

MNPS ACHIEVES Year 2

An Evaluation Report

Prepared by



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INTRODUCTION and DISTRICT CONTEXT

Like many districts around the country, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) has had an eventful year, influenced in large part by the federal policy landscape. In March 2010, Tennessee was one of two states selected to receive funding in the first round of Race to the Top. The state was awarded \$501.1 million, \$30.3 million of which went to MNPS in support of innovative transformational change plans aligned with the state's goals in the areas of teachers and leaders, standards, data, STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics), and school turnaround. Of the district's Race to the Top Funds, \$4.1 million, or 11% were earmarked for efforts directly connected with MNPS Achieves: First to the Top.

While MNPS showed growth and solid gains across the board in state testing, the district did not make Adequate Yearly Progress and will be in No Child Left Behind Restructuring I status for the 2011-2012 school year. These results occurred in the context of the more rigorous academic standards implemented by the state, and because of this the district was vocal in forecasting a dip in test scores even if student achievement stayed the same or improved. The state of Tennessee has requested a federal waiver for No Child Left Behind requirements, citing its significant system change efforts and proposing its own alternative accountability system. The district is in the process of implementing Common Core Standards, which will be fully implemented by

the 2014-2015 school year. In August 2011, the district announced that ten of its most troubled schools would be placed in an “innovation cluster,” in which they would take part in intensive turnaround efforts designed to drastically improve student performance. MNPS has hired the British-based Tribal Group Inc. to support this effort.

MNPS has also seen significant changes to teacher tenure, bargaining, and evaluation driven by state-level policy. The state has implemented a new evaluation system for teachers, which went into effect in 2011-2012. Student performance results will play a sizeable role,¹ and the system is designed to provide more frequent feedback to educators, promote the practices of the most effective teachers, and result in greater accountability for those who are not effective. In April 2011, a new teacher tenure law extended teachers' probationary period to five years and tied continuing tenure status to evaluation. And in June 2011, after much contentious debate, the governor signed into law the repeal of collective bargaining for public school teachers. Collective bargaining will be replaced by “collaborative conferencing,” which replaces union contracts with nonbinding memoranda of understanding on issues such as salaries, benefits, working conditions, and grievances. Issues such as teacher evaluation, differentiated pay and incentives, and staffing decisions may not be discussed as part of collaborative conferencing. Both laws went into effect on July 1.

¹ Tennessee Value-added Assessment System (TVAAS) scores will contribute to 35 percent of each teacher evaluation; other student performance results – e.g., end-of-course exams and Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) – will contribute another 15 percent.

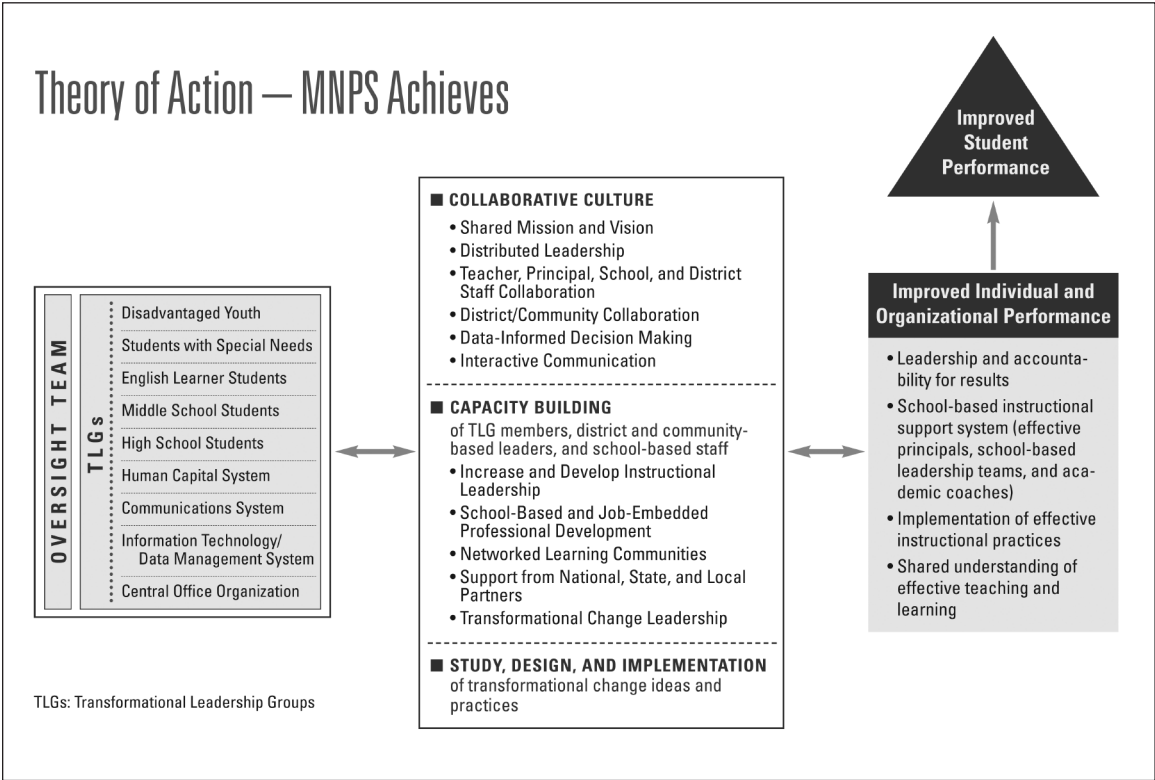
A central aspect of MNPS’s transformational change effort is MNPS Achieves, which has engaged more than 100 leaders throughout the district and community in a systemic process to improve student achievement.

stimulus dollars, which resulted in nearly 400 displaced teachers. The district retained all of the displaced teachers through natural turnover and attrition throughout the system – none were laid off.

The Metro Council fully funded the district’s budget request at \$670.5 million, an increase of \$37 million over last year’s budget. Like many districts, MNPS faced the loss of federal

Within this context, MNPS been engaged in a major transformational change effort since 2009 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 (Wagner et al. 2006) that has engaged more than 100 leaders throughout the district and community in a systemic process to improve student achievement in the district. MNPS Achieves is organized around nine “transformational leadership groups,” or TLGs, each focused on an area of concern for the district.² Additionally, the district has invested significant resources in building the capacity of principals and teachers through leadership institutes, added instructional and data coaches, and looked

FIGURE 1. Theory of action, MNPS Achieves



closely at instruction through an instructional rounds process (City et al. 2009) and the Skillful Observation and Coaching Laboratory process (Rutherford Learning Group). In our 2010 report, we identified the theory of action underlying MNPS Achieves, depicted in Figure 1.

In the 2010 report, we described the graphic this way:

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 CLG³ 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.

In this year's report, we focus on the left-hand box: the TLGs; the middle box: collaborative culture and capacity-building; and one of the improved student performance outcomes in the right-hand box: a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning. At the end of the report, we describe our evolved understanding of this complex transformational change effort and offer recommendations for improvement.

² Those TLG areas are high schools, middle schools, disadvantaged youth, students with special needs, communications, information technology, English learners, central office effectiveness, and human capital.

³ The Change Leadership Group (CLG) is now known as the Oversight Team.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS and OBJECTIVES

The authors have been engaged in a multi-year evaluation of MNPS Achieves to examine five key transformational system change dimensions: instructional vision, coherence, culture, capacity building, and scale. In this report, we address the following questions: In what ways are the MNPS Achieves system changes transformational?

- How do they build capacity?
- How do they improve culture?

Are the system changes being implemented coherently?

- How are TLG-initiated system changes being implemented?
- How do TLGs connect with departments? With external partners? With other initiatives?

In what ways are the system changes being implemented as part of MNPS Achieves achieving scale?

- Do they have spread?
- Do they have depth?
- Do they have sustainability?
- Do they extend ownership of the system change?

Our data collection sources are described in Appendix A.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Five key themes emerge from the literature on effective district transformational change.

First, effective districts have a defined and shared districtwide instructional vision, with a limited number of curricular and pedagogical approaches and a moderate to high level of specificity within those approaches (Supovitz 2006). In the second and related theme, successful district system changes place a strong emphasis on “coherence,” where “the elements of a school district work together in an integrated way to implement the articulated strategy” (Childress et al. 2007, p. 43). Third, districts and educational systems that develop collaborative professional cultures show better results for students and sustainable success over time (Hargreaves & Shirley 2009). Fourth, districts that build the collective capacity of professionals throughout the system through well-structured, well-designed professional learning and lateral networks that focus on achievement, transparency, and challenging conversations show demonstrable academic gains for students (Fullan 2010; Simmons 2007). And fifth, success of district system changes is dependent on achieving “scale,” which includes not just “spread,” but also depth, sustainability, and ownership (Coburn 2003).

⁴ There are exceptions, however. The evaluation of Children Achieving, a systemwide reform effort in Philadelphia, provided regular reports and feedback over the course of the five-year reform effort (for example, Corcoran & Christman 2002; Foley, 2001). And Supovitz’s (2006) study of comprehensive district reform in Duval County spanned six years and was able to provide in-depth understanding of the district context, multiple initiatives, and stakeholders.

These lessons about districtwide transformational change, however, are almost all based on post-hoc analyses. Evaluations of these large-scale efforts are not frequently undertaken at the outset of the transformational change initiative. Rather, they are typically retrospective, often narrowly focused on discrete programs, and summative. And many reports of school district system change efforts are also summative and retrospective, especially those that highlight “best practices” and successful initiatives, which limit their utility in impacting system change as it’s happening (e.g., Childress et al. 2007; Hess 2005).⁴

FINDINGS

Transforming MNPS through Collaborative Culture

The elements of a collaborative culture include a shared mission and vision, distributed leadership, collaboration between the central office and schools, district-community collaboration, data-informed decision making, and interactive communication. We discuss each in turn next.

Shared Mission and Vision

The general improvement in culture that we noted in our 2010 report has been maintained this year. Our interview data gave a clear sense that MNPS is in the midst of an ongoing culture change that seems to have permeated much of the executive and middle-management level of the central office, and which is beginning to filter down to the school level in some areas, among many principals in particular. Several participants used the culture and climate of the district previously as a point of comparison. It was described as “negative,” “destructive,” and “a culture of fear,” with a lack of openness and transparency – as one central office staff member put it, “It was a very depressed and depressing place to work.” There was also a sense that the district had no common direction. One member of the executive staff said, “[There was] not a common vision, and schools were left to do what they felt was best.”

At the central office level we found a general sense that MNPS has a vision and mission focused on student achievement, highly effective teaching, leadership development, and

continuous improvement, and is “moving in the right direction” even if there are still significant improvements to be made. This was reflected in our central office survey, as shown in Table 1.

More than two thirds of central office staff responding to our survey agreed or strongly agreed that the central office has a clear vision

for reform, up from only 56 percent in 2010. The survey didn’t show any significant change in principal and assistant principal perceptions of this statement, but in both years about

71 percent of school administrators agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.

The other three items in Table 1 each get at the mission of the organization and the role of individuals in supporting that mission. Both school administrators and central office staff

were highly likely to agree with these items, across both years of the survey. More than two-thirds, and in most cases upwards of 75 and 80 percent of respondents agreed with these items.

In our interviews with central office staff, several participants noted a shift in focus from adult-driven practices to student-driven, with the clear message that student achievement is the responsibility of all adults in the system. One central office staff member stated, “Dr. Register brought a focus of, student achievement has to be number one, and we’re going to do whatever it takes to get there.”

A few central office members used the term “servant leadership” and emphasized their roles as being in the service of and providing support to schools. Several participants also echoed the refrain of MNPS’s public mission and vision: that MNPS will be the first choice for all families in Nashville.

The sense that a district now has a direction or common sense of purpose was sometimes

Participants repeatedly used the word “hope” and spoke of a greater sense of positivity, momentum, and an increased focus on collaboration.

TABLE 1. Moving in the right direction

CENTRAL OFFICE...	SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS				CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
Has a clear vision of reform that is linked to standards for student learning and growth	72.0	189	71.6	194	56.4	156	68.6	121
Is committed to high standards for every student	80.4	189	74.2	198	70.5	156	76.6	128
Is actively involved in school reform	74.1	189	74.5	192	67.1	155	74.0	123
I am clear on how my job supports the district’s overall objectives	78.7	188	80.5	190	77.6	156	83.5	127

noted with what seemed to be a sense of relief, particularly at the central office level. A transformation to a more positive and productive culture is part of the district's theory of action for sustained, systemwide improvement. Again, this was most pronounced at the central office level. Participants repeatedly used the word "hope" and spoke of a greater sense of positivity, momentum, and an increased focus on collaboration. These were paired with clear expectations and a renewed focus on rigor and accountability for students and adults. One external partner said,

There's a sense of renewed excitement and hope – I mean, it's amazing. Maybe just the whole notion of hope, that adults can change their practice, is the single biggest achievement of all.

Though several participants gave Dr. Register much of the credit for spearheading the culture change, a few did note that a growing body of individuals – many brought in during

his tenure – have taken responsibility for cultivating it. One central office middle manager said:

I think honestly [the] number one [influence on changes in culture] is Jesse Register. But it's not all about him. I think the leadership he's brought, the kind of people he's brought in and is nurturing from within, who are . . . on board with this collaborative vision – I think that's been a powerful influence.

