret the MMSEE differently. A number of principals noted that communication was a problem in EPS. One elementary school principal noted, "I think one of the pieces that keeps coming up for us in elementary from what I'm hearing from my colleagues is the lack of communication, like we're the last to know." Another principal at the secondary level stated that, "It's all over the place, the communication is all over the place in the district." In analyzing how COAs and principals describe how they communicate understanding and expectations of MMSEE to principals, it became evident that COAs and principals have different views on communication of MMSEE. COAs described the informal process of communication, whereas principals talked about the more formal aspects of communication.

Informal communication. The superintendent who also evaluates the secondary principals described engaging in constant conversation with principals about the work in their buildings. He described the strategy for staying connected by participating in weekly walkthroughs in schools. The superintendent discussed his learning walks with principals in this way: "We talk about what they are doing to move the needle in their building. I go into classes with them, because it causes us to have direct conversations about their strongest or weakest teacher, and what they might need." When asked if the conversations that he has with principals

translates into written documentation, the superintendent stated that he marvels at people who provide a written document after each classroom observation. The superintendent then stated that he keeps a running log of his meetings with principals and that, by engaging in conversations with them, he is indeed providing feedback to principals on the implementation of MMSEE. Although these kinds of conversations were happening frequently, and the goal of MMSEE is to have multiple opportunities to engage in conversation about instruction, principals believe that COAs were not communicating with them about MMSEE. One principal noted, "So a lot of the feedback that I get from him was more informal and conversation rather than written down." This incongruity about communication in EPS stems from the fact that COAs and principals do not have a common understanding about what constitutes formal communication; COAs believe having conversation is sufficient, whereas principals are expecting written documentation.

Formal communication. In discussing the formal communication that principals receive, they talked about the summative evaluation that occurs at the close of the school year. One secondary school principal noted, "We meet two or three times a year. Show me what you're doing, what's going on. It's very helpful." Another secondary school principal stated that formal feedback only happens at the end of the school year. "Formal feedback, once a year usually in July." At the secondary level, another principal stated that the only time that she received formal communication about her performance was at the end of the school year. "At the end of the year, during the summer, we have a summative meeting." She also stated that the summative evaluation was written in generalities and did not provide specific recommendations of how to improve her practice.

Similarly, principals at the elementary level commented on the lack of formal communication about the evaluation process. One principal noted that, in the past three years, he

has had a different evaluator and each time the summative evaluation was different. He stated that his last summative evaluation had nothing to do with the work that was happening in his school. "The year before I got an evaluation from that person…. who had never met with me, didn't even talk to me about anything, and he wrote up a bunch of things that were meaningless." While all the principals interviewed spoke at length about the issues that exist with communication in the district, the elementary principals were hopeful that communication will improve. The elementary principals stated that they have a new evaluator who has already started communicating in writing about the ways in which support and evaluation will be conducted this year.

The goal of MMSEE is for COAs and principals to have multiple opportunities to engage in conversation about practice. Although these conversations about instruction are happening on a regular basis through the weekly meetings and district walkthroughs, principals don't see these as conversations. Principals are expecting that the conversation that COAs will have with them will mirror the conversations that they have with teachers. Due to this lack of common understanding, COAs and principals do not have a consistent understanding of how COAs are communicating with them about the evaluation process.

<div align="center">**Discussion**</div>

Analyzing the data through the lens of sensemaking provides important insights into the ways that district leadership in EPS must make their thinking transparent in order to bring coherency and alignment to the implementation of MMSEE for principals. Honig and Hatch (2004) write that top-down policy is successful when central office leaders and school leaders are able to work in partnership to "craft" coherence. They define crafting coherence as central office leaders and school leaders working in partnership to negotiate the fit between external demands

and the school's own goals. The superintendent and his leadership team must articulate the district's vision for implementing MMSEE and illustrate that all the work that they are engaged in as a community is helping to achieve its stated goal of improving teaching and learning for all students. The most effective way for district leadership to engage in this work is by bridging the district-led initiatives with the work that is currently happening in schools. For example, the RBT professional development has been impactful for principals and, therefore, COAs must explicitly communicate why the district invested in RBT. The district selected RBT to ensure all principals in EPS would have a common language and understanding about what constitutes effective instructional practice that aligns to Standard I of MMSEE rubric for administrators. By bridging the work of the schools with the district-led professional development provided through RBT, principals will be able to make the connection and realize that RBT was intentionally selected to focus their attention on improving teacher practice.

