

**MNPS ACHIEVES**

# *An Evaluation Report*



*Prepared by*



**Annenberg  
Institute for  
School Reform**

AT BROWN UNIVERSITY

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The Annenberg Institute for School Reform is a national policy-research and reform-support organization, affiliated with Brown University, that focuses on improving conditions and outcomes for all students in urban public schools, especially those serving disadvantaged children. The Institute's vision is the transformation of traditional school systems into "smart education systems" that develop and integrate high-quality learning opportunities in all areas of students' lives – at school, at home, and in the community.

The Institute conducts research; works with a variety of partners committed to educational improvement to build capacity in school districts and communities; and shares its work through print and Web publications. Rather than providing a specific reform design or model to be implemented, the Institute's approach is to offer an array of tools and strategies to help districts and communities strengthen their local capacity to provide and sustain high-quality education for all students.

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## INTRODUCTION

Under the leadership of Director of Schools Dr. Jesse Register, the Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) has embarked on a major reform effort featuring a multi-pronged plan for transformational change. A central aspect of this effort is the implementation of MNPS Achieves, a transformational change leadership model that has engaged more than 100 leaders throughout the district and community in a systemic process to improve student achievement in the district.

In April 2010, the Annenberg Institute for School Reform at Brown University began a two-and-a-half-year documentation and evaluation of MNPS Achieves, designed to capture the reform as it is evolving.<sup>1</sup> While student achievement results are the ultimate goal, it is also essential to clearly document how reforms develop, what factors influence them, who plays critical roles, and how context affects implementation. This kind of tracking is designed to provide formative feedback to district leaders for making midcourse corrections as the reforms are rolled out, as well as summative assessments of impact.

In this report, based on data collected over the last several months, as well as extensive document review and news monitoring, the Institute provides a detailed description of the reform to date, identifies implications for MNPS, and describes how we are continuing to monitor the reform effort as it deepens in the 2010-2011 school year.

## MNPS Achieves Vision

On May 7, 2009, MNPS Schools Director Jesse Register laid out his initial vision for improving MNPS. Dr. Register was just four months into his superintendency and had decided to embark on a multi-pronged reform effort, as one of his advisers described it, “to jumpstart the reform” of MNPS and “to create . . . the urgency to find someplace to get traction.” Dr. Register said of his strategy:

We were in state takeover, on the edge of that. The district had been low performing for six years and hadn’t met NCLB standards. There were a number of areas of concern of low performance, so the challenge [was] to address all of them at the same time.

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**“The district had been low performing for six years and hadn’t met NCLB standards. . . . The challenge [was] to address all [areas of concern] at the same time.”**

— Dr. Jesse Register, Superintendent, MNPS

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At that time, the effort that would eventually become MNPS Achieves was known as the Transformational Change Leadership Model. This model was developed by Dr. Register, building on his previous leadership experience as superintendent of three districts, including Hamilton County, Tennessee. During his tenure in Hamilton County, Dr. Register partic-

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<sup>1</sup> While evaluation efforts formally began in April 2010, the Institute has been involved with MNPS Achieves on multiple levels since the spring of 2009, having both authored a *Meta-review of Recent Reports on Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools* and provided technical assistance to the reform effort overall. Institute staff providing technical assistance and those conducting the evaluation inform each other’s work but do not overlap in other ways.

ipated in the Change Leadership Group at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education, directed by Tony Wagner. This team-based focus on effective change leadership in schools and districts, along with Dr. Register's experience in building a quality teaching force, building school-based support systems, and improving the instructional leadership of principals, contributed to the central tenets of the Transformational Change Leadership Model in MNPS.

The major focus of the model (which eventually would be rebranded as MNPS Achieves), was a multi-pronged approach entailing the development of eight Transformational Leadership Groups (TLGs) – teams of administrators, teachers, community members, and parents with knowledge and expertise in the following areas:

- Performance of Disadvantaged Youth
- Performance of Students with Special Needs
- Performance of English Learner Students
- Performance of Middle and High School Students<sup>2</sup>
- Human Capital System
- Communications System
- Information Technology/Data Management System
- Central Office Organization

The Human Capital, Communications, Information Technology, and Central Office Organization TLGs are sometimes characterized as *process* groups, designed to improve systems and processes across the district, while the remaining groups are characterized as *performance driven*.

A Change Leadership Group (CLG) was also appointed. The CLG was described as a steering committee to advise the superintendent, monitor the progress of the TLGs, and ensure coherence across the work of the TLGs. As an adviser to the superintendent described it, “The CLG would be monitoring the progress of the [TLGs]. There had to be planning to action in every TLG.”

Members of all TLGs met initially in early May 2009 for orientation and to begin to define each team's work. Each TLG committed to meet at least monthly, with quarterly progress reports to the CLG. Though the focus of each group differed according to its particular topic, all groups were charged with finding practices that support quality instruction and learning. Participants were given a set of overall goals (see Appendix A), as well as a set of guidelines that exhorted the TLGs to use data-driven decision making, build upon existing plans and research, search for effective practices, move plans into realistic action, engage and develop ownership of change efforts, oversee implementation of plans, and report on progress in improving performance results.

A document distributed on June 4, 2010, just over a year into the reform (see Appendix B), described the purpose of MNPS Achieves as:

to bring the best thinking and experience of district leaders and community leaders together to determine MNPS and community transformational efforts that will provide every student with the foundation of knowledge, skills, and character necessary to excel in higher education, work, and life.

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<sup>2</sup> This group was later divided into two TLGs: Middle School and High School.

The purpose of the TLGs was broken into five components in this document, which slightly reframed the goals given to the groups in May 2009, yet maintained a consistent message:

- Design and monitor implementation of transformational changes that increase student performance.
- Design and monitor implementation of transformational changes that increase adult performance.
- Create strategic recommendations for the schools director and/or board approval for implementation.
- Plan and support implementation of a reform agenda around key performance drivers, using a distributed leadership approach.
- Ensure collaborative efforts between community and district leaders that result in improved public perceptions of the quality of the MNPS educational system and in MNPS becoming the first choice of families.

This statement of purpose, combined with a set of beliefs for the district overall and MNPS Achieves specifically, shows a consistent focus over time on the central elements of increasing student and adult performance, distributing leadership among and building collaboration between multiple district and community stakeholders, building ownership in MNPS and beyond, and moving multiple reform efforts from planning to implementation. Taking effective practice to scale was also infused into the beliefs and guidelines, indicating an explicit intent to achieve not only pockets of excellence, but also reforms that benefit all students and adults in the district.

The superintendent's transformational leadership approach continues to be at the core of MNPS Achieves. However, the reform effort also includes several important elements that are led through other structures and policy venues, such as the senior management team, schools director, and school board. Some of these – notably, a central office reorganization that moves resources, including instructional support personnel, closer to schools, as well as the infusion of support from national, state, and local partners – occurred prior to the launch of MNPS Achieves. Other related reforms occurred simultaneously. These included:

the recruitment and movement of principals; working with national experts to predict student progress trajectories so that appropriate interventions can be designed; and a focus on capacity building (in addition to the work of the Human Capital TLG) that includes principal leadership development and ongoing, job-embedded professional development for teachers and administrators.

With the exception of principal leadership development, these related reforms were not evaluated as part of this report. Phase II of this evaluation will likely include more data collection on school-based professional development and supports.

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Taken together, these efforts, along with the Transformational Leadership Groups, aim to address issues of technical expertise and implementation, as well as concerns about a central office culture that we described in

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**“Dr. Register believed in . . . creating and modeling a collaborative culture, high-quality professional development, and building capacity of the adults. We constantly had in our minds . . . what would move a collaborative culture?”**

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— *An adviser to Dr. Register*

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2009 as “fragmented and counterproductive” (AISR 2009, p. 6). The planning structures were designed not only to develop and implement plans for reform efforts, but also to help create a culture of service in MNPS by

building the capacity of the individuals participating in the groups, distributing leadership, and empowering them to make decisions. An adviser to Dr. Register said:

Collaborative culture is what Dr. Register believed in – creating and modeling a collaborative culture, high-quality professional development, and building capacity of the adults. We constantly had in our minds . . . what would move a collaborative culture?

## Theory of Action

Our first research question was: What is the theory of action of the reform effort?

A theory of action is a description of the concepts and assumptions underlying a program or reform effort that describe how and why the ideas should work (Weiss 1995). Our approach is to use theory-based evaluation, in which we draw out the theory of action and then develop instruments and methods that test whether the theory of action holds.

We had multiple conversations with Dr. Register and consultant Gloria Frazier around articulating the theory of action. Dr. Frazier has contributed to the development and is facilitating multiple elements of MNPS Achieves, including TLG capacity building and serving as co-chair of the CLG with Dr. Register. The theory of action was defined through these conversations and by reviewing documents that describe MNPS Achieves, observing related meetings, and reviewing the work on transformational leadership of Dr. Tony Wagner, whom Dr. Register cites as an influence in his own professional development and thinking (e.g., Wagner et al. 2006). This theory of action has gone through several iterations and feedback cycles in an attempt to precisely capture the best thinking and intentions behind the reform effort’s design.

Figure 1 depicts how MNPS Achieves, including the work of the TLGs and CLG, is designed to:

- Create collaborative culture (Snipes, Doolittle & Herlihy 2002) within the district and between the district and community through having a shared mission and vision, distributing leadership, making decisions informed by data, and communicating interactively.



- Build capacity (Sigler & Ucelli-Kashyap 2008) of TLG members, district and community-based leaders, and school-based staff to lead transformational change efforts through a range of leadership and professional development, as well as by infusing the district with capacity and support from external partners.
- Study, design, and implement transformational change ideas and practices.

The theory is that all these efforts are focused on improving individual and organizational performance, which, in turn, leads to the ultimate outcome and purpose for the effort: improving student performance. The two-way arrows in Figure 1 depict the ways in which these elements have iterative relationships.

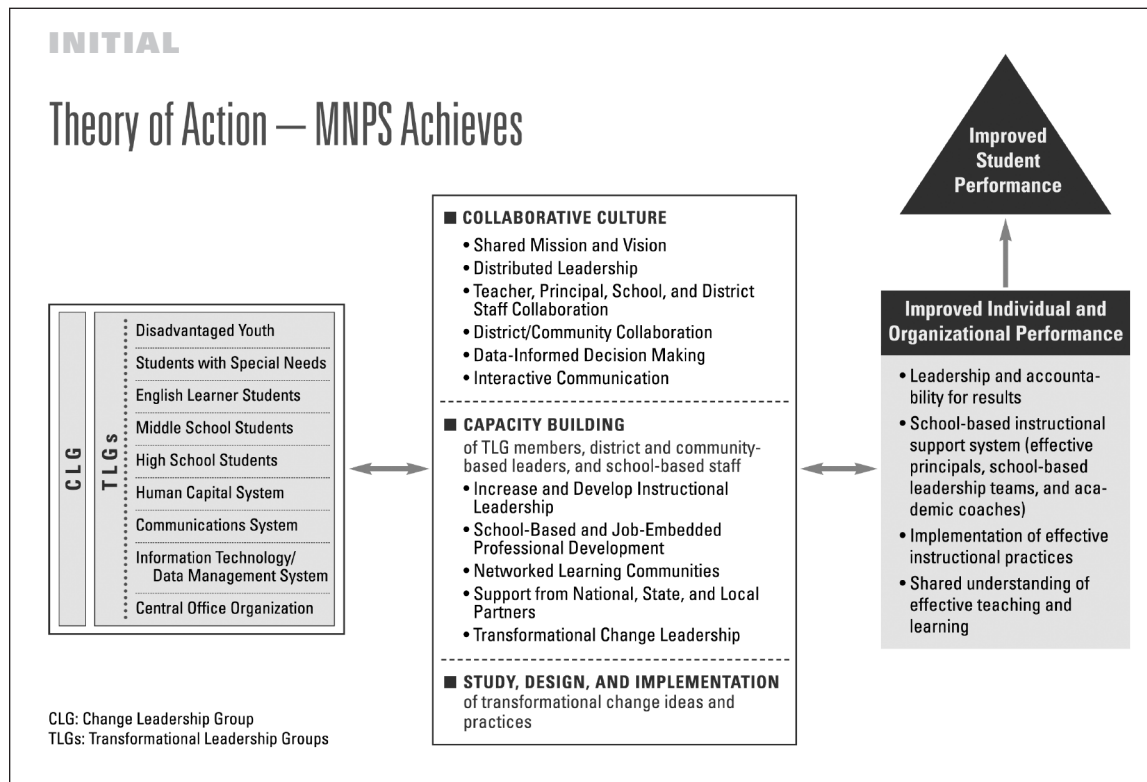
The work of the CLG and TLGs feeds into the elements of collaborative culture, capacity building, and development of transformational change ideas and practices and is, in turn, improved by their continuing development. Similarly, improved individual and organizational performance helps to develop collaborative culture, build capacity, and contribute to the development of transformational change ideas and practices.

