Building Principals' Capacity for Distributed Leadership

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Introduction

The Ohio Teacher Leadership Framework (Ohio Department of Education [ODE], 2017) emphasizes the importance of teacher leaders in driving improvements in schools and among students. The framework also highlights that teacher leadership is most effective in schools and districts where there is a culture of distributed, or shared, leadership. Distributive leadership recognizes that leading and managing a school requires multiple individuals and that leadership is spread across these individuals in formal and informal ways (Diamond and Spillane, 2016; Spillane, 2006; Spillane, Camburn & Pareja, 2008).

Accordingly, The Ohio Standards for Principals encourages teacher leadership and shared (or distributive) leadership to enhance the capacity of principals while also recognizing the talents and expertise of teacher leaders (ODE, 2017). Therefore, the resources identified in this document may be useful to school- and district-level staff in Ohio that are interested in building the capacity of principals to share leadership with teacher leaders.

Resources for Building Principals' Capacity for Distributed Leadership

1. **James Spillane's resources on distributed leadership,** available at
    https://distributedleadership.northwestern.edu/.

James Spillane, a professor at Northwestern University, is a leading researcher on distributed leadership. Over the last decade or more, he and his colleagues have been developing a framework that emphasizes the distributive nature of school leadership and management practice.

Through his distributed leadership study website, under the "Materials" tab, Spillane offers access to three curriculum modules, including PowerPoint presentations, facilitator manuals and participant workbooks.[1] These curriculum modules, which are based on Spillane's and his colleagues' research, are designed to engage school staff in diagnostic and design work using the distributed perspective. The modules explain the distributed perspective to participants and help participants apply this framework in their own schools.

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[1] To gain access to the modules, interested persons must complete and submit the form provided on the website.

School leaders might also be interested in exploring some of the papers and presentations made available under the "Publications" tab, which further explain the concept of distributed leadership; for example, *Distributed leadership* and *Broadening the educational capability conversation: Leveraging the social dimension.*

2. **Bain Report: Transforming Schools: How Distributed Leadership Create More High-Performing Schools,** available at http://www.bain.com/Images/BAIN_REPORT_Transforming_schools.pdf.

The Bain report makes the distinction between creating leadership roles for teachers and creating a system of distributed leadership. It notes specifically that, although many school systems recognize the need to reduce the instructional leadership burden on principals and have tried in recent years to create more leadership capacity through a wide variety of initiatives such as engaging more teachers in leadership roles, adding assistant principals and hiring instructional coaches, they are not creating a system of distributed leadership. These efforts are not a substitute for a well-designed school leadership model—one that distributes the primary responsibility for developing instructional excellence among a team of skilled, empowered educators who have the time and authority to work closely with teachers on a day-to-day basis.

Given the above observations, in Chapter 4: A Model for Stronger Leadership, Bain offers five principles to develop and implement a distributed leadership model. A short summary of each principle follows:

Principle 1: Make a bet on a leadership model. Ideally, school districts, with significant input from principals and teachers, decide on a common approach to distributed leadership for system-wide implementation, while also allowing some latitude for school-level customization of the model.

Principle 2: Create and strengthen leadership capacity. This principle highlights districts' need to identify ways to develop and strengthen leadership roles, both in quantity and quality, in school buildings; as well as school principals' need to better share responsibility in order to increase teachers' leadership capacity.

Principle 3: Focus leaders on improving teaching and learning. A distributed leadership model should position leaders to provide support and feedback that help teachers develop their skills and positively impact students; and also ensure there are enough leaders to support every teacher in the building.

Principle 4: Create teams with a shared mission. This principle discusses the importance of establishing opportunities for teachers to collaborate, as well as the role of teacher leaders in building teams and creating spaces for educators to share knowledge, address challenges and work toward common goals.

Principle 5: Empower leaders with time and authority to lead. This principle discusses the importance of districts and school leaders providing adequate time and authority to leaders to fulfill their roles and maintain an effective distributed leadership model.

Additionally, at the end of Chapter 4, the report outlines a set of best practices in moving toward a distributed leadership model. This list of best practices is informed by districts that are experiencing some success in developing and implementing distributed leadership models, and is broken down by phases of development—design, pilot and rollout.

3. **Success at the Core Professional Development Toolkit: Leadership Development Modules**, available at https://www.teachingchannel.org/leadership-teams-module-sac.

Success at the Core is a free professional development toolkit designed to help teams and teachers understand, embrace and implement a vision of effective school leadership and teaching that prepares all students for success in college and careers.