Distributed Leadership

Responses to the survey items related to distributed leadership were mixed across the items and years and among central office and school-based staff. As shown in Table 2, the proportion of school administrators who agreed or strongly agreed that the central office shares decision making with them actually decreased by about eight percentage points from 2010 to 2011. It was one of only three items in the administrator survey that

TABLE 2. Shared decision making

TO WHAT EXTENT DOES THE MNPS CENTRAL OFFICE DO EACH OF THE FOLLOWING?	SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS				CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
Shares responsibilities and decision making with site-level administrators	54.2	190	46.1	219	58.9	151	60.1	153
Creates structures, time, and resources for administrators and teachers to participate in joint decision making	46.0	189	47.2	218	38.7	150	44.9	147
Implements specific strategies to develop shared leadership between administrators and teachers	60.1	188	56.9	218	51.3	150	54.4	149
Creates opportunities for educators at the district and school level to take on new leadership roles	62.0	187	63.7	215	53.3	152	65.1	152
Creates structures and opportunities for collaboration among schools and teachers	49.5	186	61.6	193	48.2	137	63.0	108

decreased by more than five percentage points.

Additionally, the response to the second item in the list, that the MNPS central office creates structures, time, and resources for the school-based staff to participate in joint decision making, was consistently low across both respondent groups and years. Less than 50 percent of staff agreed with that statement. The third item did not change significantly from year to year for either group. And regarding the fourth item listed in Table 2 – that the central office creates opportunities for educators to take on new leadership roles – central office staff were much more likely to agree with that statement in 2011 than they were in 2010. School-level administrators responded fairly consistently to that item in both years, and nearly two-thirds of both groups agreed with that statement. The final item in Table 2, however, which focuses on central office supports for collaboration among school staff, was much more positive than these other examples. Both principals and central office staff were much more likely to agree or strongly agree with this statement in 2011 than they were in 2010, with increases of twelve to fifteen percentage points for each group.

In our interviews, however, we were much more likely to hear that principals felt more empowered than they did under earlier administrations. MNPS was previously described as an environment in which central office staff and principals were reluctant to, or did not perceive that they had the authority to, carry out major responsibilities and decision making, and where innovation was rarely rewarded. Both central office staff and school

leaders spoke of an attitudinal shift and an environment that promotes agency and risk-taking and expressed appreciation that there is more autonomy and site-based decision making at the school leadership level. One central office staff member who works closely with schools said:

[Previously] there was a lot more fear, and there's a lot more site-based management now. I've heard principals say, "This is my building, and I'm going to make the decisions that occur in it." And they say that because they've been given power, and that's a good thing.

Multiple principals stated that they have more autonomy and latitude to make decisions than at any other point in their careers, which in turn allows them to tailor resources to meet their school's specific needs. Coaching was often used as an example, with school leaders composing coaching teams based on their own data, needs, demographics, and teaching force. When asked if he had any concerns about the equitable distribution of coaches, Dr. Register noted that the structuring of leadership and coaching teams were a part of principal accountability, adding that the authority to make decisions at the site level has led to near unanimous principal support and buy-in of the coaching model. One central office leader spoke of the importance of central office standing behind solid decision making at the school level, even when it may be unpopular with some stakeholders. Describing a specific school-level personnel change that drew community resistance, he said:

Other principals saw that in the face of pressure, the central office did not back

down. That is a kind of culture change. [Principals] have to know that if they make a tough decision, they will be supported.

The discrepancy between perceptions in the interview and survey data may be a result of the relatively small group of principals that we talked to, as well as the fact that those who were interviewed were “high-flyers” or early adopters who are likely not representative. All of our principal interviewees were involved in TLGs and other system change efforts throughout the district and seemed particularly primed to be given and utilize greater autonomy. Despite their positive examples, the survey suggests that, particularly in the area of decision making, there are a substantial number of school administrators in the district who do not feel as empowered. In the recommendations section, we provide specific examples of the kinds of efforts that might be useful to develop distributed leadership at the school level.

Distributed Leadership within the Central Office

Respondents spoke not only of greater distributed leadership generally in the district, but specifically at the central office level. Elements of distributed leadership that were most often mentioned included a culture that encouraged individuals to generate ideas and take risks and gave them the authority to make and enact decisions that affected their departments. One central office leader stated, “There is less of a threat. . . . People are not scolded when they take courageous steps and fail.” A middle manager said:

People that have been here a while have expressed to me, like water cooler talk, that before they understood their job to

be, they do their function, they leave at 4:00, and they go home. Now it’s like, “Wow, I actually have ideas that I can bring to people and they care about them.”

Despite this shift, we heard some concerns about gaps or a lack of “bench strength” at the executive level of leadership, particularly from external partners. Though the theory of action promotes distributed leadership, it is not clear that all leaders yet have the will, or perhaps the capacity, to be fully effective in a strong leadership position. One community partner said:

Ideally, you want a manager in each area of MNPS with drive and energy to implement change.

Not all those folks have that. It can be a frustrating exercise for folks having to partner

with the school district – there’s a lot of talking, but things don’t happen.

Efforts to build capacity among leaders, discussed later in this report, are key to building and sustaining change across the system. One community partner expressed hope that capacity will grow to meet expectations, thus building a strong set of leaders in the district:

If [Dr. Register] can empower leaders under him, and he is creating that – giving them professional development and looking at how they think, expecting boldness out of his leadership team, and

“[Principals] have to know that if they make a tough decision, they will be supported.”

– Central office leader

making changes when it doesn't happen. He's hopefully making changes in other leaders that will propagate down and across.

One external partner also noted that building leadership internally is a crucial step in decreasing the district's reliance on the external expertise and consultants that have bolstered its capacity throughout the first two years of MNPS Achieves.

Data-Informed Decision Making

In the central office staff and school administrators' surveys, items related to data-informed decision making showed significant improvement in the overall proportion of respondents agreeing, or were consistently agreed with by two-thirds or more of respondents on both surveys, in both 2010 and 2011. For example, both groups were much more likely to agree or strongly agree in 2011 that central office is responsive to schools' data needs, as shown in Table 3.

More than seven out of ten of the survey respondents agreed with the first item, an increase of more than ten percentage points

for both groups. Also, more than 80 percent of school administrators and more than 70 percent of central office staff agreed that central office is engaged in analysis of student performance data and collects and uses data to improve its support for schools.

We heard this same emphasis and support for using data in our interviews. Participants at all levels clearly identified data-informed decision making as a major focus and priority of MNPS, and both the data warehouse and data coaches were often mentioned as markers of the district's commitment to and support of becoming data-driven.

One central office staff member noted the importance of emphasizing data use not just at the school level but throughout the system, saying, "We provide training to district staff as well. If we're going to use data, then principals need to know that everyone is looking at using data." There is evidence that the data warehouse is being accessed by a broad spectrum of district and school staff, including hundreds of new users each month. In 2010-2011, 4,123 users – including over 2,500 teachers – accessed the data warehouse, con-

TABLE 3. Data-informed decision making

CENTRAL OFFICE...	SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS				CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
Understands and is responsive to each school's data needs	63.0	189	73.3	202	55.2	145	71.8	124
Is engaged in systematic analysis of student performance data	84.5	187	82.8	192	67.8	152	72.3	119
Collects and uses data to improve its support for schools	76.8	190	73.3	191	67.5	157	73.2	123

ducting over 220,000 executions (see Tables 4 and 5). The majority of participants who spoke about data noted that although the district is evolving, it is still at the beginning stages of this work, and that there is a great amount of capacity building to be done at both the district and school levels. Their comments often paired a sense of enthusiasm and excitement about moving in this direction with a caveat that “we have a ways to go” or “we are nowhere near there . . . [but] we are on our way.” The scope of the task was duly noted – one central office middle manager characterized it as “having to teach a whole system how to use data effectively.”

The importance of data access, understanding, and use at the teacher level was stressed often, particularly by data and instructional coaches. As described later in this report, this varies widely at the school level, and principals often serve as “gatekeepers” who do or do not encourage teachers to become more data-driven and access and use available resources.

Though we didn’t hear directly from any teachers or school leaders who were themselves resistant to efforts to become more data-driven, coaches theorized about the anxiety that might lead to resistance amongst school staff. Of teachers, one coach said, “I

think it’s still fear and denial with so many teachers.” Another said of principals:

I think some principals are scared that they don’t really understand the data, and they don’t want anybody to know they don’t know the data. There are some that [want] control. . . . They don’t want anyone from the outside looking at their data.

The importance of data access, understanding, and use at the teacher level was stressed often.

Several instructional coaches in particular praised the service orientation of both data coaches and central office staff members who trained them in using the data warehouse, asked for feedback, and accommodated their needs by creating easily accessible reports.

One said:

That’s an example of the power of somebody being in charge who knows their area, has a plan, and listens to the audience. It should be like that in every department in this district.

One central office staff member noted that previously when teachers requested data, the

TABLE 4. Data warehouse usage summary, 2010-2011

Role	Role Group	# Users	# Executions
District	Data Coaches	13	32,079
	Other District Users	388	49,303
School Staff		1,189	88,846
Teachers		2,533	52,890
Total		4,123	223,118

TABLE 5. Data warehouse: new users per month

Month	# New Users
3/2011	705
4/2011	544
5/2011	339
6/2011	121
7/2011	101
8/2011	986
9/2011	365

response process was lengthy or sometimes didn't happen. Now, however, the data warehouse is becoming part of the culture and has "taken away the excuses" for teachers not to use data.

Interactive Communication and Collaboration

We identified communication as an issue in last year's evaluation report, and despite some improvement, it continues to be a challenge. The 2010 and 2011 surveys of central office staff and principals/assistant principals included items on communication, as shown in Table 6.

This general item on communication stood out for us. It was one of six items that consistently showed low proportions of staff agreement. Less than 50 percent of staff across both surveys and both years agreed or strongly agreed that the channels of communication are open in MNPS.

Next, we first describe internal communication within the central office and then discuss communication between central office and schools and across TLGs and departments before ending with a discussion of external communication.

Communication within the Central Office

The increase in both the amount and quality of communication and collaboration between individuals and departments in the central office was a notable theme, particularly for members of the executive staff. Both the training sessions with John Norris, a consultant from Group Dynamics and Strategy Training Associates, and the culture-building work of the Central Office Effectiveness TLG supported by Marla Ucelli-Kashyap from the Annenberg Institute for School Reform were mentioned as conscious and deliberate efforts to focus on improving communication and collaboration throughout the central office in a context where the professional demands of central office administrators would otherwise make such a focus difficult. One central office leader said:

If we got anything as an outgrowth of this transformational effort, it is the collaboration across departments. It's a complete turnaround. . . . If we don't do anything else, we've learned to communicate and collaborate.

However, interviews with central office employees not in executive leadership positions suggested a more complicated picture. When asked how departments within the central office collaborate,

one middle manager said, "I personally think that's a real weakness still. Communication in the central office is still somewhat difficult, and I think the departments do not communicate with one another very well."

TABLE 6. Communication

THE CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION ARE OPEN IN MNPS.	2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
School Administrators	45.7	188	49.5	190
Central Office Staff	31.6	158	38.4	125

Respondents to the district's central office survey made similar comments. In response to a general question seeking additional comments or concerns, seven of twenty-two central office staff who wrote comments raised the issue of communication, including this one:

Some chains of commands are better than others but as whole, there [aren't] enough meetings between top management and middle managers. Therefore, the lower managers don't have enough information to share with the "folks on the ground." We frequently hear about a new policy or a procedure and everyone in the room "has never heard of it." Decision makers assume that once they tell their next in command that everyone will hear the news. This is far from the case. This keeps adding to a lack of trust among the district AND a huge waste in resources.

Though participants described something of an evolution from an environment where collaboration was practically nonexistent or "people didn't even know people in other departments," continuing communication problems, particularly about new developments or initiatives, have impeded the ability of central office staff to adequately support schools. One middle manager said, "Sometimes we get calls on things and we can't answer, because we were totally unaware of those things ourselves."

A few participants noted that though there was a general sense of increased collaboration and communication, certain areas within the

central office remain more isolated. One central office staff member said:

There is a high level of collaboration generally, but that's not always the case. It depends on individuals and departments. . . . Some decisions we haven't been included in. To be honest, with [names department], we have not been at the table as much as

we'd like. Sometimes we're seen as outside, and we need to be jointly at the table in some of those decisions.

Again, respondents to the central office survey also raised similar concerns:

Central Office is still working in silos with little communication between departments.

Communication is an issue between and within different departments. Departments and tiers (elementary, middle, high) seem to work in isolation and often at odds.

Communication and shared vision across tier leaders was an issue. Each tier has a separate approach to transformational change: in elementary it is balanced literacy and math; at the middle school level balanced literacy and math are also a focus but so are the sixteen qualities of effective middle schools; and at the high school level it is the academies approach, which includes project-based learning, block scheduling, and career-based

"Decision makers assume that once they tell their next in command that everyone will hear the news. This is far from the case."

— A central office staff member

themes. These approaches are not necessarily in conflict; much about them is compatible, and the differences are appropriate to addressing the developmental needs of students at the various levels. However, being explicit about how they are connected and the rationale for differences is a critical communication challenge. Respondents attribute the divisions by tiers as issues of work and communication styles of key staff in these departments. As one participant in a TLG co-chairs meeting stated, “Internal communications, that’s what this is about. Does anyone own this?”

Between Central Office and Schools

The central office and school administrator surveys included several items that address how the central office and schools interact. We highlight several relevant items in Table 7.

Table 7 demonstrates consistently high or significantly improving rates of agreement for both principals and central office staff on items related to central office support for

school reform, with one exception. Fewer than 50 percent of central office staff and school administrators agree or strongly agree with the final item, “central office priorities are consistent with schools’ priorities.” Still, the other items paint a picture of a central office that is increasingly providing research-based and relevant supports for teaching and learning.