In addition to bridging the professional development of RBT with principals' work of observing instruction and providing feedback to improve practice, COAs must also bridge with the work of the School Improvement Plan with how principals are using data to drive instructional practice. A key feature of MMSEE is the expectation of data use to improve academic outcomes for all students. By aligning the work of the SIP with its focus on data to schools' practice of examining data to improve practice will help to ensure that principals are making the connections to the SIP process and the work that they are doing in their school.

Lastly, district leaders must clearly outline to principals how they define communication as it relates to the implementation of MMSEE. Principals need to know that the cycle of observation and feedback that they receive from COAs will not mirror the work they do with teachers. When COAs explicitly communicate with principals at the walkthroughs, they can help

principals make the connection with how MMSEE is being implemented in EPS. From the data

analysis, it appears that the district leadership in EPS has done a great deal to implement the

MMSEE but has not effectively communicated how all the initiatives align to support the

implementation of MMSEE.

CHAPTER 4 – DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS[3]

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

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

---

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

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

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

<div align="center">

Synthesis of Findings

</div>

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

feedback, and other collaborative structures influenced principal perceptions of COA evaluation and support.

Interpretation and Implementation of MMSEE

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

The dissertation-in-practice team quickly found that MMSEE implementation for principals was only one of many initiatives happening simultaneously throughout EPS. Many COAs and principals indicated that they were overloaded with the extent of change. With all that was going on, the superintendent strategically prioritized the improvement initiatives that were most closely connected to the instructional core. Thus, the district's MMSEE adoption for teachers took top priority. Not only did MMSEE provide a standardized model of effective

teaching practice, it also provided principals a toolkit to assess instruction collaboratively and to

support teachers in improving their practice. To take full advantage of these tools, the

superintendent and other COAs required extensive training for principals and school-based

administrators. Although the MMSEE provided similar supports for COAs to supervise and

evaluate principals, the superintendent placed a low priority on principal evaluation.

 The district's lack of urgency about principal evaluation manifested in a number of ways.

First, there was no standardized evaluation process for principals. Only the superintendent and

assistant superintendent evaluated principals, and it became clear that each supervisor evaluated

principals differently. The superintendent emphasized informal site visits and verbal feedback,

while the new assistant superintendent focused on self-reflection and goal-setting processes.

 Additionally, during the absence of an assistant superintendent the previous year,

principal evaluation responsibilities were not distributed to other COAs while the search for a

new assistant superintendent was underway. Instead, the superintendent, by himself, attempted to

supervise and evaluate all 14 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 on at least 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, principal perceptions of the SIP process were divided.

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

appreciative of the extra staffing, principals in Level 1 and 2 schools expressed concerns regarding unequal levels of support.

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

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

Communication

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Principal 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 principal 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 who 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 principal 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 who 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 who 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 student performance data, participation in whole school professional development, and the use of content coaches to support teacher 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 the learning opportunities afforded to them by COAs.

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

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

Recommendation 1: Develop an Evaluation Implementation Plan for Principals

At the time of this study, EPS had neither created nor fully implemented all the components of MMSEE. EPS's implementation has evolved from a set of informal evaluation practices dependent on individual evaluator 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 teacher 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 principal 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 is 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 rollout 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 ongoing 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 supports or enhances these district assets. If the mandate does not support the ongoing work, COAs need to engage stakeholders in a transparent process of building a new and agreed upon alignment.

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

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

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

EPS and this study, COAs could build upon successes — and avoid pitfalls — when implementing mandates, be they driven internally or externally.

<div align="center">**Directions for Further Study**</div>

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

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

In EPS specifically, and after another year of MMSEE use, researchers could revisit the district to follow up with principals to see how the first full cycle of the MMSEE went, in their opinion. COAs could also be re-interviewed to see if their perceptions of the tool and its usefulness had changed. Beyond the tool itself, researchers could understand if through this collective work relationships had improved, feedback had a more desirable impact on practice,

and principals had an increased voice in the design of their professional growth and development opportunities.