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FIGURE 1. Theory of action, MNPS Achieves



We received feedback on this theory of action at the CLG and TLG quarterly meeting that was held in August 2010. There were many suggestions, but no consensus about changes to the theory of action. We will revisit the theory of action throughout our data collection and will refine it through further conversation and feedback with the designers of MNPS Achieves as well as those who are experiencing its implementation on the ground.

## Methods and Framework for Analysis

To further understand and test this theory of action, the Annenberg Institute developed a series of research and observation protocols to guide our research. These questions encompass a particular focus on the elements of central office culture improvement listed in Figure 1 and touch upon several of the other elements, as well (see Appendix C).

We collected data from multiple sources through interviews, observations, and surveys. Twenty interviews were conducted, including the designers of MNPS Achieves, at least one member or co-chair from each TLG, and leadership-level central office staff (all of whom were participants in TLGs or the CLG). We conducted observations of multiple TLG quarterly meetings, co-chair meetings, and school board meetings and also observed

three principal leadership institutes. Finally, we analyzed the results of surveys distributed to central office staff and school administrators.<sup>3</sup> Thus, the data we drew on for this evaluation included information specific to the TLGs and CLG, as well as a broader group of central office staff and principals (through the survey and leadership institute feedback).

A five-member team from the Annenberg Institute reviewed and analyzed this data with the aid of qualitative data analysis software. Initial findings and implications from this analysis were shared with district leadership and TLG members at a TLG quarterly meeting on August 4, 2010; feedback collected at that meeting is included in this report.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The surveys were developed in collaboration with MNPS staff and administered by MNPS. The district survey draws on the work of Stanford University's evaluation of the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative, <[www.stanford.edu/group/CRC/survey\\_instruments.htm](http://www.stanford.edu/group/CRC/survey_instruments.htm)>. All survey results reported here are preliminary. See Appendix D for a list of observations and interviews conducted.

<sup>4</sup> TLG members were given a feedback form via which they could anonymously comment on the theory of action, major findings, and next steps of the reform effort and evaluation. Fifty-seven forms were collected, and feedback from them is included throughout this document.

## FINDINGS

In addition to the draft Theory of Action, our findings are structured around three major research questions:

- What is the role of the CLG and TLGs in the reform effort? How do they function?
- What was the culture of the district prior to MNPS Achieves? Has this culture changed? If so, how, and can any of that change be attributed to the TLG structure?
- What are the early impacts/outcomes of MNPS Achieves work? Has there been an impact on teaching and learning?

The findings related to the TLGs and CLG are drawn primarily from interview data and observations of quarterly and co-chairs meetings. Findings pertaining to the system more generally are drawn from responses to the survey of central office staff and building administrators, as well as observations of and feedback from three principal leadership institutes.

### Transformational Leadership Groups: Structure and Function

Initially, the TLGs were designed with just a few parameters: to meet monthly, to bring together MNPS employees with external, community-based leaders, to report progress quarterly to the CLG, and to focus on a critical area in need of improvement. The overarching goals and guidelines mentioned in the section MNPS Achieves Vision were given to all groups, along with specific areas of focus and a general time frame (ranging from one to three years).

According to MNPS Achieves designers, this flexibility was provided so that individual groups could determine the most effective ways of working to create transformational change. One designer said:

There was always an assumption that membership could grow, structures could be different, time frames for work could be different. . . . We're not laying models on them — it's not a highly structured

process. They basically have been given a problem, redefined into one or more focus areas, and a reasonable time frame with flexibility. There are very few parameters other than meeting once a month.

Each group was assigned two co-chairs — one district leader and one community member — along with an initial membership ranging roughly from ten to fourteen people, with community members and MNPS employees approximately equal in number. MNPS employees included central office staff, teachers, and principals, while community members included representatives from city and state agencies, local businesses and nonprofits, colleges and universities, community-based organization leaders, and parents (see Appendix E for a list of TLG co-chairs and members).

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*— An MNPS Achieves designer*

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Seven of the nine groups opted to form sub-committees to focus on various strands of their work. As work developed, many groups extended their outreach and added new members – both district employees and community members – to increase coherence and expertise. However, while certain TLGs such as the Performance of Disadvantaged Youth group

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**“The system has not done a stellar job at exposing people to best practices outside of the system. . . . Collectively, our knowledge is just building.”**

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*— A study participant*

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had thriving membership, others struggled with member engagement. In some cases, inconsistent attendance led to a feeling of stunted progress, as members had to

“catch up” on what they missed from previous meetings before moving forward. Several interviewees noted in spring 2010 that the year mark of the initiative provided an opportunity to take stock of membership and reconfigure as needed.

### *Capacity*

The focus of MNPS Achieves, as described in the theory of action, is capacity building. Initially, perceptions of existing capacity varied across TLGs. While some co-chairs felt that they had a successful mix of expertise at the outset or were able to add members who fleshed out the capacity of their groups, others felt that their groups still could be stronger. A few co-chairs mentioned that they were lacking specific role-based expertise and

would like to engage members such as strong teacher leaders, principals at various levels, faith-based leaders, higher-education faculty, or more community members with specific expertise in their area of focus. One participant framed the issue relative to the existing capacity in MNPS overall:

Relative to the system, [the expertise in the group is] high. Relative to what’s going on around the country in top-notch schools, I would rank it average. The system has not done a stellar job at exposing people to best practices outside of the system. . . . Collectively, our knowledge is just building.

Some co-chairs bolstered capacity by adding additional members from related MNPS departments to core TLG membership or sub-committees. As noted in the next section, this strategy in many cases was designed to aid in embedding the work in the departments that would be accountable for implementation.

The inclusion of community members is a central tenet of the TLG structure. In general, this was seen positively, as a way to bring in capacity, knowledge, experience, and perspective that might be missing in various areas, if those community members were engaged and active. One district-based co-chair noted:

My [community-based] co-chair brings up things that I don’t know or don’t think of – what he sees from the outside, looking in.

Another interviewee said:

We have a lot of good things going, new ideas brought to the table – the community has added that. [There’s] nothing wrong in bringing a new set of eyes to the

process. I don't know if we would have gotten that any other way, if it were the school district only.

One TLG member who provided feedback on the evaluation's draft findings noted that external expertise was critical for an additional reason – external participants were “less tolerant of inaction” and thus helped groups to move beyond the “status quo” that might otherwise stifle progress.

### *From Planning to Implementation*

In 2009, the focus of the TLGs' efforts was on planning. By the February quarterly meeting, which marked a midpoint for the first year of MNPS Achieves, most groups had begun to lay out a specific agenda for action. As a CLG member described at the meeting:

There are three things that the Board is looking for from TLGs: Is there a compelling vision being presented? Are there action steps? And will they lead to change? We need to step lively.

Six TLGs aligned very closely with central office departments, with the leader of that department serving as a co-chair. The other TLGs were not directly connected or had work that spanned across departments. In some cases, this had bearing not only on the way in which the work was organized, but also in clarity around lines of authority and processes of implementation.

For those TLGs that did closely align with a department, the path to implementation usually seemed fairly clear. With district decision-makers serving as members or co-chairs of these TLGs, plans could often be shepherded through the system in an organic fashion or

be absorbed by the department. One co-chair said:

I used [the TLG] as my launching pad for . . . improvements that needed to be made in the district. Some of the things that came up in the TLG . . . tied in with what I was tasked with. I made [my work and the work of the TLG] one and the same. I developed my strategic plan [in the TLG].

Some TLG members found that clarity around implementation depended on the scope of their plan and budget implications. One said:

To some degree, we can carry out [our plans] without having to jump through hoops. There

are other recommendations that we need to go through the district for approval. Some of the things that are easy tweaking you can make internally – we're able to implement. Other things that involve money or other departments are much more sluggish.

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**“We have a lot of good things going, new ideas brought to the table — the community has added that. . . . I don't know if we would have gotten that any other way, if it were the school district only.”**

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— A study participant

For the three TLGs that span multiple district departments or whose internal leader did not serve as co-chair of the group, lines of authority were less clear, and the process of moving

to implementation could be more protracted. One TLG member noted that, at the phase in which recommendations were ready to be implemented, the process was still fairly ambiguous, though the group was beginning

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**“Those at [the] school level on our TLG found it almost impossible to ‘get out of the building’ to be a productive contributor to the TLG, but those are the people implementing the work at ‘ground level’!”**

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— *A study participant*

to identify whom to approach to move from design to implementation.

The need for increased engagement from school-level staff, particularly as groups are mov-

ing toward implementation, was a recurring theme in the feedback on initial evaluation findings. The need for additional teacher presence, specifically, was mentioned several times. One

TLG member asked:

Is there enough school-level representation on TLGs? Those at [the] school level on our TLG found it almost impossible to “get out of the building” to be a productive contributor to the TLG, but those are the people implementing the work at “ground level”!

### *TLG Accomplishments*

With TLGs having met consistently for a year, notable accomplishments have been made in studying, designing, and, in some cases, implementing transformational change ideas and practices. Though not comprehensive, the following descriptions offer highlights of the work of each group.<sup>5</sup>

#### **Disadvantaged Youth**

The Disadvantaged Youth TLG expanded its outreach across stakeholder groups via a subcommittee structure that engaged upwards of thirty-five additional members. It was often noted that the charge of this group was particularly wide-sweeping, and the group has been commended for “getting their arms around” an area with such breadth. The group researched, compiled, and made recommendations to the superintendent and executive staff on national best practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment related to MNPS’s disadvantaged population; developed a proposal for the implementation of full-service community school pilots in MNPS; and developed specific recommendations related to student mobility in concert with the Mayor’s Student Mobility Task Force.

#### **Students with Special Needs**

The Special Needs TLG supported the planning and implementation of an inclusionary model via professional development on inclusive practices and differentiated instruction for more than 4,000 general and exceptional educators. They launched conversations with school leaders to develop a shared vision for an integrated service delivery model and set a target to increase inclusion of students with disabilities in general education by 10 percent

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<sup>5</sup> These descriptions were compiled from a chart of TLG highlights distributed at the June 2010 principal leadership institute, with supplementary information from interviews, meeting observations, and additional TLG reporting documents.

over two years. The group also analyzed the under-identification of students of color in gifted and talented programs and is developing procedures to increase identification of these students.

### **English Learner Students**

The English Learner (EL) TLG recently received an appraisal on the district's English Learner services from George Washington University and is designing practice changes in response to the report's recommendations. EL staff also met with elementary principals to collaboratively design a school-specific service model and have begun the decentralization of the EL program and services. The EL TLG also connected with the Special Needs TLG around better serving students with special needs who are also English learners.

### **Middle School Students**

The Middle School TLG initially focused on developing, vetting, and revising a vision for middle school reform districtwide, based largely on the tenets of the middle school movement found in the National Middle School Association's (NMSA) position paper *This We Believe*. The TLG studied *This We Believe* and other related literature and also conducted conversations and book studies with principals, school teams, and central office staff. The group is examining critical issues and best practices to address them; they also developed and executed a retreat for middle school leadership teams based on NMSA essential attributes.

### **High School Students**

The High School TLG initiated a plan for "The Academies of Nashville," which will entail the development of plans for academies in all comprehensive high schools. A public kickoff event with partners was held, and the first academy sponsorship was launched. The group also developed a vision of and measurable criteria for successful high school graduates in MNPS. The group expanded its outreach to schools by engaging principals in conversations about academic identity and planning; they also engaged some students and faculty in dialogue by holding their monthly meetings in various high schools.