The survey findings were reflected in interview data, which indicated that central office administrators were attempting to move toward a servant leadership approach in their relationships with schools in hopes that school staff would see them as agents of support rather than of punitive measures. One central office staff member said:

In the early 2000s, we were part of a culture where it was not about collaboration – the less you hear from the central office, the better off you are. We’re in the

TABLE 7. Central office/school interaction

CENTRAL OFFICE...	SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS				CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
Helps schools identify research-based strategies to better meet their reform goals	60.8	189	65.9	205	44.8	143	62.2	119
Uses the experiences of its schools to improve its strategies and approaches for supporting reform	48.9	188	54.2	201	44.4	144	61.2	121
Provides school leaders with information about high-quality support providers relevant to the focused efforts of their schools	52.7	186	65.9	185	41.3	138	52.7	110
Helps schools promote and nurture a focus on teaching and learning	76.1	188	70.9	203	60.5	147	75.6	119
Priorities are consistent with schools’ priorities	43.2	185	42.1	197	37.7	151	48.8	125

process of changing that. I don't want principals to fear me or think I'm there because something's wrong.

Despite positive examples, both survey and interview data show that experiences of communication between central office and schools vary widely throughout the district. Seven of thirty-three principals or assistant principals who responded to an open-ended question asking for additional comments or concerns on the principal survey noted negative experiences communicating with the central office. One said:

A lot of central office personnel still do not respond to principals' emails and/or phone calls on a consistent basis. It is frustrating to make contact with someone and wonder if they will do something as simple as email or call me back. What would happen if someone at central office called or emailed me and I did not return the communication?

The implementation of the district's coaching model was generally seen as an effort from the district to support teachers and help them develop their practice. One school-based staff member said:

I think that teachers are starting to feel like the whole idea of putting all those coaches in buildings is really meant to support them, so [Dr. Register] is putting his money where his mouth is. . . . I think that teachers feel like that's an effort in good faith, to help them and not to watch them.

There were some questions from various participants about whether the kinds of culture changes – including improved collaboration

and communication – that were noted at the central office level or among TLG members have translated to schools. One community partner said, "The challenge and task is to make it feel like there is change and transformation going on, to move that buzz down into the school level." An external partner noted that culture change at the school level is uneven. I think it's very uneven. And I think the people who are in [middle management] positions, they're the key translators of the culture from central office to schools, and I think that's both a work in progress and uneven in how it's being executed.

School-based staff spoke about the inconsistencies in communication from the central office, and

teachers in particular noted that much of what was shared with them was affected by administrator interpretation. One school administrator, in response to a general com-

ments question on the survey, also raised the question of whether central office tailored supports for schools.

The mandates this year have been given to our school regardless of the work that we are currently doing. It seems that someone at the central office hears about

"Teachers are starting to feel like the whole idea of putting all those coaches in buildings is really meant to support them. . . . Teachers feel like that's an effort in good faith, to help them and not to watch them."

– A school-based staff member

a great program and wants it implemented right away with everybody without going to the schools to find out, what are the needs, what is the school already doing, how does the program fit into the overall efforts of the school, etc. I believe we were told in one meeting that although our schools might not be worried about math scores, the district is, so we are all doing math interventions whether we want to or not. This would not be in line with collaborative decision making and finding reform initiatives that fit the needs of individual or small groups of schools.

One coach spoke about the need for more direct communication about system change efforts to teachers, noting that when information gets processed through multiple levels of the system before reaching them, a “rumor mill” begins. The coach said:

Teachers do get frustrated that there’s no direct line of communication for reform efforts. They hear things from us, they hear things from principals. Some principals are not as timely with getting information to teachers, so they hear it from other teachers, their buddies in the district. Even as a [coach] I hear, “Have you heard about this? Have you heard about this?” No, I haven’t. There’s not a direct line, a place you can go for all of your information, or a timeline for even getting information to teachers. . . . That can be very frustrating.

This also led to the perception from school-based staff that there were communication problems among decision-makers or depart-

ments within the central office. Additionally, inconsistent communication coupled with fast-paced, continual, and high-stakes change led school personnel to feel frustrated and overwhelmed. During a focus group, two teachers had the following exchange:

T1: So much changes at the district level that principals aren’t even aware of until the last minute. Our principal came in the other day, and I can’t remember what it was that she was panicking about – some issue relating to graduation that had just changed and they didn’t know about.

T2: And it’s vital, and it’s like you’ve got to do it, and it’s like I didn’t even know we were supposed to be doing that, what are you talking about?

Some coaches noted that their increased access to information and decision-makers allowed them to circumvent ineffective communications processes and get information to teachers more quickly than if it were delivered by administrators.

One common theme from school-based staff was the disconnect between central office managers and administrators and the realities “on the ground.” One teacher said, “I think that the higher level of administrators, from Dr. Register to the top brass, they’re still too insulated on what happens on campuses.”

Across TLGS and between TLGs and Departments

Most TLG co-chairs and members agreed that collaboration among TLGs was limited. When asked how TLGs collaborate, comments like “I don’t know,” “not much,” or “that’s probably one of the weaker areas” were common for about two-thirds of participants. While some of the TLG leaders could cite specific examples of collaboration with other TLGs, even in those cases this typically amounted to exchange of information rather than joint work plans, or involved process TLGs such as IT or Communications supporting emerging work. Meetings of co-chairs and quarterly meetings were seen as opportunities to get to know the work of other TLGs, but 60 percent of the respondents – including co-chairs of the TLGs as well as members of the Oversight Team themselves – saw the Oversight Team meetings in particular as passive exchanges of information. Some new tools and processes have been developed that are designed in part to encourage more opportunities for collaboration but had not made a discernible impact in the 2010-2011 academic year. Most district-based TLG co-chairs felt that there was a strong connection between the work coming out of the TLG and the work being done in their departments, and in many cases it was difficult or impossible to delineate between the two. One co-chair stated, “I don’t know how much I can say is TLG work and how much I can say is what we’re trying to do in our own jobs. But I think that’s a good thing.

I feel like if you’ve got a match there, I feel like that’s what it’s all about.” Several agreed that, while sometimes the TLG is primarily a “sounding board” used to reinforce the direction that the work is going, a strong community presence on the TLG can add valuable ideas and resources that would not likely come out of a district-only group.

One central office leader said, “Some of [the work] has been created in the TLG, things we haven’t thought of, connections we haven’t made with the community.”

TLG co-chairs who are also central office leaders told us that the work of their TLG is considered in executive-level decision making: “When we meet as an executive staff, when we’re making big decisions, that info from the TLGs, from what they’re doing, flows into the decision making process at top level executive staff meetings.”

In the Community

One clear change in culture has been the district’s close partnerships with community organizations, businesses, and individuals through their involvement as TLG members as well as through initiatives such as the high school academies. MNPS Achieves has brought together partners across the city, and there is alignment on several important issues: ASSET, high school academies, and use of

While some of the TLG leaders could cite specific examples of collaboration with other TLGs, even in those cases this typically amounted to exchange of information rather than joint work plans.

data. Both community partners and district staff stated that this has been a positive change. One central office leader said:

[Dr. Register] has given us engagement with the community. He came in and that was one of the first things he did. He has

“Community participation in high-level decision making — that in and of itself is transformational. Community never felt it had as much of a voice as it has now.”

— A community partner

given us the encouragement to reach out into the community and see them as partners.

A community partner said, “Community participation in

high-level decision making — that in and of itself is transformational. Community never felt it had as much of a voice as it has now.” Additionally, a few participants noted that the district’s focus on best practices, with corresponding efforts to bolster its knowledge base with external expertise, has been an important change from a formerly insular environment. A community partner noted that the district was becoming “an intentionally contemplative institution,” and one central office staff member said:

We’re looking outside the district for the first time. . . . Part of the issue with the state has been that we’ve been so isolated. To bring in outsiders . . . and look at best practice is very welcomed.

Though the continued, substantive engagement of community partners was widely praised, a few participants noted areas where there were “turf wars,” potentially duplicative

work, “prickly” relationships, or a lack of clear alignment between some external groups and the work of the TLGs or district. One community-based TLG co-chair said, “We know what each other is working on, but we’re not working in tandem. The trains are not running in the same direction. There’s not collaboration, just good will at this point.” A district-based co-chair said, “I feel like I have three different groups that are working on the same thing, so next year I’m hoping I can . . . look at the people and sort of [put] them together in one core group.” While part of this is a communication issue, it also speaks to the ongoing challenge of enacting changes that require substantial collaboration, partnership, and shared resources between the district and multiple community organizations, particularly if there is not a common vision across the engaged stakeholders. Additionally, questions of who “owns” the work (or specific elements of it) has the potential to create divisions, particularly if one or more external groups have had a significant hand in idea development or implementation or if external funding is at stake.

Some participants also mentioned that what is becoming a citywide focus on education, with continually increasing collaboration with and support from organizations such as the mayor’s office and chamber of commerce as well as an improved sense of confidence in the district from the community at large, has contributed to the shift to a more hopeful culture. One central office staff member said:

I think that there’s what I call the stars aligning. There’s political will to see MNPS be successful, there’s community

support, there's support from the business community and from the chamber and all the partnerships for the academies. There's support from the state. Everyone needs MNPS to be successful. . . . The support is there, and that has been helpful to the culture as well.

Ongoing efforts on the part of district leadership to build and sustain positive and productive working relationships with both local and state leaders has been integral to maintaining ongoing dialogue, support, collaboration, and commitment to shared ideals, even when philosophies or approaches may diverge.

Interviewees who were also parents of MNPS students praised the district's efforts in communicating to families, and some believed that the community is developing a greater sense of trust in the district. However, we heard from both district and community participants that MNPS is still facing challenges in changing public perceptions, especially given the multi-year timeframe of transformational change efforts, and in building understanding of change efforts taking place. One coach acknowledged that system change initiatives were not necessarily clear to parents and community members:

I don't think that people are as aware of what's going on. I think there are also some misconceptions out there about what's going on. I think that they're trying to address those, but I think we still have some big improvements in communication that need to occur.

A central office middle manager who is also a parent noted that community members don't necessarily need or want to know about the TLG process or internal workings of the district, but rather:

I think what the community wants to know is what's changing because of all this effort. . . . They just want to know, how are you making my kid's school better?

What's changing at the school level? . . . I think maybe the communications effort, if there is one, should be focused on what are the outcomes of MNPS Achieves.

"There's political will to see MNPS be successful, there's community support, there's support from the business community and from the chamber and all the partnerships for the academies. There's support from the state."

– A central office staff member

THE NCLB Context

Participants at the central office and school levels widely noted that the pressure for the district to make AYP, and the corresponding threat of the state taking a larger role in the district, has been the cause of a great deal of anxiety across the system and has at some level detracted from a more general sense of positivity about the direction of the change initiative. One central office staff member said:

There's fear, because we're on a path where we're really getting some traction and making some change, and people are excited. And no one wants to be derailed by the test scores not having caught up to

where we are. Because everyone I've talked to believes we're on the right path. A lot of implementation still needs to be done, but that's something that's been distracting, quite frankly, from some of the good reform strategies that are trying to take root.

Though teachers and coaches recognized the various priorities of the district mentioned above, it was clear that pressure around AYP was what they felt most immediately. When asked about district priorities, one coach said, "Making AYP, and if you say anything else you're being disingenuous. That's the political times in which we live, that's the focus." Another added, "It's sad that we can all sit here, and the only goal we can tell you that this district has is to make AYP. Because that's all we feel." The effect that AYP pressure has had on morale was palpable, particularly when speaking of schools that had been

repeatedly unable to meet targets. And school-based staff felt the stress of a "pressure cooker" atmosphere in which multiple and immediate short-term strategies to meet AYP, which may not be well aligned or sustainable, "turn [their] lives upside down." One external partner characterized this issue as "a disconnect between the meeting AYP strategies conversation and the district transformation conversation."

Some teachers and coaches talked about low morale and a sense of fear that didn't stem from the district per se but rather more general attitudes about teachers that are populating the state and national landscape and that are difficult to overcome at a local level. One teacher said:

I'd love to say the fear factor is gone. I don't think that [Dr. Register] is driving the fear factor, but it's still alive and well.

TABLE 8. Major professional development initiatives

CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF	PRINCIPALS
<p>Executive Leadership Training and Coaching</p> <p>Group Dynamics and Strategic Training Associates: Provides executive leadership training and coaching through the Central Office Effectiveness TLG and one-on-one coaching with executive staff.</p> <p>Annenberg Institute's District Redesign and Leadership group: Provides leadership and technical assistance.</p> <p>Principal Leadership Institutes: Central office leaders design, present, and participate at these two- or three-day bi-annual retreats.</p>	<p>Principal Leadership Institute</p> <p>Two- or three-day retreats are held bi- annually, which include an introduction to or extension of content and processes that are central strands for the improvement of teaching and learning that will be embedded over time including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Instructional Rounds • Training on Inclusion and Differentiated Instruction • Developing the Artisan Teacher/Skilled Observation and Coaching (Rutherford) • SUCCEED Training in processes for teacher evaluation and removal (McGrath) • Using Data for Leadership Decisions • Continuous Improvement Process • Making the Transition to the Common Core • Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS)

It's the dark ages of education right now. I feel really sad to be a teacher sometimes now. Victimized. And I don't know that the changes we're making are changing that right now. However, I don't feel like my superintendent anymore is creating a culture of fear. I think the world is.

A few leaders noted the difficulty of overcoming negative public perception stemming from the district's NCLB status, which not only detracts from the very real progress that has occurred, but leads to anxiety and defensiveness within the district. One said, "The negative publicity, negative public perception, that standard of measuring the success of this district, is a very narrow view of what education is about. It has been destructive."

Transforming MNPS through Capacity Building

In addition to the work of the Transformational Leadership Groups, MNPS leadership embarked on an ambitious effort to build the capacity of central office staff, principals and teachers. We focused our attention on central office staff and principals. Table 8 describes the major professional development initiatives for each group.

Throughout our data collection, we tried to get at the ways in which central office supports and builds the capacity of school leaders to improve student achievement. Table 9 focuses on the perceptions of central office staff and school administrators about how well central office is able to build capacity in specific areas.