The toolkit includes seven Leadership Development modules, each structured as a group learning experience for school-wide, content-specific and grade-level teams. However, the Leadership Teams and Quality Instruction module (the first module listed) specifically prepares leadership teams for their important role in guiding and directing the improvement of instruction. It provides tools to help teams build a shared understanding of quality instruction, direct their efforts to support such instruction and sustain an instructional focus.

This module includes five video resources:

- A History of Teaming;

- Leadership Teams Pursue Powerful Instruction;

- Norms for Leadership and Learning;

- Meeting Students' Needs Through Leadership Teams; and

- Leadership Teams Transform a School.

When viewing these resources, the website suggests users consider the following reflection questions:

- Does our school community share an understanding of quality instruction?

- How do leadership teams (including school-wide, content-specific and grade-level teams) promote instructional improvement at our school?

- What sustains an instructional focus at our school?

The module also includes handouts that help leadership teams work together through the module, and a facilitator guide that aids an in-house facilitator in leading teams through the module's components.

4. **Learning Forward and The Wallace Foundation: The Principal Story: Learning Guide,** available at https://learningforward.org/publications/the-principal-story-learning-guide - .U2er9CjhPj6.

During the past decade, there has been a growing recognition among educators and policymakers that school principals must be instructional leaders who ensure that high-quality teaching occurs in every classroom. In culling lessons from over a decade's worth of research on what effective principals do well, The Wallace Foundation has identified five key practices, and Learning Forward has developed a web-based professional learning guide to illustrate the five practices. The guide is intended to help those who prepare and support aspiring and current principals probe these essential practices; it also includes a facilitator's guide. The five principles are:

- Shaping a vision of academic success for all students;

- Creating a climate hospitable to education;

- Cultivating leadership in others;

- Improving instruction; and

- Managing people, data and processes to foster school improvement.

In particular, Unit 3: Cultivating Leadership in Others, helps participants identify principal behaviors essential to building leadership capacity in others. The unit includes a set of links to follow and instructions on how to move through the unit. It takes approximately 4.5 to 5.5 hours to complete the unit.

5. **Public Impact's Toolkit for Principals: How to Lead a School-wide "Team of Leaders"** A description of this resource is available at https://www.opportunityculture.org/2016/06/09/how-to-lead-a-schoolwide-team-of-leaders-tools-for-principals/, and the set of tools are available at http://opportunityculture.org/tools-for-principals-in-opportunity-culture-schools.

In June 2016, Public Impact released a set of tools to help principals plan for, lead and support a team of teacher leaders, who in turn support and guide a school's teachers. This toolkit complements Public Impact's existing resources for implementing "Opportunity Culture" schools—a model that extends the reach of excellent teachers and their teams to more students.

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Resources included in the toolkit are organized into three sections:

- **Planning Tools**, which help principals and teacher leaders set goals with specific targets and measures of success all year long, recruit and identify teacher candidates, and develop a communication plan.

- **Implementing, Monitoring and Improving Tools**, which help principals and teacher leaders monitor school-wide actions against established goals and plans, as well as outline the critical elements of instructional leadership and instructional excellence.

- **More Resources**, where additional resources are provided for teachers and teacher leaders, particularly multi-classroom leaders (see the *Building Teacher Leaders' Capacity for Facilitating Adult Learning* resource). The Planning Tools and Implementing, Monitoring and Improving Tools sections additionally provide:

  - **An Action Planner for Principals in Opportunity Culture Schools:** The planner covers the actions essential for an Opportunity Culture principal throughout the year, breaking the tasks into four seasons. Each season has a one-page checklist that includes linked tools to lead a school of empowered teachers focused on a culture of excellence for all.

  - **A School Roles and Responsibilities Chart:** This tool helps principals clarify and keep track of the school's multi-classroom leaders and their teams, charting accountability, time spent teaching and leading, and specific responsibilities.

  - **An Organizational Chart Template:** This tool creates a visual snapshot of the school's instructional leadership and teams, simplifying communication of major roles.

6. **Taking Charge of Principal Support: An In-Depth Look at NYC Leadership Academy's Approach to Coaching Principals,** available at https://www.nycleadershipacademy.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/coaching-guide.pdf.

This report provides an overview of the principal coaching program of the New York City Leadership Academy (NYCLA). The guide, published in 2015, shares NYCLA's successes and lessons learned while coaching principals in New York City and in cities and states throughout the country. It is designed to help others involved in supporting principals think through important elements such as establishing clear leadership standards; aligning support to learning needs; and recruiting, training and effectively deploying a cadre of principal coaches

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