### **ASSET/Human Capital System**

The original Human Capital TLG merged with the Superintendent and Mayor's Teacher Effectiveness Initiative to form ASSET – Achieving Student Success through Effective Teaching. A committee structure was created to divide work and redeploy members. The group presented initial recommendations to the school board for a redesign of human capital strategy based on its analysis of the district's needs in the areas of induction, support, professional development, and retention.

### **Communications System**

One major focus of the Communications TLG has been on internal communications. Through analysis and meetings with district and school staff, this group shifted a vision of internal communications to include a strong customer service orientation and articulated the role of all district employees in being responsible for communication. The group also implemented new structures and processes to streamline and clarify communi-

cations internally and externally, including a searchable employee directory, improved calendar, new employee orientation, and front-line customer service training at central office and in schools.

#### **Information Technology/ Data Management System**

The IT TLG prioritized its work into high-leverage activities and “low-hanging fruit” and worked on both types of issues. Some major accomplishments include improved teacher and school administrator access to data through implementation of a data warehouse, training, and related supports. The group also developed and finalized a data governance policy and drafted a data management policy to support quality access, use, and security. The group also held FirstCamp Nashville – an event designed to engage high school students in technology by allowing them to present and discuss their ideas with help and guidance from community leaders. A hundred students attended. The IT TLG also sought input from MNPS departments and other TLGs regarding needed support, particularly that which was related to instruction.

#### **Central Office Organization**

The COO TLG spearheaded the reorganization of the central office, which included the implementation of school-based instructional leadership through the redeployment of more than 200 positions, as well as the creation of cluster-based support teams. The Magellan Project with CSS International entailed analyzing, redesigning, and training staff in improved business service practices. The TLG also held initial work sessions on developing collaborative culture across the executive team and central office departments, as well as between central office and schools.

#### *Role of the CLG*

The articulated purpose of the CLG was to act as a steering committee and adviser to the superintendent about the transformational efforts of MNPS Achieves, monitor the quarterly progress of the implementation of MNPS Achieves, alert the system to community resources or programs that could connect to TLG work, and assess the coherence across the work of the TLGs to ensure that meaningful system change is occurring. The CLG meets quarterly with the TLGs to monitor progress, provide feedback, and ask strategic questions to move the work forward. During the first year of MNPS Achieves, the CLG met monthly to discuss updates on TLG efforts, TLG reports to the school board, new opportunities, connections to other community efforts, and consideration of adjustments needed in the TLG work. Going forward, the CLG will have these meetings quarterly (the day after the TLG/CLG quarterly meeting) and will also present progress reports semi-annually to the school board.

While some interviewees understood the CLG’s role as a steering committee and oversight or monitoring group, several needed clarification about who was part of this group, and others weren’t clear as to the CLG’s purpose beyond hearing report-outs from TLGs. Feedback from the August 2010 quarterly meeting underscored this finding. It was noted that quarterly meetings were the primary point of interface with the CLG and that there was little or no communication with the CLG outside of those meetings. Some interviewees found CLG feedback to be helpful, if



limited. One participant said, “I appreciate the questions they ask – they’re not so close to the work.” Another appreciated the CLG’s realistic view of designing and implementing transformational changes:

Although there was a sense of urgency [from the CLG], there was a sense of patience, too. [They realized] this is not something that is going to happen overnight. . . . The focus was on the importance of coming up with workable solutions to help the district improve.

While some co-chairs were content with their level of contact with the CLG, others felt that they might benefit from the opportunity to periodically have more in-depth feedback and guidance from this group. A TLG member commented, “This seems to, at this point, require more work on [the] part of TLGs than return.” One interviewee said:

I didn’t think [the CLG was] that helpful for a lot of the first part of this last year, in terms of the work we were doing. We’d present to them – it very much felt like doing an . . . oral presentation, and then you get a grade and nothing else. I didn’t feel like we were getting enough feedback or collaboration with them. A few would fire off questions . . . but [there was] not good enough back and forth.

Though the importance of sharing information across TLGs was noted, nearly all participants agreed that full-day quarterly meetings have not been an efficient use of time. While co-chair meetings were generally seen as valuable, planning them on the day following the quarterly meeting was noted to be inconvenient, particularly for community members.

## Changing the Culture of MNPS

As described in the theory of action, a critical part of MNPS Achieves is changing the culture of the district

so that it is more collaborative. The areas that both the literature and our informants continually emphasized include several hallmarks of such a culture: communication, shared mission and vision, data-informed decision making, and distributed leadership. In this section, we summarize how our

interviewees described the culture in general and then examine each of these areas using interview, observation, and survey data, as well as feedback from TLG members on our initial set of findings.

### *Emerging Culture Changes*

There was wide agreement among interviewees that the culture of MNPS prior to MNPS Achieves was top-down, characterized by fear and a lack of perceived authority to carry out major responsibilities and decision making. One TLG member said, “There wasn’t a lot of collaboration. The information and discussions were fairly closely held to a few individuals. It was a different style.”

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“Although there was a sense of urgency [from the CLG], there was a sense of patience, too. [They realized] this is not something that is going to happen overnight. . . . The focus was on the importance of coming up with workable solutions to help the district improve.”

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— A study participant

Another described it this way:

It was a pretty bad culture. You had people who had worked years and dedicated the majority of their professional lives and didn't feel good about the place they worked. A lot of different things have come through – strategies, programs – [staff] had [the] feeling that “this too shall pass.” Departments would be working on things and wouldn't know what someone else was doing. A lot of people were a little shell-shocked because of the turmoil of the past couple of years.

MNPS Achieves represents an attempt to move toward collaborative practices – both within the system and partnering with external organizations and individuals – and to

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**MNPS Achieves represents an attempt to move toward collaborative practices – both within the system and partnering with external organizations and individuals – and to create an environment where individuals believe they have increased agency to make significant decisions.**

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create an environment where individuals believe they have increased agency to make significant decisions. In our interviews, we found that there are positive culture changes emerging in MNPS, particularly in the areas of collaboration

and leadership development, as well as a new-found sense of urgency. One interviewee said:

Clearly, TLG[s] ha[ve] opened up the system to a variety of people having some influence in major decisions made. This

system had been wounded by serious top-down leadership. And cronies. And neither is the case now. . . . [I] definitely don't get the impression that [Dr. Register] [is] afraid of making decisions, but [he has] such a calm personality that as an outsider, I see the functioning of the district not being frenetic. I never get the sense – and I got that all the time previously – that everything was at crisis level. . . . There's urgency, and he's clear on that, but it's not urgent or die. It's urgent and if you're not urgent enough, let's get urgent.

The TLGs have provided a high-visibility vehicle for this collaboration, though it is difficult to determine how much the TLGs are driving culture change in MNPS, as opposed to changes in school system leadership. There is also now a defined mission around improved student achievement and a focus on the nine TLG areas that did not exist before.

We also observed clear changes in participants' attitudes in our observations of the leadership institutes over the last year. At the summer 2009 institute, we characterized the participants as somewhat cautious, though encouraged, at the Institute's new focus on developing instructional leadership. At the January 2010 institute, when asked about how things were going in MNPS generally, several

institute participants used the word “hope” when referring to ongoing change and Dr. Register’s leadership. No one talked specifically about the TLG work, although some are members of TLG teams.

Among the principals who attended the June 2010 leadership institute, there were some who offered feedback stating that Dr. Register’s direction through MNPS Achieves would “change the culture of the district.” Other principals made specific comments indicating that the professional development they received during the institute would “change the culture of their school.” These are both significant perspectives about the potential for change indicating that at least among principals, there is an expectation that the culture in MNPS will change at both the macro and micro levels.

Also, there were many other participants who incorporated change language in their feedback about the current state of MNPS by describing it as “evolving,” “transformational,” “transitional,” or “progressive.” In feedback to initial evaluation findings, one TLG member noted the need for recognition of the time it takes to change culture, while another framed the work so far as a positive start to what must be a deliberate, ongoing process: “We are in [the] beginning stages of systemic culture change – great first steps, lots more to do. [We] need more time and intentionality.”

### *Shared Mission and Vision*

MNPS rolled out a new vision in the 2009-2010 school year:

Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools will provide every student with the foundation of knowledge, skills, and character necessary to excel in higher education, work, and life. We embrace and value a diverse student population and community. Different perspectives and backgrounds form the cornerstone of our strong public education system.

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**Among principals, there is an expectation that the culture in MNPS will change at both the macro and micro levels.**

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Results from surveys distributed to central office staff and school administrators show some trends as to the coherence and clarity of the district’s vision and perceived priorities (see Figure 2 on next page).<sup>6</sup> Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with the statement, “Central office has a clear vision of reform that is linked to standards for student learning and growth.” Central office staff responses were strikingly different from school-level administrators: while 71.9 percent of school administrators agreed or

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<sup>6</sup> All 398 school principals, assistant principals, and “other administrators” were asked to respond to the school administrator survey, and 352 people responded. There was a large percentage of “other administrators,” however, and school district leadership suspect that some school secretaries filled out the survey. In terms of assistant principals and principals, there was a 72.3% response rate. All central office staff whose titles are “coordinator” or above (including pay scales 14, 15, and 16) were asked to respond to the central office survey, but it is not clear from the data the total response rate for the central office survey.

FIGURE 2. Survey results: Shared Mission and Vision

		Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Central office has a clear vision of reform that is linked to standards for student learning and growth.	TLG members	55.0%	27.5%	17.5%
	Central office staff	56.1%	30.3%	13.5%
	School administrators	71.9%	13.2%	14.8%
Central office priorities are consistent with schools' priorities.	TLG members	50.0%	31.6%	18.4%
	Central office staff	38.9%	27.9%	33.1%
	School administrators	53.4%	22.2%	24.4%

strongly agreed with this statement, 56.1 percent of central office staff agreed, and 30.3 percent were neutral.

Responses were mixed on the statement, “Central office priorities are consistent with schools’ priorities”: 53.4 percent of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, 22.2 percent were neutral, and

24.4 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

Among central office staff, 38.9 percent agreed or strongly agreed with

this statement, 27.9 percent were neutral, and 31.8 percent disagreed or strongly disagreed.

The high proportions of “neutral” responses may reflect that respondents did not feel they had the information to answer the question. When the surveys are issued again in spring 2011, we will compare results longitudinally to identify changes in respondents’ attitudes.

### Mission and Vision Related to Leadership Institutes

There has been progress over time in the way that participants in the principal leadership institutes have expressed their understanding and commitment to the MNPS mission and vision. At the first leadership institute held in July 2009, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to hear from Director of Schools Jesse Register about his vision for MNPS. During the second institute held in January 2010, Dr. Register spoke to the participants several times about his vision of the future of MNPS and the need to become an effective learning organization and build leadership capacity throughout the district, starting with the participants in that institute and extending to all of the adults charged with serving the district’s students and families. While it was not clear that the participants assimilated and were committed to all aspects of Dr. Register’s vision, several principals later referred to his assertion that MNPS can be the first choice for families.

In his opening remarks at the June 2010 leadership institute, Dr. Register gave a retrospective and forward-looking view of the transformational agenda in MNPS and set the tone for the three days by reinforcing that the

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Many participants noted in their feedback from this institute that the district now has a very intentional focus on instruction, which one principal described as “refreshing.”

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leadership institutes are about improving instruction for 76,000 students. Dr. Register outlined the processes by which MNPS Achieves will implement changes to improve instruction (including the work of the TLGs) and shared his belief that collective efficacy and building MNPS as a learning organization were key drivers for change.

Many participants noted in their feedback from this institute that the district now has a very intentional focus on instruction, which one principal described as “refreshing.” Also, many participants shared that they now had a better picture of “where MNPS wants to go in the future” and that they appreciated that it came directly from the Director of Schools.

Many participants expressed an understanding of how Dr. Register sees MNPS accomplishing its mission in their restating of three personal commitments that he shared with principals and also asked them to adopt: to substantial improvements in performance for all students; to building the capacity of leaders; and to reform focused on high-yield strategies that work. While actions, more than words, will demonstrate commitment, anecdotal feedback from principals thus far is an early indicator that they are paying attention to the mission and vision of MNPS.

### Mission and Vision Related to TLGs

Our interviews of TLG members did not specifically address the new district vision statement, but TLG participants we interviewed did indicate that they were beginning to share a common mission and vision. They seemed clear about the purpose of MNPS Achieves and the TLGs and were particularly quick to note the elements of increasing col-

laboration among and between community and district leaders, engaging multiple voices and stakeholder groups within the district and outside of it, and addressing multiple priority areas simultaneously.