Looking across these items suggests two trends: First, that the central office values professional development and is providing it

TABLE 9. How well central office builds capacity

CENTRAL OFFICE...	SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS				CENTRAL OFFICE STAFF			
	2010		2011		2010		2011	
	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N	% A or SA	Total N
Provides school leaders with professional development that involves opportunities for modeling, shadowing, and reflection	42.5	186	53.8	186	36.8	136	53.6	110
Provides school leaders with professional development centered on teacher evaluation and observation	64.4	188	72.3	184	42.6	136	61.3	106
Promotes the professional development of teachers and principals/APs	82.0	189	83.5	200	63.0	154	77.4	124
Provides struggling school administrators with targeted intensive professional development and support	28.6	175	39.9	183	23.1	134	34.6	104
Provides differentiated support for principals and APs at different stages of their careers	34.2	187	40.6	187	22.6	133	30.5	105

more often. For example, we see significant increases in the proportion of both respondent groups agreeing or strongly agreeing that the central office provides and promotes professional development involving opportunities for modeling, shadowing, and reflection and also provides professional development focused on teacher observation and evaluation. And second, we see that specific and targeted support for administrators either at struggling schools or at different stages of their careers were areas that are not yet viewed as strengths among central office staff. These last two items on Table 9 were two of only six items that fewer than 50 percent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with, across both years and both respondent groups.

Capacity Building in Central Office

In our interviews with central office staff at the executive level, they gave multiple sources from which they receive support to develop their capacity as leaders. They pointed to opportunities for professional development through training with external consultants (executive leadership training with John Norris, Instructional Rounds training, and presentations at the Principal Leadership Institutes), external conferences, and interactions with internal and external colleagues (Dr. Register, Dr. Gloria Frazier, WEB Associates, and higher education partners). They frequently noted their time spent with the Central Office Effectiveness TLG as an opportunity for collegial interaction and reflection. Central office

Developing Great Teachers and Leaders: The Engine for School-Based Transformation in Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

Much like many other urban districts across the country, Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools (MNPS) has experienced its share of leadership transition at the top. However, prior to 2009 when Dr. Jesse Register became the director of schools, there was a period of seven years in which stability existed at the helm with the same director. Yet it was a system that continued to spiral downward and was in need of a long-term overhaul that would challenge and change its culture, climate, structures, and practices. Many staff had responded to the style and expectations of the former leadership with trepidation and quiet compliance, believing that to ask for help or admit you didn't know something was tantamount to being singled out as incompetent. In a fragile environment where leaders lacked the

confidence, support, or encouragement to take risks, there were few moves made to step outside the box with a creative idea or innovative practice.

Coupled with inertia and internal isolation, MNPS also maintained a relatively insular stance toward integrating knowledge about urban school system change efforts emerging in the field and the district did not look to engage external partners with internal staff as a way to deepen their expertise and build capacity as a learning organization.

The challenge of developing the capacity of school-based and central office staff to become "great leaders" had to begin with a fundamental change of mind and a change in attitude. Transforming schools in Metro Nashville had to start with transforming personnel from being compliant

to becoming courageous, and a central mechanism for making that change has been creating a collaborative culture. "Collaboration" has become the word of the day in MNPS, and its frequent use, particularly among principals, has been a signal to each other that there is a new way of doing things in MNPS.

Beginning with transparent, definitive, and passionate messages from Dr. Register, principals seem to understand the challenges they are facing but also acknowledge the opportunities they have to grow as professionals and improve their schools. Principals continue to comment about what it means to have a committed director of schools, and while they have become increasingly aware of his high expectations, they also recognize and mention the available supports.

leaders at all levels also told us that they looked to other colleagues for support and noted that their supervisors and colleagues were accessible and willing to help them in their work. As one leader stated:

[It's been] very helpful for me to have opportunities to be with other department leaders and other employees in central office. Everyone's extremely busy [which] led to the silo-ing everyone talks about that is prevalent. . . . People sometimes assume something can't be done some way because of a preconceived notion or [they] didn't know who to ask. Whenever we can get together, it's beneficial – to have discussions to share what you're doing. Even more of that would be stronger.

However, middle management seemed to have fewer structured opportunities for ongoing professional development. Recent hires also told us that they received no structured or formal district orientation, induction or training as new central office staff in the district. What they did receive was either procedural or informational in nature – particularly among mid-level management or below.

Central office leaders also expressed concern about the sheer volume of meetings they are asked to attend on a daily basis (only a fraction of which are expressly for professional development). They viewed this as a conflict with their ability and desire to spend more of their time in schools, which they affirmed as a priority area of work.

The change in attitude and actions of MNPS leadership has begun to take root across the district, and a major factor in accelerating that shift has been the huge investments made to develop the capacity of principals. The Principals Leadership Institute (PLI) has become a cornerstone of those investments and provides a structure for the delivery of ongoing professional development. Created early on in Dr. Register's tenure, the three-day experience held twice a year provides content knowledge and also process knowledge so that principals develop their capacity in multiple ways.

Each PLI has been bookended with a set of key messages from Dr. Register that set the tone at the beginning and the charge at the end. Over time, principals have begun to see the institutes as unique learning opportunities where they can share strategies and challenges in the

company of their colleagues and in a non-threatening way. The district has become more open-minded about using consultant expertise from outside the district, but it has also used the Institute format to showcase local work and practice.

One theme of instructional leadership training that has been carried through the Institutes as a central thread is the work of Mike Rutherford of the Rutherford Learning Group, Inc. Developing the Artisan Teacher is grounded in the belief and understanding that the role of an instructional leader is to build the talents and capacities of teachers – in other words, great leaders grow great teachers.

Rutherford's Skilled Observation and Coaching Lab (SOCL) model has become the framework around which principals have been given ongoing, job-embedded professional development. A key point about the decision to embrace this

approach is that it internalizes the idea of developing a workforce by first acknowledging the talent and ability that is inherently there and can be unleashed so teachers reach their fullest potential. The belief in principals to transform schools is then transferred to a belief in the capacity of teachers to transform teaching and learning for their students.

A significant number of staffing changes have also occurred at the principal level and a sizable number of principals have been in their positions in MNPS for five years or less. Some of the new principals were promoted from inside the district while others were recruited from outside, but together they represent roughly one third of the school-based leadership. Simultaneously, there have been several promotions among school-based leaders to central office positions ranging from the cabinet level to mid-level management.

Capacity Building at the School Level

In our data collection, we've regularly observed the Principal Leadership Institutes (PLI), which occur biannually in January and June. Principals have provided extensive evaluation data from each of these retreats. We have noted the following trends across the five PLIs that we have observed:

- **Ongoing professional development:** Efforts to develop the capacity of principals as instructional leaders began at the PLIs and have been continued between PLIs and revisited in subsequent leadership retreats. Developing the Artisan Teacher through the Skilled Observation and Coaching Laboratory, Instructional Rounds, and the Continuous Improvement process are three examples of an effort to "seed" best practices in stages using the PLIs as a fixed structure upon which to add building blocks and move principals through cycles of training and implementation.
- **Greater engagement:** As rapport, collegiality, and trust have developed among principals and their interest in the topics has grown, we have observed greater engagement in sessions and fewer side conversations and distractions from smartphones. Principals have increasingly asked for more time to spend with their colleagues and seem to place more value on those interactions over time.
- **Wider involvement:** While the initial PLIs drew on the expertise and skills of primarily external consultants, a conscious effort has been made to tap internal expertise,

Another approach to leadership development in MNPS has been to grow great leaders through an internal leadership pipeline. The Teacher Leadership Institute (TLI) was launched by the district in the summer of 2011 and is designed to recruit cohorts of promising teacher leaders with at least three years of classroom experience and prepare them for leadership positions throughout the district. By developing the potential for leadership among its more recent hires, the district is hoping to build its human resource capacity over the long term.

The focus on developing their own pipeline for leadership has spurred along the development of the Leadership Performance Strands and Skills, which are now the guideposts for the professional development that takes place in the PLI and the TLI. The five performance strands are: Setting Clear and Compelling Direc-

tion; Shaping Culture for Learning; Leading and Managing Change; Transforming Teaching and Learning; and Managing Accountability Systems.

Principals have been given new tools in their "leadership toolkit", a new language of "transformational and servant leadership," and a supportive culture in which to improve their practice. But they have also been given a more rigorous version of the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), the Tennessee Value-added Assessment System (TVAAS), and the overarching mandates of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). There is less timidity among these leaders every time they come together for a PLI, and their enthusiasm does not seem diminished by the difficult road ahead. Gains that are made at the school and district level are often celebrated. But it is the aggregate of their efforts that seems to matter most and will

determine whether as a district, they can make AYP and avoid a state takeover. Behind the smiling faces on the first day of an Institute and the exuberant talk that fills the room, there are many principals who feel overwhelmed by the number of new initiatives that must be implemented and are concerned about how to balance breadth with depth.

Pulling it all together into a coherent and manageable framework has to be a major part of the district's ongoing processes, especially when there are so many moving parts. The stakes are high, but the district's structures, policies, and practices are becoming stronger, and so is their belief system. Most importantly, there are now a growing number of principals who are willing to withstand the pressures so that they can move their schools forward and see their students make unprecendented gains.

with central office staff and principals serving as presenters, facilitators, and panelists. These opportunities have increased sharing of best practices along with challenges faced by other principals and new connections have been made across schools.

- **Clearer standards for leadership development:** The district has developed a set of five Leadership Performance Strands (Setting Clear and Compelling Direction; Shaping Culture for Learning; Leading and Managing Change; Transforming Teaching and Learning; and Managing Accountability Systems) that frame their professional development for leaders and they have defined the knowledge and skills that capture what leadership looks like in each of these areas.

Principals frequently referred to the Developing the Artisan Teacher, Instructional Rounds, and the SUCCEED training as key professional development strategies that have supported their work as leaders. Some noted that the opportunity to visit other schools through these models and have a better understanding of what is happening in other schools in their feeder pattern is as beneficial as the content of the trainings.

Principals, however, also returned frequently to the issue of time and expressed their desire to have more time to work more closely with their staff in focused areas of development. Given the number of in-service days, some principals expressed frustration in trying to keep pace. As one principal noted:

If I had the money, I would pay for all teachers to do an extra month in the summer, and we would plan ahead of the school year, look at data ahead of the

school year. Instead, we get going then wait until October. We have two days together as a faculty to get to know one another and take off.

Instructional coaches in general acknowledged the increase in professional development they now receive and specifically noted the changes in structures (“built-in” networks, PLCs, etc) as beneficial. As one coach commented:

I think we have networks really that we did not have before. I went to reading specialist meetings for years and felt like I hardly knew

anyone; I just sat here and talked about what needs to be done next and that kind of thing. They were fine, but I think we now have these built-in . . . now we’re attending these cluster

leadership meetings – they’re hard to squeeze in, but I know all the coaches from the middle and high schools in my cluster. We come to these coaching meetings, get to know coaches from other clusters. We have a lot more support as far as a resource than we had in past.

However, they did note that the trade-off of having more coaches working in diverse areas has meant less time to meet in content and role-specific groups than before. Coaches also

Principals returned frequently to the issue of time and expressed their desire to have more time to work more closely with their staff in focused areas of development.

recognized a shift in the focus of their professional development to include both content and process skills – for example, developing skills for working with teachers as adult learners. Some veteran coaches further explained that the nature of the job has changed over time from working directly with students to having more direct contact with teachers.

And finally, a strategic component of the district’s leadership capacity building has been the development of the Teacher Leadership Institute (TLI). Developed in collaboration with multiple partners, the Institute has become the district’s internal structure for

developing leadership capacity of teachers to lead from the classroom within the school and at the district level. An initial cohort of twenty-eight third-year

teachers went through a rigorous selection process and in June began a year-long development experience to increase their knowledge and skills in each of the MNPS Leadership Performance Strands. The intent is to increase retention of effective teachers and support them in the development and application of their leadership skills to improve adult performance.

Implementation

During the visit from the National Advisory Panel in December 2010, Dr. Register and other central office leadership noted that they believed MNPS is at the point with TLGs and other systemwide changes where planning was moving into implementation.⁵ Dr. Register noted, “If you [compare] planning and implementation, we were heavy on the planning side. Now we’ve moved along the continuum toward implementation.” However, Dr. Register and others recognized that leveraging the work of 150 people to impact the entire school system is a tremendous challenge.

Discussing “implementation” in a district as large and complex as MNPS is a challenge, as there are multiple initiatives in play at any one time, each one on its own timeline with their own definitions of what constitutes strong implementation and fidelity. Further complicating the picture for this evaluation is the fact that some initiatives pre-date MNPS Achieves or are only tangentially related to the work of the TLGs. Next, we explore issues related to implementation. We describe in general the work of each TLG, then focus on some notable examples of ideas and programs developed through the TLG process.

Implementing the Work and Ideas of the TLGs

In our evaluation report last year, we noted that most TLGs, up to that point, had been engaged in intensive planning processes that would, hopefully, set the stage for moving from planning to design and implementation of transformational changes in the 2010-2011 school year. We also saw different paths to implementation for different TLGs depending

“If you [compare] planning and implementation, we were heavy on the planning side. Now we’ve moved along the continuum toward implementation.”

– Dr. Jesse Register, Director of Schools,
Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools

⁵ See Appendix B for a list of National Advisory Panel members.

on the closeness of “fit” between the TLG and a related office or unit within the central office. For example, the High School TLG is clearly aligned with a particular department and line of authority within the central office. And the organization of that TLG – with the associate superintendent of high schools serving as TLG co-chair – reflected that alignment and clear line of authority. We argued that the path to implementation for these TLGs would be a simpler process (in theory, at least) than TLGs whose membership and authority crossed multiple departments within the central office, the most notable being the Performance of Disadvantaged Students TLG.