Perspectives on District Leadership

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

The Importance of a Communication Plan

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

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

Fair Does Not Mean Equal

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

Joint Instructional Leadership Opportunities

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

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

Growth-Oriented, Reciprocal Feedback

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

The Link Between Relational Trust and Distributive Leadership

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

organization similarly, as both flow and spread non-linearly and reciprocally through interrelationships.

Noting the striking parallels among the constructs of distributed leadership and social capital, Harris (2012) constructed a compelling argument that envisions fundamentally new roles for district and school leaders. District leaders should stop thinking of their organization as a hierarchy and remove themselves from their position at the top. Instead, they should view the district as a network, place themselves in the middle, and refocus their core role as developing the leadership capacities and capabilities of others, thus transforming schools to meet 21st century needs.

Limitations

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

One District

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

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

Timing of Study

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

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

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

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

Limitations to Qualitative Studies

While there are many benefits of qualitative research, there are also limitations including, but not limited to, data interpretation by team members, interpretation of interview questions,

interpretation of interview data, 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 him or her during interviews. While researchers were, on occasion, asked for clarification during interview sessions, how a question was internalized, understood, and interpreted was ultimately up to the interviewee and influenced the final answer given to researchers.

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

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

References

American Education Research Association. (2011). *Code of ethics*. Retrieved from

       http://www.aera.net/AboutAERA/AERArulesPoliciesProfessionalEthics/tabid/10200/Def

       ault.aspx.

Ancona, D. (2012). Sensemaking: framing and acting in the unknown. *In The Handbook of*

       Teacher Leadership. California, Sage Press.

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.

Anderson, M.H. (2006) How can we know what we think until we see what we said?: A citation

       and citation context analysis of Karl Weick's the social psychology of organizing

       Organizational Studies, (270 1675-1692).

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). Leadership Practices of Principals and Perceptions of Central Office

       Support: 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.

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.

Bryk, A. S., & Schneider, B. (2002). *Trust in schools: A core resource for improvement*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.

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.

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.

Coburn, C. E. (2001). Collective sensemaking about reading: How teachers mediate reading

      policy in their professional communities. *Educational evaluation and policy*

      analysis, *23*(2), 145-170.

Coburn, C. E. (2005). Shaping teacher sensemaking: School leaders and the enactment of

      reading policy. *Educational policy*, *19*(3), 476-509.

Coburn, C.E. (2006). Framing the problem of reading instruction: Using frame analysis to

      uncover the microprocesses of policy implementation. *American Educational Research*

      Journal, 43(8), 343-379.

Coburn, C. E., & Russell, J. L. (2008). District policy and teachers' social networks. *Educational*

      Evaluation and Policy Analysis, *30*(3), 203-235.

Copland, M. A., & Honig, M. I. (2010). From operations to teaching and learning. *School*

      Administrator, 67(11), 11-14.

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.

Davis, S. H. & Hensley, P. A. (1999). The politics of principal evaluation. *Journal of Personnel Evaluation in Education, 13*(4), 383-403.

Desimone, L.M., & LeFloch, K.C. (2004). Are we asking the right questions? Using cognitive interviews to improve surveys in education research. *Education Evaluation and Policy Analysis*. (24)4, 1-22.

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.

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.

Freeman-Wisdom T. N. (2016). Supporting Principals with 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. (Doctoral dissertation). Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA.

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.

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.

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.

Hallinger, P. (1992). The evolving role of American principals: From managerial to instructional

to transformational leaders. *Journal of Educational Administration, 30*(3), 35-48.

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.

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.

Hill, H.C. (2006). Language matters: How characteristics of language complicate policy

implementation. (p.65-82) in Honig, M.I. (2006). *New directions in education policy*

implementation, New York, NY: State University Press.

Honig, M.I. & Hatch, T.C. (2004) Crafting coherence: How schools strategically manage

      multiple external demands. *Educational Researcher*. 33(8), 16-30.

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.

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.