The work’s desired effect on student achievement was sometimes explicitly stated. One participant said:

The ultimate goal is to improve student achievement and the efficiency and effectiveness of the district. We have the process drivers for the latter, and the other [areas] are academic.

Improving student achievement was also implicit in a number of responses that cited the goal of

improving the work of the district on behalf of students. One interviewee said, “[The purpose of the TLGs is] to

move the district forward. To make us much better than what we are. To take us to a different level.”

However, one comment from a TLG member, in response to draft evaluation findings, indicated that the mission and vision of MNPS Achieves was not clear to a broader group of stakeholders, or to all participants involved in TLGs: “MNPS Achieves is still a vague concept not quite understood, certainly by parents and teachers. Even TLGs guess at defining it.”

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**“MNPS Achieves is still a vague concept not quite understood, certainly by parents and teachers. Even TLGs guess at defining it.”**

— TLG member

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There were many positive comments about the TLG structure itself and its potential to address areas of high need in the district. One co-chair said:

The purpose [of the TLGs] is to be a catalyst for significant change across a number of

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**Survey results showed mixed perceptions about whether central office provides adequate information to central office staff and principals, engages principals and teachers in joint decision making, and keeps open lines of communication.**

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different areas that need it. And to make sure that changes are not being made in isolation – they're tied together such that the system is moving forward, not

pieces of it. It's a terrific process. If anything, I think the process isn't celebrated enough.

Another said, "I think a lot of good things are happening because of this that wouldn't otherwise be happening."

However, there was concern about how overall coherence of the work will be brought about, along with uncertainty about how everything fits together into a comprehensive reform strategy. As one interviewee described it:

It's that thing about the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. How we come together as a whole in the end – that's where I'm still kind of cloudy.

Another TLG member added, "It's helpful to hear what other TLGs are talking about at quarterly meetings, but difficult to actually connect the work."

### *Collaboration and Communication*

Survey results showed mixed perceptions about whether central office provides adequate information to central office staff and principals, engages principals and teachers in joint decision making, and keeps open lines of communication (see Figure 3). Respondents were asked to rank their level of agreement with the statement, "I receive the information I need from others at central office to perform my job effectively." While more than half of the school administrators who responded were in agreement, only 39.4 percent of central office staff agreed, and 36.9 percent disagreed.

Survey participants were also asked to respond to the statement, "Central office creates structures, time, and resources for administrators and teachers to participate in joint decision making." Again, school administrators were more likely than central office staff to agree with this statement. However, 37.5 percent of school administrators and 35.5 percent of central office staff disagreed or strongly disagreed, indicating that opportunities for joint decision making are not experienced consistently.

Responses were again mixed on the question, "The channels of communication are open in MNPS" and evidenced a fair degree of skepticism about processes of communications districtwide. When the surveys are issued again in the spring of 2011, we will compare results longitudinally to identify changes in respondent attitudes.

FIGURE 3. Survey results: Collaboration and Communication

		Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
I receive the information I need from others at central office to perform my job effectively.	TLG members	45.0%	20.0%	35.0%
	Central office staff	39.4%	23.8%	36.9%
	School administrators	57.5%	21.8%	20.8%
Central office creates structures, time, and resources for administrators and teachers to participate in joint decision making.	TLG members	45.0%	25.0%	30.0%
	Central office staff	38.3%	26.2%	35.5%
	School administrators	46.0%	16.4%	37.5%
The channels of communication are open in MNPS.	TLG members	37.5%	25.0%	37.5%
	Central office staff	31.0%	26.6%	42.4%
	School administrators	45.7%	23.4%	30.8%

### Collaboration and Communication Related to Leadership Institutes

The leadership institutes for principals have played an important role in creating new opportunities for collaboration among school-based leaders in addressing shared problems and obstacles to improved practice. The first leadership institute, held in July 2009, was focused on sharing a selected list of best practices identified by MNPS; however, it is not clear that there were opportunities for participants to propose their own specific issues for discussion and problem solving with their colleagues.

The leadership institute in January 2010 was also a time to share some of the leadership practices perceived as being particularly effective, and this time presenters included both external consultants and district personnel. Participants were not yet expected to engage in deep discussion and work on their personal challenges and obstacles to developing more effective schools, but the focus on developing a collaborative learning culture likely provided a foundation for those next difficult steps.

The leadership institute in June 2010 moved principals one step closer toward developing a collaborative learning culture, and the word “collaboration” was often used by participants to describe the benefits of the three-day experience. Principals also used “collaboration” as a way to express their expectations for future interactions with their peers. One principal explained, “This is the beginning for MNPS administrators to collaborate on best practices. It should remain a part of principal professional development.”

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Responses were mixed on the question, “The channels of communication are open in MNPS” and evidenced a fair degree of skepticism about processes of communications districtwide.

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## Collaboration and Communication Related to TLGs

The change leadership model, including the TLGs and the CLG, was intended to help promote better collaboration within the school district and between the district and the community. Collaboration within TLGs, including

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**“No one explained what this commitment entailed. When I said yes, I didn’t know it was a multi-month, year-long, more-than-a-year commitment. Nor did I understand the expectations. They were far more than what I thought.”**

— A co-chair external to the district

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that between district leaders and community members, was generally perceived to be good among active members, with many co-chairs noting efforts to engage members, ensure that all voices were heard, and distribute leadership when appropriate. Some of the process-oriented groups, in particular, also made efforts to improve consistency and alignment in areas such as communications and technology, adding to the overall service orientation of the district.

Collaboration across TLGs has been mixed. A few TLGs have made substantial efforts to collaborate or be more deeply informed about other groups. Joint group meetings have happened occasionally, usually around specific interrelated topics. More frequently, co-chairs discussed assigning representatives to attend the meetings of related groups and report back to their “home” TLG or communicating

with department staff who are members of other TLGs. One participant said:

We’re [TLGs] basically all the same now. I have [people] from my department on several of the other groups. They bring back information. . . . There’s a lot of collaboration and many overlapping issues.

For others, however, interaction with other groups was limited. An interviewee said:

We haven’t really had a lot of collaboration other than at monthly TLG meetings, co-chair meetings, [and] quarterlies. As a co-chair, I’ve really only talked to [one other] co-chair.

Several interviewees noted a lack of clarity around certain expectations and processes at the outset of the effort, when TLGs were first developed. Community participants, in particular, often noted that they were unaware of the level of time and effort the work would entail and were sometimes unclear as to the duration of their commitment. One co-chair external to the district said:

It was such a quick start that even as co-chair, no one explained what this commitment entailed. When I said yes, I didn’t know it was a multi-month, year-long, more-than-a-year commitment. Nor did I understand the expectations. They were far more than what I thought.

Several months into the effort, some common tools were developed to aid groups in agenda setting, documentation, and reporting. These tools were generally seen as helpful in organizing the work of the TLGs, though some felt that reporting tools such as the dashboard were not user-friendly and didn’t always adequately represent the work that the group had

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done during the quarter. One TLG member noted:

I understand the point behind [the reporting process] – you can customize it, everyone can look on it in one big swoop. I'm not sure it's making it that much easier for people to be able to report what their true changes are. They're going through extra efforts to make things uniform but are avoiding listening to real changes in the TLGs.

The MNPS Achieves Portal – an online sharing and workspace – was envisioned as a potentially important tool for promoting communication and collaboration across TLGs. However, there were ongoing problems in getting access for TLG members and in getting the Portal itself to function. After dealing with Portal-related frustration, many TLG members essentially “gave up,” even though it became fully functional in January 2010. One interviewee said:

The thing that was frustrating was not having a portal. We really needed an online space to share information. People were excited [about it] at first, then couldn't get on. It was frustrating, and the group gave up.

As the work of the TLGs continues to evolve, becomes more intertwined, and spans multiple areas of the system, collaboration and communication across TLGs will become more essential to maximize efforts, avoid duplication, and ensure coherence.

Perceptions about how well the purpose and work of MNPS Achieves have been communicated more broadly are mixed. One board member said at a meeting we observed:

I'm out in the community a lot; there has been a reshaping of the public impression of what is going on in MNPS. The public's expectations are higher. . . . It is very helpful for TLGs to have outside people leading these efforts.

However, while survey data cited earlier in this report shows that the majority of principals agreed that there is a clear vision of reform districtwide, many interviewees

questioned whether information about the TLGs and their work has made its way into schools or the community. While some groups have worked directly with school-based staff, it was unclear that visibility and understanding of MNPS Achieves, and particularly the work of the TLGs, has spread much beyond those who are directly involved. This was also one of the most consistent themes in the feedback to our initial findings, with multiple TLG members noting a need for not only more communication to teachers and parents in particular, but more genuine engagement. Comments indicated that for some there is a disconnect between the work of the TLGs and the “real” or day-to-day work of the central office and schools. One TLG member asked,

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**“There has been a reshaping of the public impression of what is going on in MNPS. The public's expectations are higher. . . . It is very helpful for TLGs to have outside people leading these efforts.”**

— A board member

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“Is it clear how the work of the TLG is directly informing the real work at central office? Not to me. . . . it isn’t clear at the building (school) level.”

It may simply be too early to expect widespread understanding of TLG work. One TLG member noted that a meeting involving a presentation to school faculty

exposed things. It showed that communication is not getting to the teachers. Our committee is going to be developing a plan to make sure that a clear, consistent message is being delivered to everyone.

Developing broad understanding and ownership of MNPS Achieves is crucial to improve culture districtwide and create better outcomes for students and adults, particularly as groups move to implementation. As Dr. Register said in an interview:

We have to continue to work hard with this, be smart and strategic. We have to

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**Getting 6,000 teachers to change attitudes, the way they work, and believe in a reform strategy is not easy. We have to concentrate on developing broader ownership.**

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— *Dr. Jesse Register, Superintendent, MNPS*

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grow the ownership so that 139 principals and a lot of teachers really develop ownership in the reform initiatives. It has to reach beyond where it is now. . . . I think there’s a lot of positive feeling going on, but we also have 6,000 teachers. Getting 6,000 teachers to change attitudes, the way they work, and believe in a reform strategy is not easy. We have to concentrate on developing broader ownership.

### *Capacity Building*

In the central office and school administrator survey, respondents were asked to rate their level of agreement for a series of twelve statements centered on professional development for teachers and principals (see Figure 4).

One overall trend was a high percentage of “neutral” responses, particularly from central office staff. It’s possible that this high neutral response is due to inconsistent implementation or that neutral respondents didn’t feel they had sufficient knowledge to either agree or disagree with the statements.

A few of the statements elicited relatively substantial agreement, generally more pronounced among principals and assistant principals than among central office personnel. The highest level of agreement was found in response to the statement, “MNPS provides professional development as part of a comprehensive plan”; 83.4 percent of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed with this statement, but only 59.6 percent of central office staff agreed.

Statements around teacher evaluation and observation, the tailoring of professional development to meet the needs of schools, coaching, and peer observation and review also garnered relatively strong agreement from school administrators. As noted earlier, agreement was less strong from central office staff, but the percentage of neutral responses was particularly high.

Responses from school administrators and central office staff members were generally less positive and garnered more disagreement on statements regarding differentiated support for teachers and principals. The statement regarding differentiated support for principals and assistant principals received the highest

percentage of disagreement for this set of questions, with 51.9 percent of school administrators and 36.3 percent of central office staff disagreeing or strongly disagreeing.

Responses were also varied on statements regarding struggling teachers and administrators. School administrators, in particular, were divided on the statement, “Central office provides struggling school administrators with targeted, intensive professional development

and support”: 28.6 percent agreed with this statement, 34.9 percent were neutral (the largest neutral principal response in the set), and 36.6 percent disagreed.

Among all items in this set of questions, the two questions dealing with provision of supports for administrators also garnered the lowest scores of agreement, the highest scores of neutrality, and the highest of disagreement among central office staff.