One year later, there are several TLG-designed or TLG-supported initiatives that have moved beyond the planning and design stages to implementation. Next, we outline the main focus areas of each TLG, along with some notable highlights and challenges faced during their second year of work. While not intended to be comprehensive, the following descriptions give a flavor for the work that each TLG is doing and how they are proceeding in studying, designing, and implementing transformational change ideas and practices.

Performance of English Learners

The Performance of English Learners TLG (EL TLG) used both student data and recommendations from an external appraisal conducted by George Washington University to identify priority areas for their work. A major focus for the EL TLG has been on decentralizing EL services and on creating the conditions for an inclusive culture for English learners

districtwide. Part of that effort has involved increasing recognition that English learners live throughout the Nashville community and has led to an emphasis on teacher effectiveness and increasing parent outreach and family support. The latter has proved a challenge within the TLG as members struggle to identify effective outreach strategies that sustain the voice and participation of parents and families. Highlights of their work include the creation of tier-level professional learning communities, restructuring the English learner coaching system to reach more schools, providing professional development for coaches, expanding English learner services to more schools, initial planning for an ESL endorsement and professional development program, and the initial implementation of the LEAF (Linking, Educating, and Advancing Families) program, which offers literacy and life skills training to non-English speaking parents. The TLG made a transition to a new district co-chair and seems to have developed effective processes for teamwork and collaboration.

Performance of Students with Special Needs

The Performance of Students with Special Needs TLG continued to focus on creating a culture of inclusion in all learning environments, developing the capacity of both general and special educators to support student learning, and aligning and implementing collaborative professional development support practices throughout the district. An additional area of focus for the coming school year is the concept and implementation of acceleration of learning for students with special needs, which the TLG has struggled with. The

group's work on implementing inclusive practices and integrative service delivery more deeply in the district is geared toward both improving student achievement and to changing attitudes and mindsets about instruction and best practices for students with special needs. The TLG recommended the district have an external assessment of the education of gifted and talented students. MNPS expects to award a contract for this assessment at the beginning of the school year based on responses to a request for proposals. The Performance of Students with Special Needs TLG is also working to embed social-emotional learning strategies into the district's approach to support services delivery for all students. The TLG had a district co-chair transition and has also continued to partner with the Mayor's Advisory Council on Special Education.

Performance of High School Students

The work of the Performance of High School Students TLG continued to focus on rallying stakeholders together around a common vision, goal, and structure for high school system change. The group's focus areas included identifying the characteristics for an MNPS graduate, building on the momentum from the launch of the Academies of Nashville and continuing to garner support and engagement from the business community, and transforming instruction through teacher collaboration, professional development, and project-based student learning. The TLG also worked on communication and messaging about the academies to the community using student ambassadors, though it has struggled to over-

come some perceptions both internally and in the community about the academy model. Additionally, the TLG supported a path of national certification, which requires data collection and a process to monitor the effectiveness of the academies model and implementation fidelity, and developed and launched virtual education options. The TLG transitioned to a new community co-chair.

Performance of Middle School Students

The Performance of Middle School Students TLG streamlined its number of subcommittees this year and also had a transition at the district co-chair level. The TLG focused on continuing to build a districtwide vision and implementation of the sixteen effective characteristics of middle schools, creating an aligned system of curriculum and assessment, which included building teacher capacity (with an emphasis on how to teach mathematics) through professional development and establishing a school culture that embraces practices and services to support the whole child. A self-assessment survey conducted through the National Middle School Association helped to identify weak areas across the district and define priorities. The TLG also planned and implemented a middle school conference serving 1,200 teachers, which included training in formative assessment, highly effective teams, and teaching in block scheduling.

Performance of Disadvantaged Students

The Performance of Disadvantaged Students TLG transitioned to a new district co-chair and also transitioned to a new community co-chair twice. Several community-based participants in the TLG, including two co-chairs and

a subcommittee co-chair, were hired by the district, leading to a heavier internal presence. The group narrowed its focus areas to include best instructional practices, including ensuring effective instructional practices for disadvantaged youth and aligning curricular resources and data to make instructional decisions; the impact of mobility on learning; and increasing student and family supports for health and social services. The district implemented the TLG's year one recommendation to hire data coaches, as well as develop K–12 pacing guides. The group has analyzed data on and increased awareness of student mobility issues throughout the district and collaborated with the Mayor's Task Force on Youth Mobility. In the area of student and family supports, four new Family Resource Centers were opened in the district with efforts to standardize services. The group also began to reexamine the concept of community schools and has explored various models and providers. With a charge to impact over two-thirds of the district's students, the group has struggled with finding paths to implementation in focus areas that spread across multiple district departments and which in some cases require significant financial investment.

Human Capital System/ASSET

ASSET, which is a merged entity comprising the original Human Capital System TLG and the Mayor's Teacher Effectiveness Initiative, focused on the areas of redesigning the district's human resources department to become a high-performing human capital system, hiring a professional development director to lead the district's efforts in this area, and working at the state level to inform changes to

both teacher and principal evaluation systems. A major goal of the group was to systematically identify and build the capacity of teacher leaders to increase retention and build a leadership pipeline, and as noted previously, the district's inaugural year-long Teacher Leadership Institute was put into place. The TLG launched action teams focused on preparation, induction, professional development, and evaluation for the second phase of its work and had a community co-chair transition. Given that the work of ASSET has such a wide spread, the group has at times struggled to ensure that human capital efforts are coherent and aligned both among TLGs and the larger district. A separate effort, focused on improving the business practices of the human resources department, was conducted by CSS.

Information Technology/Data Management System

The Information Technology / Data Management System TLG took on the federal 2010 National Education Technology Plan as a framework and focused on instructional as well as operational technology. The TLG worked to support instruction and student learning through training and the use of electronic learning tools, continued to update and support the district's technological infrastructure, and most notably, expanded the capabilities, staff, and use of the district's data warehouse by teachers and administrators. The TLG played a role in supporting the technology and data management needs of other

TLGs, including establishing the district's virtual high school. The group also developed a data governance model and action plan for MNPS. Because, like ASSET, this TLG has a focus that spreads throughout the district, the group has also struggled with ensuring coherence and alignment throughout the larger system. The Information Technology / Data Management System TLG also had a community co-chair transition, and MNPS hired the co-chair at the end of the year.

Communications System

The Communications System TLG focused on implementing a district communication plan, which had strategies for both internal and external communications. Internal communications work focused on connecting district communications to the classroom and creating a common knowledge base and more collaborative culture within the central office. As noted earlier in this report, internal communications continues to be a struggle. The TLG's work on external communications focused on utilizing a variety of formats, languages, and delivery systems to communicate to external stakeholders. This included a greater online and multi-media presence; a commitment to greater transparency and easy access to standard documents; clear and consistent messages about district priorities, efforts, expectations, and results; and training to help employees communicate with parents from diverse backgrounds. This focus also led to a collaboration with the EL TLG to examine best practices in translation and interpretation services in a multilingual school district. The Communications System TLG had a community co-chair transition and also brought on several new external TLG members.

Central Office Effectiveness

The Central Office Effectiveness TLG focused on the ongoing monitoring and adjustment of central office structures, roles, and resources; creating a culture and developing leaders to support the district vision and beliefs; and benchmarking and measuring the effectiveness of central office leadership practice. The Federal Programs office was restructured, and the district also began implementation of a project designed to align human capital resources. The executive team, executive directors, and supervisors participated in training on "Retooling the Organizational Culture," and associate and assistant superintendents took a lead role in designing and implementing the district's bi-annual Principal Leadership Institutes. TLG members, who are primarily district executive staff, reviewed the research base on central office effectiveness, identified best practice districts in particular areas, and began planning for an Emerging Knowledge Forum on Effective System Practices. The TLG group also identified the strategic initiatives of the district funded by Race to the Top or general funds. The director of schools assigned MNPS Achieves staff to design a project management framework and accountability system that will benchmark district, TLG, and executive staff transformational change efforts to increase the central office effectiveness during Year 3.

Implementation and TLG Structure

Several TLG members raised a concern around the relative lack of principal participation on TLGs, and that this would complicate implementation of TLG-led transformational change. Principals need to both have knowledge of and buy into the initiatives developed by TLGs (as well as other districtwide changes not developed by TLGs), since, as one TLG member put it, the principal is the “gate-

keeper.” Light principal participation and sometimes poor communication with principals is a threat to implementation of MNPS Achieves transformational change efforts. One ASSET TLG member argued:

We need to engage our principals more in the TLG/ASSET process. I don’t think most of them are aware of the work and recommendations of the TLG/[MNPS] Achieves. I was disappointed to learn that

Implementation Vignettes

The following vignettes explore implementation more deeply in two areas: high school academies and instructional and data coaching.

HIGH SCHOOL ACADEMIES

The largest and most visible initiative at the high school level in MNPS is the development of academies. While this “small learning community” approach to secondary schools pre-dates MNPS Achieves, its adoption at all high school campuses in the district has been accelerated significantly in the last two years. This has been accompanied by a comprehensive effort around the academy vision, branding and marketing, organizational structure, teaching and learning practices and expectations, and external assessment and accreditation of academy quality.

The curricular and instructional focus within the Academies of Nashville is to have all instruction be project- and inquiry-based and reinforced across multiple disciplines. There is also an emphasis placed on practical work experiences through internships and job shadowing. This vision is explicit and consistent

across central office and the High School TLG members and is supported by a branding and marketing campaign that (literally) summarizes the academy vision on the back of a business card. Beyond print and web-based marketing, each school has developed two student ambassadors from each school who promote the academy model across the district, but particularly to their fellow high school students and middle school students. The importance of the ambassador program to promoting academies was evident at one of the TLG quarterly meetings, where the High School TLG used a significant portion of time to have a set of student ambassadors promote the academy model to the other TLG members present.

Implementation of the model is occurring on several tracks, with some at a more developed level of implementation than others. At a purely structural level, implementation of academies is well developed. There are forty-three academies at twelve high school campuses. Twelve academy coaches work with high schools as liaisons to both the central office and to the business and higher education

communities. Buy-in from the business community is also far along, with more than 140 partners signed on to work with academies.

Implementation of project-based and inquiry learning, the instructional heart of the academy model, is at an earlier stage, “20 to 30 percent implemented” according to one TLG member. School team leaders have been trained in the project- and inquiry-based learning model, and thirty-three of forty-three teams have been trained. Additionally, MNPS is setting up two “demonstration” schools where academies have been implemented with fidelity, and model classrooms and lessons will be set up for visiting teachers to observe and adapt at their own schools. A TLG member said that MNPS “want[s] to build capacity here and not rely on outside experts.”

While academies have been widely embraced by MNPS, its business partners, and many in the broader Nashville community, one example of resistance was highly publicized. One high school with a longstanding International Baccalaureate (IB) Program became a center

of controversy when its IB coordinator publicly disagreed with the movement of MNPS towards the academy model. When the coordinator was subsequently transferred to another school by central office, many parents of the school's IB students protested that move. One TLG member described the situation as one of miscommunication and district history:

Parents of upper-level IB, high SES [socio-economic level] parents believe that academies are trying to dumb down schools and expectations. . . . That is the unfortunate thing that that message has permeated through a small core group of parents who are influential and loud. One thing I have noticed in this city is distrust of the school district. Parents have been burned time after time. I hear that consistently. . . . They suspect we're not doing [academies] for the right reasons. That has been a challenge to overcome perceptions. The only way to do that is with real results and data.

Early results are positive. In 2011, an MNPS high school was the only high school in the country to receive the National Community Schools Award of Excellence from the Institute of Educational Leadership/Coalition for Community Schools. Several academies are preparing for accreditation from a national organization focused on academies. Finally, there is an increased focus on virtual learning, expanding partnerships, and working more closely with middle schools to align visions and practices.

The Academies of Nashville is generally recognized within MNPS Achieves as the initiative at the most developed level of implementation. Part of this is due to the fact, as mentioned above, that the academy model has existed in some form in the district since 2006. But there is also a high level of clarity around the academy vision, significant internal and external buy-in, and a focus on teaching and learning best

practices, which are unusual to see in tandem in most district change efforts. Still, challenges remain to deeply impact teaching and learning in Metro Nashville. In addition to the well-publicized resistance mentioned above, one key issue is the coherence of the academy model at the high school level with system changes at the middle school level. The Middle School TLG is engaged in a deep study of middle school issues in the district and has adopted the "16 Essential Attributes and Characteristics of Effective Schools" advocated by the Association for Middle Level Education (n.d.). The other main focus in district middle schools has been addressing achievement in math, and there has been an emphasis in professional development in this area. At the same time, the High School TLG has been interested in bringing the academy model to eighth grade. This interplay of current and proposed initiatives at two different schooling levels has led to some tension between the TLGs. At its heart, however, there are significant coherence and middle-to-high-school-transition questions that need to be addressed by both TLGs and district departments over the next year, even as the implementation of the Academies of Nashville continues and deepens.

NOTE: For more detailed information on the Academies of Nashville, please visit <http://www.mnps.org/Page68146.aspx>

INSTRUCTIONAL AND DATA COACHES

Data and instructional coaches have been a significant investment by MNPS in ensuring that best practices are implemented with fidelity at the school and classroom levels. Their presence in schools is seen as a positive by central office staff, principals, and teachers. While there are a number of instructional coaching models that have been used by MNPS, the primary focus has been on giving schools access to literacy and numeracy coaches, especially at the elementary

and middle school levels. Shortly after Dr. Register's arrival as director, the number of instructional coaches increased significantly, to over 300 (with more literacy than numeracy coaches). In the first two years using instructional coaches, reviews were very positive. One central office staff and TLG member said that "even in two years they've made a big difference." Although one-time funding supporting many coaches ceased in the 2011-2012 school year, and there was anxiety about potentially significant cuts, many schools have chosen to use their federal money to retain coaches. Dr. Register noted that between one-third and one-half of coaching positions are now funded as part of MNPS's regular operating budget, and the remaining are funded by Title money, so the positions are no longer supported by "soft money."