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., Patten, S., & Jantzi, D. (2010). Testing a conception of how school leadership influences student learning. *Educational Administration Quarterly, 46*(5), 671-

Leithwood, K., Louis, K. S., Anderson, S., & Wahlstrom, K. (2004). *How leadership influences student learning: A review of research for the Learning From Leadership Project.* New York: Wallace Foundation.

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.

Marriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Marzano, R. J., Waters, T., & McNulty, B. A. (2005). *School leadership that works: From research to results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education. (2012). Massachusetts model system for educator evaluation. Retrieved from HTTP://www.doe.mass.edu/edeval/model/PartI. Pdf.

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2015

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.

Maxwell, J.A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: An interactive approach.* Thousand Oaks,

      CA: SAGE.

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

      Educational Administration Quarterly, (47), 332-352.

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. (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: 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.

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 Secondary School Principals. (2013). Retrieved from

   https://www.principals.org/.

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods (2nd ed.*). Newbury Park,

   CA: Sage Publications.

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.

Rafferty, T.J. (2003). School climate and teacher attitudes toward communication in secondary

   schools. American Secondary Education, 31(2), 49-70.

Rigby, J. G. (2015). Principals' sensemaking and enactment of teacher evaluation. *Journal of

   Educational Administration*, *53*(3), 374-392.

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.

Seashore Louis, K., & Robinson, V. M. (2012). External mandates and instructional leadership: school leaders as mediating agents. *Journal of Educational Administration*, *50*(5), 629-665.

Sevelius, A. C. (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. (2004). Standards deviation: How schools misunderstand education policy. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

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., Reiser, B.J., & Gomez, L.M. (2006). Policy implementation and cognition: the role of human, social and distributed cognition in framing implementation. (p. 47-104). In Henig, M.I. (2006). New directions in education policy implementation, New York, NY: State University Press.

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.

U.S. Department of Education. (2009). Race to the Top program executive summary. Retrieved

        March 22, 2015, from www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/executive-summary.pdf.

Waters, T., & Marzano, R. (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. (2004). Leadership that sparks learning. *Educational*

        Leadership, 61(7), 48-51.

Weick, K. E. (1988). *Enacted sensemaking in crisis situations*. National Emergency

        Training Center.

Weick, K. E. (1995). *Sensemaking in organizations*. (Vol. 3). Sage.

Weick, K. E. (2001). *Making sense of the organization*. Blackwell Publishers Inc.

Weick, K.E., Sutcliffe, K.M., & Obstfeld, D. (2005). Organizing and the process of sensemaking.

        Organization Science, 16(4), 409-421.

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 Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
J. Kimo Carter: jkimocarter@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
Christine Copeland: copeland.boston@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
Tanya Freeman-Wisdom: tfwisdom@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
Alexandra Montes McNeil: amontesu25@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX
AC Sevelius: ac.sevelius@gmail.com Telephone # (XXX)XXX-XXXX

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

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

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

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

Signatures/Dates:
- Study Participant (Print Name) :   Date _____

  Participant or Legal Representative Signature :   Date _____

APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Questions for Central Office Administrators and Principals

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

Interview Questions, Principals

Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:
 	
What are the district's priorities for principal evaluation and support?
 	
   • How are they determined?
 	
How do they relate to the state's model system?
 	
Do you believe that the model system is an effective tool to support principals? Why or why not?
 	
How do your central office administrators communicate with you about the evaluation process?
 	
   • Formally? Informally?
 	
Do you feel that you have a common understanding with your supervisor about the evaluation

process? Why or why not?

What are your interactions with COAs, in general?

Questions on instructional leadership:

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

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

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

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

How do central office administrators support you with instructional leadership?

- What other support do you receive?

Describe the type of support you need with instructional leadership.

Questions on leadership practices:

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

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

How do these leadership practices align with MMSEE?

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

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

Questions on feedback:

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

feedback.

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

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

What is the purpose of the feedback?

- What is the nature of the feedback?

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

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

Questions on professional relationships:

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

How has MMSEE affected your professional relationships with your supervisors?

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

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

Interview Questions, Central Office Administrators

Questions on the model system for educator evaluation:

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

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

What leadership qualities do you look for in your principals?

- How do they know these are the prefered 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.*