FIGURE 4. Survey results: Capacity Building

		Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
MNPS provides professional development as part of a comprehensive plan.	TLG members	56.4%	15.4%	28.2%
	Central office staff	59.6%	19.2%	21.3%
	School administrators	83.4%	7.5%	9.1%
MNPS provides leaders with professional development centered on teacher evaluation and observation.	TLG members	40.5%	37.8%	21.6%
	Central office staff	42.3%	39.3%	18.5%
	School administrators	64.4%	13.8%	21.9%
MNPS tailors professional development to the improvement needs of my school.	TLG members	52.6%	26.3%	21.1%
	Central office staff	48.2%	28.1%	23.7%
	School administrators	63.1%	14.4%	22.5%
MNPS provides leaders with professional development regarding the role of coaches.	TLG members	56.7%	18.9%	24.3%
	Central office staff	51.9%	26.7%	21.4%
	School administrators	61.5%	15.9%	22.5%
MNPS promotes professional development that includes peer observations and review.	TLG members	29.7%	32.4%	37.8%
	Central office staff	42.4%	31.6%	26.6%
	School administrators	56.8%	18.4%	24.9%
MNPS provides differentiated support for teachers at different stages of their careers.	TLG members	38.9%	19.4%	41.7%
	Central office staff	37.6%	33.6%	29.3%
	School administrators	47.1%	17.6%	35.3%
MNPS provides differentiated support for principals and assistant principals at different stages of their careers.	TLG members	8.4%	41.7%	50.0%
	Central office staff	22.0%	41.9%	36.3%
	School administrators	34.2%	13.9%	51.9%
Central office provides struggling teachers with targeted, intensive professional development and support.	TLG members	33.4%	16.7%	50.0%
	Central office staff	37.8%	30.4%	31.9%
	School administrators	46.7%	20.4%	32.8%
Central office provides struggling school administrators with targeted, intensive professional development and support.	TLG members	11.1%	33.3%	55.6%
	Central office staff	22.6%	42.1%	35.3%
	School administrators	28.6%	34.9%	36.6%

### Capacity Building Related to Principal Leadership Institutes

Principal leadership is one aspect of capacity building that has received ongoing attention and support through the implementation of the biannual leadership institutes, and these experiences are contributing to the development of a districtwide learning organization. Observations and analyses of data from the three leadership institutes that have been held thus far are key indicators of how principals are developing as leaders in MNPS and how the institutes are helping to build capacity within the organization to provide effective leadership.

The first leadership institute was held in July 2009 at a retreat setting. The design of this institute centered on the use of external con-

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**The content focus for this meeting was on effective practices and accomplishments, and evaluative comments suggested that the principals would have also liked attention to ongoing challenges and obstacles.**

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sultants for large-group sessions, as well as small-group sessions on pre-selected topics led by a combination of principals, central office staff, and external consultants.

From observations, it did not appear that participants were asked about their own practice in any extensive way. For the most part, they seemed to be recipients of guidance and instruction in leadership practices from the external presenters. But participants often cited the enormous value of opportunities to

meet and to interact with other principals, and some called for more unassigned time during the day for connecting with colleagues. One principal noted that “it was nice getting together with MNPS peers and brainstorming ideas and practices that work with them.”

In January, 2010, the leadership institute was held in a remote retreat setting, and sessions were led, with a few exceptions, by principals who were designated content facilitators, recruited and selected by central office personnel. The sessions observed largely consisted of demonstrations and explanations of the facilitators’ personal practices as school leaders. The design of this institute provided numerous opportunities for principals to meet with others both within and across tiers or grade levels.

While formal sessions observed varied substantially in the time allowed for conversation among participants, in between sessions and during mealtimes, the principals talked about their personal practice in working with their teachers, school leadership teams, and learning communities. As one principal noted, “I enjoyed hearing from my peers – we have common challenges – we are all committed to improving our [district] – we are members of a *team* sharing.” However, the content focus for this meeting was on effective practices and accomplishments, and evaluative comments suggested that the principals would have also liked attention to ongoing challenges and obstacles.

During the most recent leadership institute held in June 2010 at the district’s professional development center, the opening day was facilitated primarily by the Director of Schools

and key central office personnel. Dr. Register’s remarks and his presence throughout the institute were frequently mentioned in feedback from principals as important signs of his commitment to and leadership of MNPS.

The design of this institute, again, gave school administrators opportunities to learn from and with each other in focused large- and small-group interactions that were facilitated by keynote presenter Mike Rutherford. Based on feedback about his successful session at the first leadership institute, he delivered two days of training on “Developing the Artisan Teacher” that again received rave reviews from principals.

During one session, the large group divided into four smaller groups by tier – two elementary, one middle school, and one high school. In each group, a central office associate or assistant superintendent facilitated discussions about the current state of leadership; what has been accomplished; where the district needs to be in three years; and what capacity building principals need. These conversations produced long-running lists in each category that were shared with the larger group. When asked, “What has been accomplished?” principals gave “professional devel-

opment and training” as the most frequent response. As one participant explained:

Working in tier groups helped me to realize that we are all talking about the same things (instructional leadership, teacher issues, technology, the change process) and how we will begin to work toward them together.

The practice of having principals as presenters was, again, viewed positively by participants at this institute. The panel of principals that presented strategies for establishing Leadership Teams was described as “very powerful” and “enlightening.”

### *Distributed Leadership*

An important element of creating a culture of distributed leadership involves sharing decision making with site-level administrators. In surveys of central office staff and school administrators, a majority of both groups agreed or strongly agreed that responsibilities and decision making were shared (see Figure 5).

However, it should be noted that more than one-third of school administrators disagreed or strongly disagreed with this statement, suggesting that site-level administrators and cen-

FIGURE 5. Survey results: Distributed Leadership

		Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Central office shares responsibilities and decision making with site-level administrators.	TLG members	66.6%	15.4%	17.9%
	Central office staff	58.7%	19.3%	22.0%
	School administrators	54.2%	9.5%	36.4%

tral office staff differ in their perceptions of distributed leadership in MNPS. Our other data collection suggests that the culture of the district prior to MNPS Achieves was “top-down,” so this may also reflect vestiges of the previous culture. When the surveys are issued again in spring 2011, we will compare results longitudinally to identify changes in respondent attitudes.

#### Distributed Leadership Related to Principal Leadership Institutes

Participants acknowledged the first principal leadership institute held in July 2009 as representing a new way of dealing with leadership – namely, by focusing on leadership. One participant cited it as one of the first times princi-

pals received professional development specifically designed for them, and another referred to it as being more like a professional learning community instead of a long to-do list and agenda. While they found fault with some of the sessions, the prin-

cipals seemed to recognize that the institute represented a change in the way MNPS would address leadership development. As noted earlier, the leadership institutes of January and June 2010 advanced the development of MNPS as a learning organization and strengthened the leadership skills of principals.

#### Distributed Leadership Related to TLGs

TLGs are designed as collaborative groups drawing on both internal and external expertise. An explicit goal in the creation of TLGs was to shift the culture from “top-down” to collaborative. We found that the formation of TLGs has allowed external capacity to be brought inside MNPS and allowed these external members an opportunity to exercise leadership and decision making in a systemwide reform effort, though the precise roles of external members may look different depending on the TLG.

Some TLG co-chairs described a process in which their work – ranging from vision setting to planning – was generated and completed collectively or by consensus, with multiple internal and external members taking leadership on various elements. For example, one TLG co-chair noted:

We debate and discuss many of the processes that we move through. Action steps [and] why we decide to take them are largely debated in these meetings. It’s part of the reason we move so slowly, debating the validity of action steps we’re taking. We’ll constantly challenge that. In that degree, everyone has a stake. When dealing with particular topics that someone is an expert on, we’ll defer and ask what they recommend, but never [as] an “it’s your call” type situation.

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*“We debate and discuss many of the processes that we move through. . . . It’s part of the reason we move so slowly, debating the validity of action steps we’re taking. We’ll constantly challenge that. In that degree, everyone has a stake.”*

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Another co-chair noted:

Everything we do, [it's] formed around a . . . shared leadership/collaborative effort. All ideas come from group members. [They] don't make decisions about anything – [for example,] committee formations – without everyone's input. [We] try to make sure that everyone feels like they have ownership; opinions are valued. Everyone brings something different to [the] table. That's worked well for our group.

For others, the bulk of the work was generated by department leaders and staff, with the TLG offering feedback. One interviewee said, “The TLG, to me, is basically an advisory group. We (the department) report what we've done.” Some groups used a hybrid of these two tactics.

While there are strong examples of distributed leadership within TLGs, it should be stressed that ultimate accountability still resides within MNPS. On the one hand, this has reinforced to MNPS staff that they are leaders with authority to make decisions. On the other hand, as TLGs move toward implementation of goals, maintaining distributed leadership among internal and external leaders may become more difficult.

The TLG structure has also created new opportunities for leadership among principals through their role as members of each TLG. Currently about 10 percent of MNPS principals serve on the TLGs; through their participation, they can provide a school-based perspective to help shape the direction and work of each group. These principals can, over time, become an important link for shar-

ing information with and soliciting feedback from other principals who are not directly involved with a TLG. Principals who serve on TLGs interact with other members who have roles elsewhere in the district and in the Nashville community; this can create opportunities to develop new internal and external relationships. One TLG member, however, questioned if leadership opportunities were available at additional levels: “Efforts may be shared at the principal level, but I think it stops there. [I'm] not sure it gets 'down' any further (assistant principals, teachers, parents, students).”

### *Data-Informed Decision Making*

When we asked TLG members what data informed their work, they told us they primarily used readily available data, such as achievement/AYP data, information from ACT, and SCORE reports, as well as best-practice research from sources like the Education Trust and case studies of successful districts. TLG members have also brought in more informal data from their working experiences inside and outside the school system. As the work of MNPS Achieves deepens, we expect that TLGs will analyze more data, as well as begin to collect new data on areas of interest.

One TLG member talked about recent improvements in MNPS in terms of reliably reporting data across departments. Another mentioned not being sure of a TLG's authority to request data analyses from MNPS staff. It is important that MNPS have internal procedures for requesting data analyses across departments to move TLG work.

Looking at MNPS more broadly, there was widespread agreement among surveyed central office staff on the collection and use of data to improve supports for schools (see Figure 6). Likewise, principals surveyed agreed that central office helps schools use data to

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Improving the use of data is a high priority within MNPS and MNPS Achieves, and relationships between central office staff and site-level administrators around data issues are well developed.

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improve achievement. Finally, principals generally agreed that central office was responsive to his/her school's data needs.

These findings reflect what we found in our meta-review as well, which identified the Research, Assessment,

and Evaluation department as highly service oriented toward schools. The findings also suggest that improving the use of data is a high priority within MNPS (and within MNPS Achieves) and that relationships between central office staff and site-level administrators around data issues are well developed.

## Revisiting the Theory of Action: Impacts and Implications

The MNPS Achieves theory of action (see Figure 1 on page 5) posits that by working together, teams of stakeholders, including those from outside the district, can address multiple challenges simultaneously. This effort is iterative. The act of doing the work together helps to build a collaborative culture and to build capacity and, in turn, the greater capacity and the collaborative culture also improve the efforts to address the challenges. The study, design, and implementation of transformational practices address the challenges and also strengthen the collaborative culture and build capacity. In the theory of action, these efforts then act to improve the performance of adults – individually and organizationally – which in turn improves student performance.

### Accomplishments

Our data suggest that thus far, we are seeing the first half of the theory in action. In general, our evidence supports the theory that external input would galvanize an effort to focus on MNPS's key challenges – the nine

FIGURE 6. Survey results: Data-Informed Decision Making

		Agree/ strongly agree	Neutral	Disagree/ strongly disagree
Central office collects and uses data to improve its support for schools.	TLG members	75.0%	17.5%	7.5%
	Central office staff	67.3%	19.9%	12.8%
	School administrators	76.8%	12.1%	11.1%
Central office helps [schools/this school] use information about student achievement relative to standards to improve instruction.	TLG members	74.3%	15.4%	10.3%
	Central office staff	65.5%	21.8%	12.7%
	School administrators	82.5%	10.1%	7.4%
Central office helps [with], understands, and is responsive to each school's data needs.	TLG members	69.3%	12.8%	18.0%
	Central office staff	54.9%	26.4%	18.8%
	School administrators	63.0%	19.6%	17.4%



TLG areas – and lead study and design in those areas, and would also lead to a more collaborative culture and to capacity building. And the higher capacity and the improved culture have led to a substantive planning process for addressing the nine challenge areas. At this writing, the reform is just past the one-year mark. The work is far from done. But we did see evidence of the specific accomplishments outlined in this section.