Both the source of funding and the fact that principals are electing to retain coaches provides evidence that the coaching model is not only valued but becoming institutionalized. Still, the role of coaches, and how those coaches are accessed by schools, was a source of confusion for some teachers we interviewed. First, there was concern that some school administrators do not understand the role of instructional coaches, believing that those coaches were intended to evaluate teachers, which is not their role (administrators evaluate teachers). This issue has the potential to be exacerbated when the new teacher evaluation system is implemented in the 2011-2012 school year, and principals are expected to observe teachers for evaluation purposes at a much greater rate. And second, how coaches are assigned to, or requested for, schools was not well understood by some teachers. "Coaches were given and then taken away" was a representative response from teachers.

The introduction of a data coach coordinator and twelve data coaches – each assigned to a feeder cluster – has been a

many of the teachers that are part of the Teacher Leadership Institute had to ask their principal to nominate them. Many principals were not aware of the Institute and/or did not demonstrate the leadership to recognize outstanding teachers and nominate them on their own.

MNPS leadership has taken the viewpoint that all principals don't have to be a part of the TLGs to be involved, but all principals should be engaged in the district rollout of TLG recommendations. Principals must understand the implications of the changes and the linkages in order to lead and manage others in making the necessary changes. As Dr. Register has often said, "Systems changes don't happen without the superintendent and principals supporting the change."

Intentional decisions have been made by the leadership about how to involve principals in the transformational change of the district. Work of the TLG is carried into the practices of the district through the executive staff and operations of the departments of the district. There is a bridge between the work of the TLG and district administration – between recommendation and implementation – through the TLG structure. All TLGs have a member of the MNPS executive staff as one of their co-chairs. The executive staff meet with the director of schools every Monday, and together, they talk about the TLG recommendations in relation to making them operational.

Then there are principal meetings in which the executive staff engage *all* principals in the plan of action for implementation of the initiative if it is K–12 and districtwide. If the initiative is tier-specific (elementary, middle, or high school), principal tier meetings are the place where feedback, discussion, and education occurs. Often the Executive or Lead Principals, along with school-based principals, are leading the discussions.

How to achieve the most effective engagement of principals in TLG efforts is an open question. Principals have busy jobs – leading and managing change efforts daily to improve student and adult learning. Yet the principal voice is key for framing and implementing district and community transformational recommendations and practices. Designing mechanisms to keep principals informed about how the various initiatives fit together is also important. As the work of the TLGs deepen the focus on implementation, the need for coherence – an area we address later in the report – will become even more important.

significant and well-regarded investment in MNPS, with district stakeholders at all levels speaking of potential for data coaches to help improve instruction districtwide, praising the work that they have done so far, and sharing hopes for deeper implementation and a solid impact on student achievement in the coming years. Funded for four years through Race to the Top, data coaches work with school-level personnel to interpret, analyze, and use data for instructional improvement, including helping them become proficient in using the district's data warehouse. The data coaches are deployed by tier – four each for elementary schools, middle schools, and high schools. One central office leader argued that data coaches have been influential – I can't think of anybody who can't say that they've not been vital this year in being able to go into the schools, work with the teams, look at the data, determine what is it that our children or what areas our children need support in, and how they can support those teams.

A principal said that the data coaches had created an interest in using data at the school level and a new level of transparency and honesty: "I think we're more able to intelligently discuss data and feel comfortable with putting out there – this is what we are, where we are, where we need to improve." Another principal, who employed a data coach at his school prior to the expansion of the initiative, said that at the time, "We as a district were reporting incorrect data. [It] was a mess." The data coaches, he said, are "phenomenal," and at his school there was a 21 percent increase in the Hispanic graduation rate in one year, and a 20 percent improvement in algebra within the African American subgroup. Despite these positives, one participant noted that with twelve data coaches spread across the entire district, these coaches are "thin on the ground."

Data coaches themselves spoke of feel-

ing well respected and supported by district staff, from the director of schools to the Research, Assessment, and Evaluation Department with whom they are most closely aligned. On the day of our group interview with data coaches, they had a planned debrief with the director of schools and executive staff to talk about their experiences during their first year on the job and get help on their next steps. It is clear that the district takes its investment in data coaches seriously, values what they are doing, and wants to maximize their impact going forward.

Implementation of data coaches across all schools has been uneven and is in large part dictated by principals. Data coaches – who are assigned to a district cluster but for their first year of implementation are essentially "invited" into schools by principals – contrasted their experiences at schools with welcoming leaders with those where leaders were resistant. One data coach said, "Some of my principals are really into bringing me in and having me work with teachers and really involving their teachers in the data. You can see the effect that it has on teachers and their instructional thinking." Another described a particularly welcoming school, saying, "The first time I went I thought I was just going to meet with the principal and talk about some things we could do, and she said the third- and fourth-grade teams are waiting for you." However, coaches noted that "Some principals are just not there." One coach described the frustration at encountering schools that need help but are resistant to available supports:

It's just difficult when you're looking at a school's data over time, and you see there's a population of students that are not improving at all, and you have no relationship working with that school. . . . You want those students to be served, and you want to make sure that those teachers understand those students are not

improving, and you don't know if anyone is paying any attention to it.

Although data coaches are in some cases working directly with teachers, there was consistent acknowledgment that this practice is critically important and is not nearly as widespread as it needs to be.

One data coach noted:

What's really exciting [in] the school [is] that you can get to the teachers. Because it happens at the teacher level. No matter what you say. The principal has the attitude and welcomes you in, but things that happen are at the teacher level – we know that the teacher is the most important person in this whole process.

There was some concern by data coaches that their role has not been clearly articulated or communicated throughout the district and a wish that central office leaders would take a greater role in encouraging principals to use them as resources. One said:

If I had my wish, I wish that the executive directors who oversee my principals would have a conversation with them – what are you doing with your data coach? How are you using your data coach? And help them, if they say we're not doing anything with the data coach – help them see how they could use me.

The hiring and deployment of data coaches is an interesting study in implementation of a TLG recommendation that both spreads across the entire district and requires a significant investment of resources. The initial recommendation for data coaches came out of the Performance of Disadvantaged Students TLG, in part due to the observation that instructional coaches were spending much of their time reviewing and interpreting data. The TLG presented their recommendation to both the executive staff and Oversight Team. TLG members noted that initial reactions to the recommendations were

Coherence

As these individual initiatives touch more classrooms within MNPS, coherence becomes even more critical. At the National Advisory Panel meeting in December 2010, panelists raised the issue of coherence across the multiple initiatives that make up MNPS Achieves. As panel member Joe Johnson, executive director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation and professor of urban education at San Diego State University, noted:

But I'm struggling trying to find the mechanism for coherence. What's the design that's going to ensure that what is bubbling up is going to work in a way that is going to address the specific felt needs of the district and the community? And even though I hear about structures, like the oversight committee, I'm not hearing how that guarantees coherence. Is there a conceptualization of how that coherence is going to come about? Or is it not baked yet?

Panel member Andy Hargreaves, a professor of education at Boston College, mentioned a study he and colleagues conducted in three school districts in Alberta and noted:

They all have different theories of how you got coherence. . . . We have different beliefs of how we get everyone on the same page, different theories for different stages. What's your theory? Does it come from your beliefs? Or some understanding of where you are and what you need?

The issue of coherence is critical to MNPS Achieves. We heard concerns about it in interviews, responses from surveys, and in the

meetings we observed. For example, a community leader told us:

I continue to go back to the coherence piece – it's hard to understand what is the overarching goal here? Feels like we're dealing with too many goals, rather than [focusing on] transforming the way people teach. We need a big three rather than a big thirty-seven.

District, school, and community leadership are clearly thinking about this issue. One interviewee ques-

tioned whether employees at all levels, but especially school-level employees, could manage the many initiatives that are being undertaken as part of MNPS Achieves: "I get a general sense that at the school level, people are overwhelmed by it

all. And I'm afraid that's turning into – oh my gosh, one more thing, can you leave me alone so I can do my job effectively?"

This concern about the challenge of multiple initiatives was raised regularly. In one of the monthly co-chairs' meetings we observed, a central office leader noted:

There are fifty strategic actions that are taking place as a result of this [TLG] work; some are very significant. You can talk about any one of those fifty . . . but how do you do it overall?

"What's the design that's going to ensure that what is bubbling up is going to work in a way that is going to address the specific felt needs of the district and the community?"

– Joe Johnson, National Advisory Panel member

External leaders responded to that comment:

Those fifty actions can be put in a couple of sentences, but my kids are in Metro schools, and they are oblivious [that any system changes are happening].

The coherence challenge comes from that. How do you show that there are fifty things going in the same direction?

But the Director of Schools reiterated to his TLG co-chairs in February 2011 his commitment to a comprehensive approach:

I have been in this career for a long time. This is a once-in-a-career, lifetime opportunity to turn around a huge urban school system. We have the right model, we have brought the right people on board the leadership team, we have resources, we have a community behind us that wants it to work. This is a special time. I've really had an epiphany, a light bulb go off. Before this particular experience, I had Change Leadership training at Harvard. The conclusion was that you

shouldn't take on more than one to two efforts because districts don't have the capacity to do this. I think that is a contributor to [the failure of systemwide change efforts]. This task is difficult. It is comprehensive. It reaches across departments. This [comprehensively] is how you transform systems.

This quote suggests that the theory of action of MNPS Achieves actually requires multiple simultaneous ongoing initiatives, involving many actors at different levels. Given this complexity, the mechanisms that are part of MNPS Achieves and are designed to foster coherence deserve scrutiny. In the following sections, we turn our attention to the Oversight Team (formerly the Change Leadership Group), the monthly TLG co-chair meetings, and the quarterly all-TLG meetings. Another coherence mechanism, regular meetings of executive staff members and principals, was not a subject of this year's data collection so is not addressed in the following.

seemingly focused on the prohibitive cost of implementation. One said:

And when we presented it, it was like, uh yeah, you know how much that's going to cost? And we said yeah, we did the math on it. And that's where we left it. Because we just assumed that because of the funding, it wasn't going to happen.

The district's decision to hire data coaches came as a pleasant surprise to the members of the Performance of Disadvantaged Students TLG. One member said, "We presented the data coach idea, and when we first brought it, they were saying they didn't know if they could do

that. And then the next thing we knew, they were doing it." TLG members were, in one person's words, "overjoyed" that their recommendation was implemented and saw it as evidence that the TLG process was effective. However, they had no knowledge of how the recommendation moved to implementation, though they did assume that there was a connection to the district's Race to the Top funding.

The murky process between recommendation and implementation in this example is something that has been a particular issue for the Performance of Disadvantaged Students TLG, which works in service of nearly 70 percent of the student

body. Not only is the scope of this group particularly large, but, as noted in the year one evaluation report, the lack of a direct connection with a discrete department within MNPS (such as the TLGs on high schools or English learners have) often means that the path to implementation is less clear or direct than it would be otherwise, particularly for the subcommittee chairs who lead the development of the work in the TLG's focus areas. As one TLG member said, "That's one thing that as a . . . whole TLG we struggle with. We make the recommendations, and then what's next?"

Role of Oversight Team/Quarterly Meetings

Each quarter, the TLGs meet with the Oversight Team. Beginning in 2010-2011, two of these meetings were an all-day, all-TLG meeting – meaning all TLG members were asked to attend the meeting all day. In the other two cases, the Oversight Team met with each TLG individually across the course of the day. TLG co-chairs and Oversight Team members requested the individual meetings to reduce the burden on TLG members from the community (it is often difficult for them to stay for a full day) and to have deeper conversations with the Oversight Team.

On the positive side, TLG members felt that the quarterly meetings with the Oversight Team “kept us focused.” They appreciated being told that they were “on track.” But most also felt their quarterly interactions with the Oversight Team were primarily a missed opportunity. Most TLG members we interviewed described the quarterly sessions with the OT as passive, with comments like “it was mostly reporting out” or “sometimes it felt like just another meeting.” One co-chair suggested that the tables be turned on the Oversight Team:

How about the OT being less passive? At the end of the day they should have to do a skit or [present a] video. Why shouldn't they feel a little bit of the anxiety to produce something? Then they could model what they want to see.

With one exception, the TLG co-chairs couldn't point to specific feedback from the OT that had led to changes in their TLG's work. As one central office leader told us:

In terms of being supportive of the TLG effort, helping them align and integrate their efforts, helping to shape the coherence of what's going on, and provide valuable and meaningful input beyond the closed door Oversight Team meetings, I don't think they've done a good job of that.

Oversight Team members agreed that their time with the TLGs was not as productive as they wanted it to be. OT members wanted to add more value and make quarterly meetings with TLG members more interactive. To that end, the OT members wrote a discussion protocol to address the need for deeper engagement that both the TLG and OT wanted. But, from the OT's perspective, it was difficult to get TLG members to use the time for anything but identifying accomplishments and progress. Presenting challenges, identifying roadblocks, and engaging around the hard issues remains difficult and is an aspect of culture change that needs to be further addressed.

Co-chair Meetings

Monthly co-chair meetings are another opportunity to create coherence across the multiple initiatives of MNPS Achieves. As Dr. Register noted in one of those meetings,

We counted up, not an exhaustive list, [and there are] forty-six different initiatives that are running at the same time as a result of the resources of MNPS Achieves. Making sure that all of this is effectively coordinated and that we collaborate well and we have a good focus is extremely important. This group of co-chairs will help us do that.

These meetings typically occur the first Friday of every month and are 2.5 hours in length. In addition to the eighteen central office and community co-chairs, Dr. Gloria Frazier, from WEB Associates, and Dr. Register also attend. In the eight meetings we observed in 2010-2011, co-chair attendance ranged between ten and eighteen. There is good rapport among the group. Agenda items frequently included plans and/or feedback from the quarterly meetings and TLG board presentations, updates from Dr. Register on key issues facing the district, updates on Race to the Top funding for TLGS, and discussion of the progress of TLGs.

There was much conversation at co-chairs' meetings of the importance of inclusion for special education and English learner students and the role of the district in communicating and advocating for that. This was a regular topic of co-chairs meetings the previous year

as well, and participants voiced very consistent messages about the need for inclusion over the past two years. Family Resource Centers, known as FRCs, were another frequent topic of discussion in 2010-2011 as district leadership worked toward improving the coordination and developing standards for these service providers.

Co-chairs valued these meetings as an opportunity to get to know the work of the other TLGs, and some examples of joint work have begun to emerge from these discussions. For example, the Communications and EL TLGs worked together to improve multicultural communication. There has also been much effort to develop a results-based project management accountability framework, stemming from the work of the Central Office Effectiveness TLG. The framework was just unveiled to TLG co-chairs in the summer of 2011. Implementation will begin in November 2011, so this report cannot assess its impact, but it does include mechanisms for data-informed decision making, coherence, and transparency. The tool builds on the use of dashboard and status reports for each TLG that were a regular feature of the first two years of the transformational change effort. It will catalog TLG efforts, as well as other district strategic initiatives, and will be accessible by community and district employees.

Scale

Cynthia Coburn (2003) asserted that scale in education reform involves four dimensions: spread; depth; sustainability; and ownership. MNPS has adapted Coburn's dimensions of scale to apply to a systemwide improvement effort. In the Transformational Leadership Group Support Toolkit (2011-2012), the dimensions of scale are defined as follows:

1. **Depth: Nature of change**
 - Does the change go deep into the organization's beliefs?
 - Does the change go deep into the individual beliefs?
 - Does the change have an impact on teaching and learning?
 - Who is responsible for the change?
2. **Spread: Norms, principles, beliefs understood by expanding numbers of people**
 - How widespread is the change?
 - Who is involved in the change?
 - Who should be involved?
 - Who will benefit from the change?
3. **Sustainability: Endurance over time**
 - How long will the change endure?
 - What strategies are in place to assure sustainability of the change?
 - What structures are in place to assure sustainability of the change?
 - What policies, procedures are in place to sustain the change?
4. **Ownership: Shifts in reform ownership (knowledge and authority) to implementers**
 - Who "owns" the process and action? (p. 44)

There are many initiatives that make up MNPS Achieves, and each one is at a different place within each dimension of scale. In the following sections we discuss the four dimensions of scale, the progress MNPS has made in addressing it, and the challenges that remain.

Depth

Depth gets to the heart of changing the practices and beliefs of adults in classrooms that will have an impact on the interaction between teacher, student, and instructional content. Efforts such as those led by the English Learners and Special Needs TLGs to better serve English learners and to fully include special needs students in regular education classrooms have challenged longstanding, traditional beliefs and values of individuals and of the organization as a whole. Implementation of the middle school model and the development of High School Academies are also efforts to transform teaching and learning and are both grounded in a new belief system about what young people need at the secondary level in order to be successful. There are early adopters of some of these ideas and initiatives throughout the district – pockets of depth that have the potential to be transformational, given continued support from the district as a whole. Central office executive leadership, as well as co-chairs of TLGs, in particular, voiced a deeper understanding and commitment to district practices like inclusion and differentiation, and they could in turn point to schools and school-based practitioners that had taken the lead in implementation.

Depth, however, needs to be combined with spread in order to achieve scale. "Spreading" the depth of transformation beyond the early

adopters to all classrooms in MNPS will take many years. We are encouraged that so many reforms are intended to make deep changes at the classroom level. For example, training in the Skilled Observation and Coaching Lab, which is a core strategy in Developing the Artisan Teacher, has been implemented with two-thirds of principals, and that training is consistently strengthening the district's belief system about teacher practice and transformational leadership and has been embraced by a critical mass of principals.

However, to better understand the depth of MNPS reforms, system leadership needs to more clearly emphasize and devote resources to a deeper level of evaluation of individual initiatives. Otherwise, it will be difficult to know whether a reform is being implemented effectively and deeply enough within classrooms to produce evidence of its impact on teaching and learning.

Spread

In the past year, a mantra heard in meetings and repeated by several interviewees was the need for the transformation effort to “touch all classrooms.” As one central office leader noted,

The practice in the classrooms is the last thing to change. If there [was] an anxiety now [about MNPS Achieves], it would be that we finish and implement all this, and we really haven't impacted our 5,000 classrooms.

This is the essence of spread. Ideally, the transformative ideas and initiatives move beyond the early adopters to encompass everyone in the district – inside and outside the classroom – so that non-implementers are the exception, not the rule.

Several interviewees raised issues related to the spread of the initiatives that are part of MNPS Achieves. A common concern was that knowledge of reforms is understood at the executive level, but is not spreading to other areas of the central office, or to schools. In a district with a number of “moving parts” and multiple initiatives being rolled out concurrently, infrequent and/or poor communication could result in the inability of staff at the central office and school levels to articulate the core beliefs, norms, and guiding principles that undergird the transformational process. This would limit spread to only those directly involved in the design of the transformation.

Another concern related to spread was whether the district could shift from external expertise to internal capacity in designing and implementing initiatives, while at the same time broadening the number of people within the district with the requisite knowledge and ability to carry them forward. As one external consultant said, MNPS needs to

transfer the capacity building to a much more internal leadership. . . . In essence, this is the year that it has to happen – the year that we'll be starting it. That transition has to happen. I'm concerned about the dependence on a few people to really move some things along, keep coherence, keep folks on their toes.

Attention has been directed at building this internal capacity, with contracts for several key consultants reduced or ending after three years, and explicit plans for MNPS staff to take on their duties and build the capacity of others through a “train the trainer” model.

However, the shift to internal MNPS staff needs to be balanced against the prospect of “burnout” from the still relatively small number of people directly involved in MNPS Achieves. Central office staff described being “triple-booked” for meetings. Several interviewees discussed the unexpected level of commitment and time required to effectively be a member of a TLG in MNPS Achieves, and there was even confusion about the end date for MNPS Achieves work, with some community representatives believing their commitment to their TLG ended at the conclusion of the 2010-2011 school year. This balance – between intense systemwide reform, the need to begin focusing on implementation, and the reliance on a relatively small number of dedicated internal and external actors – will need to be addressed to ensure spread of the transformational ideas and initiatives at the heart of MNPS Achieves.

Sustainability

As mentioned earlier in the section on implementation, there are several MNPS Achieves initiatives that have developed the structures necessary to bring them to scale, districtwide. Structural, procedural, and policy changes that pave the way for the depth and spread of reform are critical and reflect the sustainability dimension of scale. For example, as described in the vignette on High School Academies, all high school campuses have adopted the academy model, academy coaches are working with each campus, and campus leadership teams have received professional development around academy development over time. Structures and strategies like these are necessary but not sufficient aspects of high

school transformation, and designers of the reforms are the first to admit that much of the heavy lifting to transform teaching and learning is still to come.

The addition of data coaches to MNPS is a structural change that might not be extensive enough to develop and sustain the focus on data-informed decision making. While early reviews for the data coaching initiative have been very positive and all schools, in theory, have access to data coaches, the fact remains that twelve coaches are deployed to work with all MNPS schools. This raises two key questions that can be applied beyond the

data coaches. First, given the size of the district and the limited number of data coaches, how can MNPS best leverage the expertise of these coaches and other instructional supports to sustain a districtwide focus on data-informed decision making? And related to that question, how is the district incorporating other strategies, structures, and procedures to build additional capacity for data use among principals, teachers, and central office staff?

Ownership

MNPS Achieves, in its two years of development, has already outlasted many other well-intended reform initiatives in other districts. This transformation effort has garnered city-wide ownership and buy-in, deepened the long-term commitment by system leadership to the MNPS Achieves process, and prioritized the distribution of resources devoted to the

Designers of the reforms are the first to admit that much of the heavy lifting to transform teaching and learning is still to come.

effort from ARRA federal stimulus funds and Race to the Top funds (called First to the Top in MNPS).

Developing broad internal and external ownership of MNPS Achieves is embedded in the TLG structure itself, as each TLG includes individuals from MNPS and external community partners. And that structure has had a major impact on community understanding and engagement in the work of the district. For example, one TLG co-chair said that it

has given us an opportunity for a variety of organizations in the city to work with us [and] allowed for networking between different government offices [and] different agencies. People are proud to be a part of it and expressed their interest in supporting the community.

Central to the success of this approach seems to be the co-chairs structure, which partners

an internal district leader who has the “knowledge and authority” to move the ideas and recommendations of the TLG forward in the system, with an external partner who has the interest, commit-

Now that many of the structures, policies, and procedures are in place, it will be particularly important for the system to address spread and ownership of the transformational ideas and initiatives.

ment, and leadership to help sustain the workgroup over time.

However, this engagement has tended to rely on the highest-level central office leaders as well as “grasstops” leadership and staff of local nonprofits, city agencies, and higher

education. As discussed earlier, even though the engagement of external partners has been intentional, there are still a relatively small number of people engaged in the transformation of a large school district, and that has led, in some cases, to bottlenecks in decision-making and the potential for burnout. It also limits the scale of ownership of MNPS Achieves. Grassroots organizations and community members who are not typically included in reform design and implementation are currently missing in the conversation as they are not proportionally represented within the TLGs. An ongoing challenge is how to expand outreach without making the size of the TLGs unwieldy.

The discussion around community schools is both more positive and more complex. This model of providing services to students and families at the school-based level has the potential to broaden the involvement of grassroots and neighborhood organizations, community members, and parents in the work of MNPS. The Disadvantaged Youth TLG, according to one interviewee, has visited district schools with a history of success in engaging parents and the local community. She said that the committee “felt like we were starting to put together to some degree a vision for how to take this, not to scale necessarily, but how to share this information across the district.” And while the status of community schools expansion in MNPS is uncertain at this time, there are other models for parent and community engagement in Nashville, like the “Parent University,” that leverage the knowledge and expertise of MNPS partners.

Scale – developing spread, depth, sustainability and ownership – will be an ongoing challenge in MNPS. Now that many of the structures, policies, and procedures are in place, it will be particularly important for the system to address spread and ownership of the transformational ideas and initiatives. Specifically, MNPS Achieves needs to affect classroom instruction throughout the district, as we discuss in more detail in the following section.

Shared Understanding of Effective Teaching and Learning

The MNPS Achieves National Advisory Panel emphasized the importance of defining good instruction in MNPS. As Joe Johnson, executive director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation and professor of urban education at San Diego State University, noted in December 2010:

In places where there's traction around this . . . there has to be a very clear notion of what is good instruction. Somehow out of all this process, if MNPS Achieves does not somehow come to this powerful picture of what is good instruction in MNPS, you've missed an opportunity.

In the MNPS Achieves theory of action (see Figure 1 on page 2), “a shared understanding of effective teaching and learning” is an outcome of the TLG and capacity-building work. In our interviews and focus groups, we asked respondents to describe their vision of good instruction and to assess the degree to which that is shared across the district. In many

cases, this question drew silence initially: it did not seem to be something our respondents had thought about before. And eight respondents said it was “hard to articulate” or “fuzzy.” When they were able to define good instruction, responses frequently differed by tier. At the elementary and middle school levels, respondents emphasized balanced literacy and math. Respondents working at the high school level cited both structural changes brought about by academies (block scheduling, theme-based schools) and project-based and inquiry-based learning.

Differentiation

However, one theme emerged from all the responses. Differentiation – instruction tailored to the needs of individual learners or groups of learners – was mentioned frequently (by about one-third of participants). As one TLG co-chair said:

I hear people talking about inclusion, social-emotional learning, welcoming new arrivals, friendly office environments. People are talking about those not as isolated target activities but as embedded in all the TLGs. . . . So I'm hearing languaging. I don't know if it's translating into implementation, but it sure is part of the conversation, and it wasn't before.

A teacher said:

I think the most productive part of this initiative is that no matter what need the student has, we must meet it. It doesn't matter – autistic, can't speak the language, can't move. Whatever it is that the child needs, Metro has put it out there that we must accommodate and meet that child's needs. Home, in school, whatever. We do it.

Messages about student achievement as a top priority, with a focus on educating all students including those with special needs and English learners, seem to have been received clearly by school-based personnel. One coach said simply, “Raise the achievement of every child. I think that’s a strong vision.”

This emphasis on the needs of diverse learners was also a recurring theme of TLG co-chair meetings and a focus of the January 2011 principal leadership institute.

Using Data

A significant proportion of respondents talked about using data as part of the instructional vision. As described in earlier sections of this report, MNPS has made significant investments toward becoming a data-driven culture, and participants at both the central office and school level noted the impact that the data warehouse and data coaches are beginning to have. One central office staff member said:

When I first came [to the district], I can say one or two persons [were proficient] on the data. It’s not like that anymore. I’ve seen a shift, with us becoming a very data-driven district. We have a ways to go, because I don’t think it’s at the teacher level like it needs to be, but it’s amazing how it has shifted.

At the school level, participants agreed that the data warehouse was a powerful tool but emphasized the need for ongoing support. One teacher said, “I think we’re on our way. [The data] is there, but now what do we do with it?”

Challenges to Defining Good Instruction

Respondents did point out two challenges to defining/further developing the instructional vision. First, the new Common Core Standards mean that any connections between standards and the instructional vision are at an early stage. Those standards are just being rolled out to Tennessee teachers in grades K–2 only. And second, tools that are meant to support good instruction – such as the pacing guides and benchmarks – are not seen as useful by teaching staff. For example, in one of our focus groups with coaches, one participant mentioned pacing guides, and the other participants audibly groaned. We asked the group why in this exchange:

Q: When you said pacing guides, why did everyone groan?