**The culture of the district is becoming more collaborative.**

Our data collection and document analysis leaves little room for doubt that prior to MNPS Achieves, the culture of MNPS, particularly in the central office, was dysfunctional. There was very little collaboration, departments worked in isolation, only a very few people were empowered to make decisions, and communication was poor. MNPS Achieves was specifically designed to bring additional capacity to the district through the involvement of outside expertise, in the form of both local expertise through external leaders and members of TLGs, and, looking beyond Nashville, best practices and the expertise of national reform partners. Over the last year, the TLGs have provided opportunities for collaboration within the central office, between central office and the community, and, to some extent, among central office and the schools. The external co-chairs and members brought additional capacity to the district. TLGs actively sought out and collaborated with external committees, such as the Teacher Effectiveness Initiative and the Mayor’s Task Force on Mobility. Sharing and

distributing leadership across these multiple internal and external actors has the potential to strengthen the work; strong coordination is critical where there are multiple initiatives both inside and outside the school system.

**Key infrastructure has been developed.**

Instructional resources have been shifted to the schools. The Central Office TLG oversaw the reassignment of staff members from the central office to schools; 310 staff now serve as instructional coaches. Having these instructional resources available directly in schools

provides the opportunity for more effective, job-embedded professional development.

Additionally, the Information Technology TLG spearheaded the

development of a data warehouse, which should enhance the already-strong relationships developed by the Research, Assessment, and Evaluation department. The Communications TLG helped to increase the district’s online presence by training staff in customer service, revamping the Web site and developing Facebook and Twitter accounts.

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**Thus far, we are seeing the first half of the theory in action. . . . The work is far from done. But we did see evidence of specific accomplishments.**

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Significant visioning, study, and planning have taken place.

The TLGs have catalyzed an extraordinary amount of engagement and effort to identify best practices and adapt them for use in MNPS. Each TLG had to quickly agree on focus areas and then figure out how to address them. For example, the high school TLG drafted the vision of what an MNPS graduate should know and be able to do and finalized a five-year plan for developing Academies, along with a marketing plan. The Disadvantaged Students TLG collected an enormous amount of data in nineteen schools in MNPS that they identified as succeeding with low-income students; made recommendations for

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In many cases, these efforts have been impressive in scope and ambition, but they still exist mostly on paper. Implementation of the plans will be an even greater challenge.

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improving teaching and learning, reducing student mobility, and providing supports; and developed a plan for piloting

community schools in the district in 2010-2011. The Middle Schools TLG conducted a book study with all middle school principals and developed a vision for middle schools in the district; to communicate the vision, they hosted a one-day leadership institute involving about 200 middle school staff. These planning efforts will be critical to the next phase of the work, which is implementation.

There is an emphasis on the effectiveness of adults, as well as of students.

In the last year to eighteen months, professional development experiences have proliferated. There have been three, three-day leadership institutes involving all administrators and senior staff; TLGs have developed and instituted training on customer service, data use, instructional leadership, inclusive practices, differentiated instruction, and exceptional education. New teacher induction was revamped. Also, personnel changes have resulted in new energy in central office. Our observations of the three leadership institutes that have occurred over the last year have shown a steady progression in developing a learning community among administrators. This emphasis on capacity building is a central aspect of the MNPS Achieves theory of action.

### *Challenges*

These successes should be celebrated. The early accomplishments of MNPS Achieves are important because they demonstrate that thus far, the theory of action is holding. However, the standard of any school reform effort is whether it increases opportunities and outcomes for children. It is too early to know whether MNPS Achieves has impacted schools and students. As the work continues, our evaluation will focus on whether individual and organizational performance has improved in the ways the theory suggests.<sup>7</sup> Meanwhile, we see several challenges MNPS leaders and partners will need to consider in order to achieve their ambitious goals.

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<sup>7</sup> MNPS will engage another organization to complete an analysis of student outcome data.

## Implementation

Over the last year, MNPS Achieves has largely been a planning effort. With a few exceptions, most of the accomplishments of the TLGs, for example, have involved studying best practices and developing plans for adapting and implementing those best practices in MNPS. In many cases, these efforts have been impressive in scope and ambition, but they still exist mostly on paper. Implementation of the plans will be an even greater challenge.

As McLaughlin summarizes in a seminal 1987 article, policy implementation is “incredibly hard” (p. 172). She suggests that successful policy implementation requires a balance between pressure and support. Thus far, the energy and goodwill engendered by the arrival of a new schools director, other new staff in leadership positions, and a new reform effort, as well as the involvement of Nashville and national partners, has provided the impetus for the initial successes. But will MNPS Achieves be able to maintain this kind of pressure and support for action? Some of the external partners were not aware of the kind of commitment they were making to the reform effort and were not sure if they could keep up the level of involvement. Now that Tennessee has won the “Race to the Top” competition, added resources will flow into the district. However, this initiative might also take support and pressure away from the initiatives that don’t neatly fit its guidelines.

The Change Leadership Group is perhaps an untapped resource to maintain the pressure and support that is needed for successful implementation. In our interviews with TLG members, many could not define the role of the CLG, and several questioned the benefit of

their reporting sessions with the CLG. With the start of a new phase, the CLG is perfectly positioned to recast its role beyond report-outs. As the plans developed out of this first phase of work are implemented, the CLG could take on a much more active, hands-on role. Reformatting the quarterly meetings or hosting additional in-depth meetings between each TLG and the CLG would help TLGs maintain focus and provide support, particularly in terms of clearing obstacles to implementation.

## Coherence

MNPS Achieves is a complex reform effort to create transformational change in MNPS. By design, it is addressing the most significant challenges MNPS faces, all at once. Add in the ongoing, day-to-day work of teaching and learning, as well as other large reform initiatives (e.g., Race to the Top/First to the Top), and it’s no surprise that one TLG co-chair likened the work to “trying to build a plane while flying it.” Fortunately, the structure of MNPS Achieves is flexible enough to allow for TLGs to organize themselves in ways that best fit the work. This balance of structure and flexibility is an important feature of MNPS Achieves. How the organization and operating styles of TLGs adapt and change over time as the work deepens will be a key question in future evaluations.

Several of our interviewees, while positive about the direction their TLG was taking, wondered how all the different efforts would fit together into a coherent whole. Coherence across the work of a district is critical to building high-performing school systems

(Childress et al. 2007). There was an admirable lack of redundancy in the work of TLGs, but what will happen when the work is necessarily not in the purview of one group? Professional development is a good example. While ASSET is charged with developing a comprehensive human capital system for the district, individual TLGs have been offering specific professional development opportunities that support their area of work.

Do these efforts come together at any point? When, and how? Thus far, we have observed that the work has been the smoothest in TLGs whose internal co-chair also is an effective

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**It is critical that the efforts of each TLG are clearly connected to the bigger picture of reform in MNPS. How do the puzzle pieces fit together? What will it take to connect them?**

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leader of an MNPS department with the same focus as the TLG. This is a functional arrangement, but how can leadership ensure that it is transformational? There is perhaps a trade-off between having clear lines of authority, which

might smooth the path to implementation, and generating the collective, comprehensive effort required to transform individual and organizational practice. There were some successful efforts to connect TLGs whose missions overlapped, but many of the cases we are aware of focused primarily on exchanging information and thus far have been limited in scope and impact.

As MNPS Achieves develops, it is critical that the efforts of each TLG are clearly connected to the bigger picture of reform in MNPS. How do the puzzle pieces fit together? What will it

take to connect them? We feel our support for the articulation of the MNPS Achieves theory of action is a contribution toward developing that coherence, but it is just a start, and it paints a description of the theory of the reform at this point in time. MNPS Achieves will evolve. With so many moving parts and so many people involved, it will be important to regularly make sense of the reform effort. Quarterly meetings in the upcoming year may be an opportunity to focus on TLG interconnections, as well as individual TLG progress.

### Scale

Cynthia Coburn (2003) asserts that scale in education reform involves four dimensions: depth, sustainability, spread, and shift in reform ownership. For a reform to achieve depth, it must incorporate profound changes in practice, not just surface improvements. Sustainability involves maintaining improvements over time; spread is ensuring that educational opportunities reach all students, not just some students. Shift in reform ownership reflects an internalization of the effort by practitioners, such that the reform does not seem imposed externally.

We have begun to see some changes in practice, with the incorporation of many more community stakeholders and other partners in the reform efforts. The extent of these changes remains to be seen – we did not do any data collection at the school level, with the exception of the principal survey. We have already raised the question of sustainability previously in regard to the motivation of external members of TLGs. In terms of spread, the planning has been comprehensive. But, as also noted

earlier, the trick is in the implementation. And in terms of reform ownership, it will take considerable communication – an MNPS weakness according to survey data – to assure that the TLG plans, when implemented, make sense and don't lead to "reform overload" (Foley 2001, p. 21).

In the 1990s, Philadelphia implemented Children Achieving, a systemwide reform effort that also emphasized "doing it all at once." One of the key lessons from that effort was that even policies designed to support instruction, like small learning communities or family resource networks, can feel to schools like unsupported mandates if they are poorly explained or sequenced, rushed, or require additional work (Foley 2001; Corcoran & Christman 2002; Christman & Rhodes 2002). While MNPS Achieves is different from Children Achieving – most significantly, MNPS Achieves leaders are more likely to acknowledge the importance of involvement and buy-in from key stakeholders – it's essential to understand the risks this approach entails.

To some extent, Children Achieving had limited impact and did not "go to scale," ironically, because it was too ambitious and too comprehensive. Given the skepticism with which both central office and administrators responded to questions on the topic, communication should be a central focus of leadership as the reform becomes even more complex, involves more people, and requires more changes in individual work habits. As MNPS Achieves shifts more toward implementation, maintaining space for organizational learning, including critical questions, reflection, and revision, is essential for the reform effort to be sustained and go to scale.

## The Evaluation Moving Forward

As the Annenberg Institute moves into the second year of documentation and evaluation, we will move from a broad-based view of MNPS Achieves to a more targeted look at how work is being implemented on the ground. This will entail a sampling of schools that we expect to be involved in implementation of TLG plans: for example, some high schools adopting the Academies model, or a school developing itself as a community school. Within those schools, we will follow the implementation of those specific efforts, as well as conduct focus groups with staff to focus on the other elements

of the theory of action: collaborative culture and capacity building. In addition to gathering data from the re-administered central office and principal surveys, surveys of other stakeholders, including teachers, students, and parents will be included to build the range of perspectives included in this evaluation and to help determine the extent to which reforms and culture changes are penetrating to the school and community levels. The importance of including voices from "the bottom up" was important to a number of TLG members who provided feedback to the initial findings from this report. We will also

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**One of the key lessons from Philadelphia's Children Achieving effort was that even policies designed to support instruction can feel to schools like unsupported mandates if they are poorly explained or sequenced, rushed, or require additional work.**

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continue to document the quarterly meetings, observe leadership institutes, and monitor the policy and community context, including Race to the Top and city and state reform initiatives.

The evaluation process has been designed to be flexible and responsive to the needs of Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools. As such, we will make every attempt to adjust our year-

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**In the midst of challenges that can potentially pull attention and energy away from the district’s central business of teaching and learning, MNPS is to be commended for maintaining a focus on transformational change in service of better outcomes for students and adults.**

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two plans to best suit the district and to incorporate new structures.

We will also engage a national advisory panel consisting of urban education leaders and scholars, which will help conceptualize evaluation, provide forma-

tive feedback about MNPS Achieves based on findings developed by the Annenberg Institute, and suggest improvements to MNPS Achieves design and implementation. Advisers will also be asked to extend relevant learning between their own practice networks and MNPS’s reforms.

Urban school districts deal with many challenges, and MNPS is no exception. This year, in addition to the pressures of state and federal mandates, the district has faced controversial budget cutbacks, highly visible lawsuits, and extreme flooding and snow that

led to damage and scheduling setbacks. The district has also seen multiple changes in its high-level administrative ranks and will soon face significant changes in the membership of its school board. In the midst of these challenges, which can potentially pull attention and energy away from the district’s central business of teaching and learning, MNPS is to be commended for maintaining a focus on transformational change in service of better outcomes for students and adults. The Annenberg Institute is committed to the documentation and evaluation of this effort, in order to support the learning of MNPS staff and stakeholders in the service of this critical mission.

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## GOALS AND GUIDELINES

### Goals

1. MNPS sustains continuous improvement of organizational results by enabling students and adults to achieve or exceed high performance standards.
2. MNPS student performance shows an upward trajectory in performance with all subgroups *and* all schools.
  - 2009-2010 baseline of student performance on new state academic standards
  - 2010-2011 improvement in performance of all student subgroups and all schools
3. MNPS demonstrates a collaborative, inclusive, and accountable culture that fosters student and adult learning and high performance.
4. We all own the problem of low student performance in achieving standards. MNPS

and the community are committed to providing the leadership to ensure every student's success at meeting or exceeding high performance standards.

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#### Transformational Leadership Groups

##### Student Performance Driven

- Performance of Students with Special Needs
- Performance of Disadvantaged Youth
- Performance of ELL/LEP Students
- Performance of Middle and High School Students

##### Efficient and Effective Processes

- Human Capital System
  - Communications System
  - Information Technology/Data Management System
  - Central Office Organization
- 

### Guidelines

1. Use student-learning needs to identify practices to change – *data-driven decision-making*
2. Build upon existing plans and research – *analyze and make sense of the data*
3. Search for effective practices – *research and benchmark*
4. Move plans into realistic action – *plan and implement*
5. Engage and develop ownership of change efforts – *collaborate and tap everyone's strengths*
6. Oversee implementation of plan – *monitor milestones and results*
7. Report on progress in improving performance results – *transparency of actions and results*

### Transformational Change Leadership Model

#### Guidelines for All Transformational Leadership Groups

- TLG: Meets monthly
- TLG: Reports progress to CLG quarterly
- CLG: Meets quarterly to formally review TLG progress
- CLG: Meets monthly as a steering committee, keepers of the vision and touching base and giving guidance to each TLG
- Document monthly progress on website
- Keep key resources and data on website
- Use effective meeting practices
- Engage in dialogue not debate about the unsolved, difficult issues
- Use systems thinking to make sense of the “pieces” and take effective practice to scale



### *Responsibilities for All Co-chairs*

- Keep work focused on finding practices that support quality instruction and learning.
- Ensure effective meeting practices are being used.
- Make sure linkages with other TLGs are made when the data and work intersects.
- Create a process to orient new members and brief members who miss a meeting.
- Report quarterly to the CLG progress in achieving milestones and annual targets.
- Keep discussion focused on relevant processes and content.
- Involve the TLG members in reflecting on both the quality of the content of their efforts, collaborative leadership, and decision-making, and the quality of the group processes.

### *Change Leadership Group (CLG)*

#### *Focus of Work*

- Act as a steering committee to advise the superintendent.
- Provide an external view of the economic, political, and social context for planning, implementing, and positioning of the Transformational Change Leadership Model.
- Identify and examine how to best leverage the intersections of Transformational Change Leadership Model with other local, state, and national efforts and/or resources.
- Examine the coherence across the work of eight Transformational Leadership Groups to ensure meaningful system change is occurring to enable students and adults to meet or exceed standards of performance.

- Monitor the quarterly progress of the Transformational Change Leadership Model.
- Encourage engagement of diverse ideas, people, and perspectives across the community.
- Help elevate the community's awareness about the progress and results of the Transformational Change Leadership Model.

#### *Guidelines*

- Schedule: Meet quarterly, 3:00 – 5:00 p.m.; Meet monthly, 11:00 a.m. – 1:30 p.m.
- Attendance: Members only, no substitute representatives

#### *Members*

- Superintendent, Dr. Jesse Register
- Board of Education, Mr. David Fox
- Office of the Mayor, Dr. Danielle Mezera
- Office of the Commissioner, Dr. Connie Smith
- Curriculum and Instruction – Elementary, Dr. Greg Patterson
- Curriculum and Instruction – Middle School, Ms. Sandra Tinnon
- Curriculum and Instruction – High School, Mr. James Briggs
- Business and Facility Services – Mr. Chris Henson

#### *Facilitators and Staff*

- Gloria Frazier, facilitator
- Fred Carr, staff liaison



## PURPOSE, BELIEFS, AND STRUCTURE, 2010

### Purpose

To bring the best thinking and experience of district leaders and community leaders together to determine MNPS and community transformational efforts that will provide every student with the foundation of knowledge, skills, and character necessary to excel in higher education, work, and life.

### Beliefs: MNPS

- All students bring unique cultural backgrounds, learning styles, abilities, interests, and social and health needs.
- Each student can achieve at high levels, exceeding national standards.
- Quality school staff is essential to academic excellence.
- Consistent and sustained leadership ensures results are achieved and proven strategies can take hold.
- Professional development must be sustained, clear, and consistently focused on quality instruction.
- Families and community organizations must be partners in meeting our goals.
- Each person in the school system is responsible for working toward this vision.
- Effective, two-way communication with parents and other stakeholders is essential.
- Transparency and accountability must be valued and practiced.

### Beliefs: MNPS Achieves First to the Top

*We believe that to improve student performance . . .*

- A shared mission, vision, and set of beliefs must be the foundation for all efforts.
- Adult performance must improve so each student can achieve at high levels, exceeding national standards.
- Systemic change efforts must be designed, implemented, and brought to scale.
- Data-informed decisions are necessary.
- Shared leadership (distributed leadership) is required to access and deploy the most effective resources (time, people, money).
- A collaborative culture – relationships, structures, work, and use of resources – is required.
- Ownership of effort and results must extend beyond MNPS employees to all stakeholders.

### Structure

- Oversight Team – nine district and community leaders
- Transformational Leadership Groups (TLGs)

### Performance Drivers

- Performance of Disadvantaged Youth
- Performance of Middle School Students
- Performance of High School Students
- Performance of Students with Special Needs
- Performance of English Learner Students

### Process Drivers

- Human Capital System/ASSET
- Communications System

- Information Technology/Data Management System
- Central Office Organization

### *Co-facilitators*

- Jesse Register, Director of Schools, MNPS
- Gloria Frazier, WEB Associates

### Evaluation/Documentation

Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) will document the work of MNPS Achieves and provide formative and summative data to inform decision making.

AISR documenters/evaluators will regularly attend MNPS Achieves First to the Top Oversight Team/TLG quarterly progress monitoring sessions, interview selected Oversight Team and TLG members, monitor MNPS Achieves First to the Top progress toward agreed upon results, and assist in development of reflection, feedback, and evaluation forms.

### Oversight Team: Purpose and Structure 2010-2011

#### *Purpose of Oversight Team*

- Oversee and advise the superintendent about MNPS Achieves transformational efforts.
- Monitor the quarterly progress of the implementation of the Transformational Change Leadership Model: MNPS Achieves.
  - Determine if change efforts are transformational in improving student and/or adult performance.
  - Encourage and examine evidence of engagement of diverse ideas, people, and perspectives across the community.

- Provide an external view of the economic, political, and social context for planning, implementing, and positioning of the MNPS Achieves efforts.

- Identify and examine how to best leverage the intersections of MNPS Achieves with other local, state, and national efforts and/or resources.

- Examine data to assess the coherence across the work of Transformational Leadership Groups (TLGs) to ensure meaningful system change is occurring to enable students and adults to meet or exceed standards of performance.

### *Structure of CLG*

#### *Membership (9)*

- Jesse Register, Director of Schools, MNPS, Co-facilitator of MNPS Achieves, CLG Chair
- School Board Chair or member appointed by Board Chair
- Danielle Mezara, Director, Mayor's Office of Children and Youth
- David Fox, School Board Chair (2009-2010), community member (2010-2011)
- Marla Ucelli, Director, District Redesign, Annenberg Institute for School Reform
- Fred Carr, Chief Operating Officer, MNPS
- Chris Henson, Chief Financial Officer, MNPS
- Meredith Libbey, Assistant to Director of Schools for Communication, MNPS
- Gloria Frazier, President, WEB Associates, Co-facilitator of MNPS Achieves

## Schedule

- Meet quarterly with TLGs to monitor progress, provide feedback, and ask strategic questions to move the work forward. The meetings are held at the Martin Professional Development Center, Conference Room.
  - August 4, 2010, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (All TLGs together for full day)
  - November 3, 2010, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (All TLGs by appointment)
  - February 2, 2011, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (All TLGs by appointment)
  - May 4, 2011, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (All TLGs together for full day)
- Meet for two hours to discuss: updates on TLG efforts, TLG reports to School Board, new opportunities, connections to other community efforts and consideration of adjustments needed in the TLG work. The meetings are held in the Director of Schools' conference room.
  - August 5, 2010, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
  - February 3, 2011, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
  - November 4, 2010, 11:00 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
  - May 5, 2011, 11:00 am – 1:00 pm

## Transformational Leadership Groups: Purpose and Structure, 2010-2011

### *Purpose of TLGs*

- Design and monitor implementation of transformational changes that increase student performance.
- Design and monitor implementation of transformational changes that increase adult performance.
- Create strategic recommendations for Director of Schools and/or Board approval for implementation.
- Plan and support implementation of a reform agenda around key performance drivers using a distributed leadership approach.
- Plan and support implementation of a reform agenda around key process drivers using a distributed leadership approach.
- Ensure collaborative efforts between community and district leaders that result in improved public perceptions of the quality of the MNPS educational system, and MNPS becomes the first choice of families.

### *TLG Structure*

#### **TLG Co-chairs**

- Every TLG has two co-chairs: a district leader and a community leader.
- District co-chairs are responsible for ensuring MNPS implements TLG recommendations approved by the Director of Schools and/or School Board.

#### **TLG Membership**

- Membership ranges from twelve to twenty people.
- Work groups/subcommittees generally range from three to twenty members as the TLG extends its outreach.
- Community members and MNPS employ-

ees are approximately equal in number on each TLG.

- All TLGs have teacher representatives.
- All TLGs have principal representatives.
- All TLGs recommend changes in membership to the Director of Schools.

#### TLG Schedule

- Co-chairs facilitate monthly TLG meetings and any additional scheduled meetings.
- Co-chairs facilitate a quarterly TLG progress reporting session to the CLG.
  - August 4, 2010, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
(All TLGs together for full day)
  - November 3, 2010, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
(TLG sessions by appointment)
  - February 2, 2011, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m.  
(TLG sessions by appointment)
  - May 4, 2011, 8:30 a.m. – 4:30 p.m. (All TLGs together for full day)
- Co-chairs meet with the Director of Schools monthly from 8:30 – 11:00 am to discuss cross-TLG issues (e.g., surveys of stakeholders, professional development, accomplishments of each TLG, needed support and readiness for upcoming presentations to the School Board). The meetings are held at the Martin Professional Development Center, Conference Room.

2010	2011
July 30	January 7
September 10	February 4
October 1	March 4
November 5	April 1
December 10	May 6

TLG Co-chairs (Yr 1: 2009-2010, Yr 2: 2010-2011, TBD = To Be Determined)

TLG	District Co-chair	Community Co-chair
Performance of Disadvantaged Youth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greg Patterson (Yr 1), Associate Superintendent of Elementary Schools</li> <li>• Brenda Steele (Yr 2 - 7/1/10), Associate Superintendent of Elementary Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lisa Wiltshire (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Parent, Community Volunteer</li> </ul>
Performance of Middle School Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lora Hall (Yr 2), Associate Superintendent of Middle Schools</li> <li>• Sandy Tinnon (Yr 1), Associate Superintendent of Middle Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Avi Poster (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Retired Middle School Principal, Community Volunteer</li> </ul>
Performance of High School Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jim Briggs (Yr 1), Associate Superintendent of High Schools</li> <li>• Jay Steele (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Associate Superintendent for High Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marc Hill (Yr 1), Chief Education Officer</li> <li>• Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce TBD (Yr 2)</li> </ul>
Performance of Students with Special Needs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Linda DePriest (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Assistant Superintendent of Instructional Support</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dan Reschly (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Professor of Education and Psychology, Peabody College, Vanderbilt University</li> </ul>
Performance of English Language Students/Limited English Proficient Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LaWanna Shelton (Yr 1), Executive Director, English Language Learner</li> <li>• Nicole Chaput-Guizani (Yr 1, Yr 2), Executive Director (Interim), English Language Learner</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jan Lanier (Yr 1 and Yr 2), ESL Coordinator, TN Department of Education</li> </ul>
Human Capital System/ASSET	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• June Keel (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ester Swink (Yr 1), Dean of School of Education, Trevecca Nazarene University</li> <li>• David Sigler (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Principal Associate, District Redesign, Annenberg Institute for School Reform</li> </ul>
Communications System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Olivia Brown (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Director of Communication</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jim Bartoo (Yr 1), Marketing and Public Relations Director, Nashville Zoo</li> <li>• TBD (Yr 2)</li> </ul>
Information Technology/Data Management System	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lance Lott (Yr 1), Assistant Superintendent of Information Technology</li> <li>• John Williams (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Executive Director of Information Technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tod Fetherling (Yr 1), President/CEO, Nashville Technology Council</li> <li>• TBD (Yr 2)</li> </ul>
Central Office Organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Jesse Register (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Director of Schools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Marla Ucelli (Yr 1 and Yr 2), Director, District Redesign, Annenberg Institute for School Reform</li> </ul>

# INTERVIEW AND OBSERVATION PROTOCOLS

## Interview Protocol

[Name, Position, Date, Facilitator, Documenter]

### *Introduction*

Thank you for taking time to talk with us today. The Annenberg Institute is working with MNPS and engaging in a long-term documentation of MNPS Achieves to develop a clear understanding of the evolution of the reforms, as well as provide feedback to MNPS on reform achievements and how the process and work might be improved to achieve better outcomes for kids. While we will take extensive notes of this interview, your responses are confidential and will only be shared with the members of our evaluation team. You will not be identified in any reports, so you should feel free to be candid.

- Tell us about your background. What is your current position and responsibilities, and what were your significant professional experiences before this?
- [You're on the X TLG]. Tell me about that. How often does your TLG meet? [Prompt for subcommittees, etc.] How is the group structured? How many members are on your TLG? [Prompt for change over time. Prompt for relationship between size and effectiveness.]
- How would you describe the expertise in the group?
- What authority does the group have to carry out its plans?
- To what extent are all TLG members given a role in decision-making?
- What is your TLG doing well?
- What does your TLG struggle with?
- What have been the major accomplishments so far of the TLG? [Prompt for whether this is aligned to the TLG's original goals, and refer to dashboard]
- Were there any particular pieces of data the TLG looked at that drove the work of the TLG?
- How does your TLG communicate and collaborate with other TLGs?
- How would you describe the role of the CLG? What has your TLG's relationship been like with the CLG? [Prompt for responsiveness, feedback, support, etc.]
- Thinking about it overall, what is the purpose of having the TLG/CLG structure? [Prompt for student achievement if not mentioned]
- Has this work had an impact on how you do your own work? [Prompt for professional learning] Why or why not?
- Now thinking back, how would you describe the culture of the district when [Dr. Register/you first] arrived?
- Have you seen any changes in the culture of the district since then? [If any change...] Do you attribute those changes to the TLG/CLG structure?
- Next year, we're going to be focusing in on the work of a few TLGs. Is there something that your TLG has planned that you feel we should follow closely?
- Is there anything that we didn't talk about that you would like to share with us?

## Observation Protocol

<p><b>Session title/type:</b> CLG mtg, _____ TLG mtg, TLG co-chairs with CLG, presentation to the Board by _____, professional development re: _____ for _____</p>	
<p><b>Date and time:</b> including starting and ending times</p>	
<p><b>Setting/location:</b> conference room, in administration building/ PD center/school, meeting room in hotel or conference center</p>	
<p><b>Observer's vantage point:</b> on site, audio-conferencing/phone, video and audio-conferencing – “present” for the entire session or from _____ to _____</p>	
<p><b>Facilitator(s)/Conveners(s)/Presenter(s):</b> related to type of session – if not well known to the research team or if new to the work, give a bit of background in addition to name, role, affiliation,...</p>	
<p><b>Participants:</b> roles or names if possible</p>	
<p><b>Description:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the stated purpose of this session</li> <li>• what people are doing and saying during this session</li> <li>• the primary products/results of this session</li> <li>• anticipated follow-up by participants</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Comments/observations:</b> (go beyond description to interpretation, evaluation)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• in what ways does the DESIGN of this particular session provide opportunities for leadership development, collaboration, using data, communication?</li> <li>• in what ways do the WORDS AND ACTIONS of the participants provide evidence of leadership development, enhanced collaboration and partnerships, systematic use of data, efficient and effective communication?</li> <li>• for repeat observations of a group, compare current findings with those of the previous observation</li> </ul>	
<p><b>Questions/follow-up:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• get clarification, if needed, to understand what was observed</li> <li>• propose a question or topic that should help to guide a subsequent observation of this same type of session or group</li> </ul>	



## OBSERVATIONS AND INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

## Observations Conducted

Type of Meeting	Total	Date (month, year)
TLG/CLG quarterly meeting	2	February 2010, June 2010
CLG debrief (post-quarterly meeting)	1	February 2010
Co-chairs meeting	5	February–June 2010
Board of Education meeting	1	May 2010
Principal Leadership Institute	3	July 2009, January 2010, June 2010
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>12</b>	

## Interviews Conducted

Participant Type	Total	Interview Method
District-based TLG co-chairs & central office leaders	8	Individual interview
Community-based TLG co-chairs	7	Individual interview
District-based TLG/CLG member and central office leader	3	Individual interview
MNPS Achieves designers	2	Individual interview
<b>Total Number</b>	<b>20</b>	

## TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP GROUPS MEMBERSHIP

### Change Leadership Group

#### *Co-chairs*

David Fox, MNPS Board Member

Jesse Register, MNPS

#### *Members*

Fred Carr, MNPS

Linda DePriest, MNPS

Gloria Frazier, WEB Associates

Chris Henson, MNPS

Danielle Mezera, Mayor's Office

Greg Patterson, MNPS

Connie Smith

Sandy Tinnon, MNPS

Marla Ucelli-Kashyap, Annenberg Institute  
for School Reform

### Performance of ELL/LEP Students

#### *Co-chairs*

Jan Lanier

LaWanna Shelton, MNPS

#### *Members*

Abdelghani Barre, Social Services

Diana Bibeau, MNPS

Deloris Burke, MNPS

Nicole Chaput, MNPS

Steven Cobb, Sister Cities

Jackie Dunn, MNPS

Kim Fowler, MNPS

Jeanette Goggins, MNPS

Paul Leddy, MNPS

Joseph Locke, MNPS

Julie McCargar, Tennessee Department of  
Education

Tom Negri, CEI

Luz Negron, University of Phoenix

Alice Patterson, Trevecca Nazarene Univer-  
sity

Lisa Pray, Vanderbilt University

Lokman Rashid, MNPS

Vanessa Saucedo, MNPS

Adelina Winston, MNPS

## Performance of Students with Special Needs

### *Co-chairs*

Linda DePriest, MNPS

Dan Reschly, Vanderbilt University

### *Members*

Pat Ashcraft

Stephen Breese, MNPS

Karen Goodwin, Vanderbilt University

Lora Hall, MNPS

Tom Hannon, Mayor's Committee

Debra McAdams

John Page, Centerstone

Ann Sanders-Eakes, Tennessee Department of Education

Victoria Stacey, MNPS

## Performance of Disadvantaged Youth

### *Co-chairs*

Greg Patterson, MNPS

Lisa Wiltshire

### *Members*

Shelley Archuleta-Smith, MNPS

Etta Crittenden, Tennessee Department of Education

Teresa Dennis, MNPS

Kim Fowler, MNPS

Enoch Fuzz

Howard Gentry, Nashville Area Chamber of Commerce

Fran Gregory, MNPS

Donna Hackett, MNPS

Terry Hanserd, MNPS

Naima Khandaker, Vanderbilt University

Doris Laing

Mary Laurens-Seely, Monroe Carell Jr. Children's Hospital at Vanderbilt

Peter Millett, Tennessee State University

David Moore, MNPS

Janet Murphy, MNPS

Mildred Nelson, MNPS

Overton Pupo-Walker, MNPS

Kecia Ray, MNPS

Denise Rollins, MNPS

Ernestine Saville-Brock, MNPS

Joyce Searcy, Bethlehem Centers of Nashville

Gerri Smith, Bethlehem Centers of Nashville

Kay Stafford, MNPS

Brenda Steele, MNPS

Ralph Thompson, MNPS

Todd Wigginton, MNPS

Sharon Williams, MNPS

Carolyn Wood, MNPS

Sharon Wright, MNPS

## Performance of Middle School Students

### *Co-chairs*

Avi Poste  
Sandy Tinnon

### *Members*

Alene Arnold  
Margarett Bess, MNPS  
Gary Cowan, MNPS  
John Duckworth, MNPS  
Lendozia Edwards, MNPS  
Henry Flenory, MNPS  
Judy Freudenthal, Oasis Center  
Dorothy Gunn, MNPS  
Kellie Hargis, MNPS  
Warren Hill  
Barb Ide, MNPS  
Candy Markman  
Sandra Moorman, MNPS  
Carol Nixon  
Sally Spear, MNPS  
Sheila Young

## Performance of High School Students

### *Co-chairs*

Marc Hill, Nashville Area Chamber of  
Commerce  
Jay Steele, MNPS

### *Members*

Deana Conn, MNPS  
Ann Cumbie, MNPS  
Monica Dillard, MNPS  
Warren Hill  
Melissa Jagers  
Kevin Koster, MNPS  
Karen Lefkovitz, MNPS  
Tony Majors, MNPS  
William Rochford, Vanderbilt University  
Branson Townsend, Tennessee Department  
of Education  
Schunn Turner, MNPS

## Human Capital System

### *Co-chairs*

June Keel, MNPS

Esther Swink, Trevecca Nazarene University

### *Members*

Etta Crittenden

Ashley Croft, MNPS

Marci Garner, MNPS

Junior High, Lipscomb University

Francie Hunt, Stand for Children

Trevor Hutchins, Belmont

Bill Moody, MNPS

Kay Musgrove

Tracie Potochnik, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Suzette Robotham, The New Teacher Project

David Sigler, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Debra Smith, MNPS/Jones Paideia Magnet School

Kay Stafford, MNPS

Ervin Tinnon, MNPS

Gloria Towner, Metropolitan Nashville Education Association

Chris Weber, MNPS

Julie Williams, MNPS

Lindsay Wright, Teach For America

## Communications System

### *Co-chairs*

Jim Bartoo, Nashville Zoo

Olivia Brown, MNPS

### *Members*

Carole Bartoo, Vanderbilt University

Ruben De Pena, MNPS

David Fox, MPF

Denise Gregory, MNPS

Stephen Henry, MNPS

Keel Hunt

David Kern

Drew Kim

Will Pedigo, Nashville Public Television

Bradley Redman, MNPS

Aimee Wyatt, MNPS

## Information Tech/Data Management System

### *Co-chairs*

Tod Fetherling, Technology Council  
John Williams, MNPS

### *Members*

Fred Carr, MNPS  
Paul Chngas, MNPS  
Ruben De Pena, MNPS  
Keith Durbin, Metro ITS  
Sharon Gentry, Board Member  
Denise Gregory, MNPS  
Laura Hansen, Mayor's Office  
Bobby Hurley, MNPS  
Erick Huth, Metropolitan Nashville Education Association  
Margie Johnson, MNPS  
Susan Kessler, MNPS  
Mark Littlefield, MNPS  
Lance Lott, MNPS  
Chris Marczak, MNPS  
Kesha Moore, MNPS  
Bradley Redman  
Doug Renfro, MNPS  
Matt Springer, Vanderbilt University  
Lori Tigert

## Central Office Organization

### *Co-chairs*

Jesse Register, MNPS  
Marla Ucelli, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

### *Members*

Pat Ashcraft  
Olivia Brown, MNPS  
Fred Carr, MNPS  
Linda DePriest, MNPS  
Chris Henson, MNPS  
Warren Hill  
June Keel, MNPS  
Kay Musgrove  
John Norris  
Greg Patterson, MNPS  
Kecia Ray, MNPS  
Ralph Thompson, MNPS  
Sandy Tinnon, MNPS  
Sheila Young





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