P2: Some are good.

P4: Middle school were a disaster.

P3: Basically, we were given pacing guide, and were told teachers were to follow them.

P2: Teachers were told they were mandatory.

P5: They’re horrible.

P3: They had different people – like there may have been one little group that did sixth-grade reading, another group that did seventh-grade reading, another group that did eighth-grade reading. They didn’t use a common template.

P5: And they may not have had the experience to do it.

The recommendation for creating pacing guides came out of the Disadvantaged Youth TLG, whose members also headed up their

development. As in many initiatives, there was a short time window for the completion of the guides and not enough expert staff available during that window to support their development. This example raises the issue of the need for the capacity, time, and personnel to implement ideas effectively to assure consistent messages about instruction.

In addition to questions about the pacing guides, there were also multiple and conflicting responses on how the district is implementing an instructional vision at the classroom level. Several interviewees, especially at the central office level, saw the issue of implementation of instruction as a communications issue – that the district has an instructional vision but is not communicating that vision effectively to teachers to implement. Others saw the issue as one of vision vs. interventions – that MNPS has an instructional vision but has not given teachers the tools or resources to respond with appropriate interventions for students. A third interpretation is that there is confusion within MNPS about instruction vs. strategies. One central office interviewee put it this way: “The instructional coaches are not good definitions of good instruction. The coaches are a strategy to infuse or implement what you define as good instruction across the district.”

As the instructional vision emerges and is defined further, it will be critical to develop common criteria for what constitutes “good teaching and learning.” The new teacher evaluation system should contribute to that conversation, as should the continued development of the skilled observation and coaching model.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As we noted last year, MNPS has much to be proud of in building a comprehensive and inclusive systemwide transformation effort. Several initiatives described in the report – data coaches, high school academies, and principal leadership development, to name just three – show great promise, though they are still in the early or middle stages of implementation. We also highlighted challenges in specific areas, especially coherence, scale, and implementation. After preparing a draft of this report, we asked the National Advisory Panel⁶ for MNPS Achieves to examine our findings and co-construct with the Annenberg Institute a set of recommendations moving forward. The following five recommendations are not tied specifically to one particular initiative or another but are rather designed to address the capacity and coherence of the system to handle the major changes taking place in MNPS.

Bundle Multiple Initiatives to Improve Coherence

Within MNPS, and among the evaluation team and our National Advisory Panel, there have been many discussions of the viability of a complex system change with multiple initiatives. At the December 2010 meeting, panelists urged the district to consider focusing on a few of the “forty-six” initiatives undertaken as part of MNPS Achieves. However, the theory of action of the system change requires

⁶ See Appendix B for a description of National Advisory Panel members.

strong effort on multiple fronts simultaneously; reducing the number of initiatives is not possible because the complexity is part of the plan. Advisory Panel member Carrie Leana, a professor at the University of Pittsburgh whose work focuses on organizational behavior in business and education, suggested an alternative to reducing the number of initiatives.

She suggested the concept known as “bundling.” Bundling requires a systematic prioritizing of initiatives, making explicit connections among multiple initiatives and communicating that coherence across the system. The bundling approach comes out of research on evidence-based medicine, where there may be multiple evidence-based medical approaches to a patient’s care, but those approaches are often isolated. By developing protocols that include multiple evidence-based approaches, overall patient care can be improved (Fullbrook & Mooney 2003). In the context of MNPS, there are multiple change initiatives being implemented at once with numerous explicit and implicit connections to one another. However, making those connections explicit through a bundling process would strengthen each individual effort and would allow for more seamless and coherent implementation.

While we recognize the necessity for implementing multiple, simultaneous system change initiatives in MNPS, we would argue that it is not feasible to bundle all initiatives, both for practical and evidence-based reasons. It is not practical to try to tie together forty-six initiatives in a coherent way, and there is

not sufficient evidence of effectiveness for all initiatives. Therefore, we suggest that MNPS reduce the number of initiatives to a manageable set of practices that are explicitly and thoughtfully connected to one another. Andy Hargreaves of Boston College, a frequent writer on effective international educational systems, recommended the “selective abandonment” of initiatives to “sharpen the focus” of MNPS Achieves. This process, which would be carried out by top and middle-level management, requires thoughtful and structured conversation and planning about abandonment. This process would also signal to others in MNPS and external partners that the district is prioritizing high-yield strategies and using resources efficiently and effectively. Thinking through the process of what system change efforts could be “bundled” and which would be abandoned would be a proactive task for the Oversight Team supported by the new results-based project management accountability framework and, perhaps, the communications TLG.

Evaluate Key Initiatives

To be able to effectively “bundle” key initiatives and “selectively abandon” others, it is critical that MNPS devote resources to evaluating individual initiatives, either through internal expertise or by expanding partnerships with external evaluators with that capacity. It appears that MNPS is moving in this direction by having their internal evaluation team focus their capacity and resources on managing assessment and evaluation efforts, while monitoring external evaluations of key complex initiatives (for example, district STEM initiatives). More specifically,

internal evaluation should examine key “lagging” indicators – student test scores, teacher value-added measurements, and other routinely collected data such as principal surveys. External evaluators should focus their expertise on the “black box” of teaching and learning and provide formative (as well as summative) feedback on particular initiatives.

External quality monitoring is already taking place through the Academies of Nashville, where schools with deep implementation of the academy model will receive site visits and possible accreditation from a national academy organization. Coordinating and monitoring these external evaluations should be a key function of the evaluation and accountability department.

Clarify Purposes, Goals, and Feedback Mechanisms

While most interviewees were positive about the work of the TLGs, there were several areas noted for improvement. First, there were several individuals who were confused about the timeline, end dates, and commitment being asked of them for the TLG process. This was more noticeable among non-co-chairs, whose participation is usually less intensive. Reemphasizing the goals and process of MNPS Achieves will mitigate any confusion among participants and potential for burnout. System leadership has already made strides in this area by producing an overall MNPS Achieves guide for participants for the 2011-2012 year, but leadership needs to periodically reiterate key goals and timelines.

Second, it is important for MNPS Achieves, and especially the TLGs, to broaden membership to ensure diverse voice from the community and especially from school-based staff. Given the large impact that new initiatives will have on schools over the next school year, feedback and input is necessary to be able to make adjustments and for school staff to believe that their voices are being heard. There are already some channels for this kind of feedback, such as the districtwide survey of principals and focus groups and written feedback from principals at the Principal Leadership Institute, but this feedback should be expanded, especially given the district’s stated focus on distributed leadership. This might include additional focus groups of principals and teachers to elicit information about the strengths and weaknesses around current implementation of initiatives and the extent to which these initiatives are “going to scale.”

Finally, we heard from several individuals a concern about whether the TLGs are doing “real work” and not just perpetuating themselves. Avoiding this “spinning wheels” feeling will prevent potential burnout. Part of addressing this issue involves communication of transformational change successes but also relates back to the concept of bundling – focusing on key strategies, backed by evidence of success.

Create Joint Work to Increase Coherence across TLGs

Having attended many cross-TLG meetings over the past two years, we recognize that sharing information across the strands of MNPS Achieves work is a norm of practice. However, for MNPS Achieves to have sustained and deep impact, TLGs must move beyond sharing information and increasingly create joint work. This will have the effect of both increasing the coherence of MNPS Achieves and cut down on redundant work being done by individual TLGs. One promising area for cross-TLG collaboration is new teacher induction. This was a topic at the May 2011 TLG quarterly meeting, and given induction's place as the introduction to the district for new teachers, a real opportunity to show a unified, coherent, and dynamic district.

Address Variations in Vision, Standards, and Messages

The theory of action of MNPS Achieves suggests that a shared definition of good instruction will emerge from the efforts of the TLGs, the emphasis on professional development, and other supports for improved instruction. District leadership point to a number of specific teaching and learning initiatives – for example, Artisan Teacher training and professional development for K–12 literacy – that they believe are coalescing into a coherent systemwide instructional vision.

At this point in the initiative, we suggest a two-pronged approach. The National Advisory Panel agrees that participants will only

come to “own” the definition of good instruction when they discover it themselves; it cannot be imposed from above. But it might be useful to build on the emerging areas of agreement: differentiation, inclusion, and data-informed decision making. Executive staff and executive directors should be involved in discussions about how these areas can be linked in a broader framework for instruction and communicated to school-based staff. These conversations might help address the middle-management issue that turned up throughout our data collection – that different tiers promote different models of instruction, that assistant principals are left out of development opportunities, and that the capacity of executive directors to be the translators of transformational change efforts to the school level varies. While executive staff are enthusiastic about MNPS Achieves and have benefited from the emphasis on professional development, middle management at both the central office and school level should be targeted for differentiated supports, meeting their specific development needs.

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APPENDIX A



EVALUATION: Observations and Interviews Conducted, August 2010 — MAY 2011

Individual Interviews

Participant Type	Total	Number of Executive Staff	Interview Method
District-based TLG Co-Chairs (includes subcommittee co-chairs)	12	5	Individual interview
District-based TLG Members	10	6	Individual interview
District-based staff (non-TLG)	2		Individual interview
Community-Based TLG Co-Chairs (includes subcommittee co-chairs)	8		Individual interview
Community-Based TLG member	3		Individual interview
Community Partner Organization Members (non-TLG)	2		Individual interview
Consultants	2		Individual interview
MNPS Achieves Designers	2		Individual interview
Total Number	41		Individual interview

Group Interviews

Participant Type	# Interviews	# Participants	Interview Method
Principals	2	13	Group Interview
Coaches (Instructional and Data)	3	19	Group Interview
Teachers (Middle and High School)	3	20	Group Interview
Total Number	8	52	

Observations

Type of Meeting	Total	Date
TLG/CLG quarterly meeting	3	November 2010; February 2011; May 2011
Oversight committee meeting	3	August 2010; November 2010; February 2011
Co-chairs meeting	8	October 2010 – May 2011
TLG meetings	13	October 2010 – May 2011
Principal Leadership Institute	2	January and July 2011
Community partner meeting	1	November 2010
Professional development training	1	May 2011
Total Number	31	

Surveys

Participant Type	Respondents	Date
Central office staff	159	April – May 2011
Principals/assistant principals	190	April – May 2011
TLG members (not co-chairs)	32	May – June 2011



NATIONAL ADVISORY PANEL MEMBERS

Norm Fruchter

Senior Advisor, Annenberg Institute for School Reform

Norm Fruchter supports the Community Organizing and Engagement work – formerly the Community Involvement Program at New York University’s (NYU) Institute for Education and Social Policy (IESP) – of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform. He is also a clinical professor of education policy at New York University. Previously, he was director of IESP, which he formed in 1995, in collaboration with the deans of NYU’s Steinhardt School of Education and Wagner School of Public Service, with the mission of improving public education so that all students, particularly in low-income neighborhoods and communities of color, obtain a just and equitable education and can participate effectively in a democratic society.

Prior to his work at IESP, he served as a senior consultant with the Academy for Educational Development and Advocates for Children of New York; director of the Institute for Citizen Involvement in Education in New Jersey; co-founder and co-director of Independence High School in Newark, an alternative high school for dropouts; and, for ten years, an elected school board member in Brooklyn’s District 15. He holds a BA from Rutgers University and an MEd from Teachers College, Columbia University. He has published extensively in the field of education policy and equity.

Andy Hargreaves

Thomas More Brennan Professor of Education, Boston College

Andy Hargreaves is the Thomas More Brennan Professor in Education, endowed with the mission of promoting social justice and connecting theory and practice in education, at the Lynch School of Education at Boston College. His teaching and research at Boston College concentrates on educational change, performing beyond expectations, sustainable leadership, and the emotions of teaching. He taught primary school before studying for and completing his PhD thesis in sociology at the University of Leeds in England. He lectured in a number of English universities, including Oxford, until in 1987 he moved to the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education in Canada, where he co-founded and directed the International Center for Educational Change. From 2000 to 2002, he was also Professor of Educational Leadership and Change at the University of Nottingham in England.

Professor Hargreaves has authored or edited more than twenty-five books which have been translated into a dozen languages. His book *Teaching in the Knowledge Society: Education in the Age of Insecurity* is published by Teachers’ College Press and Open University Press and has received the Choice Outstanding Book Award from the American Libraries

Association for Teaching and the American Educational Research Association Division B Outstanding Book Award. His current research is funded by the UK Specialist and Academies Trust and the National College for School Leadership and is concerned with organizations that perform beyond expectations in education, sport, business, and health.

Joseph Johnson

Executive Director, National Center for Urban School Transformation

QUALCOMM Professor of Urban Education, San Diego State University

Joseph Johnson is the executive director of the National Center for Urban School Transformation and the QUALCOMM Professor of Urban Education at San Diego State University. Previously, he served as a classroom teacher in San Diego, a school district administrator in New Mexico, a state department official in both Texas and Ohio, a researcher and technical assistance provider at the Charles A. Dana Center at the University of Texas, and Director of Student Achievement and School Accountability at the U.S. Department of Education, where he was responsible for directing the federal Title I Program and several related programs.

Dr. Johnson earned a PhD in educational administration from the University of Texas at Austin's Cooperative Superintendency Program, an MA in education from San Diego State University, and a BS magna cum laude from the University of Wisconsin at Oshkosh. In 1987 he received the Special Educator of the Year Award from the New Mexico Council for Exceptional Children. In 1989 he was the founding president of the

National Association for the Education of Homeless Children and Youth. In 1993 and again in 2000, he received the Educator of the Year Award from the Texas Association of Compensatory Education. In 2003 he received the Distinguished Alumnus of the Year Award from San Diego State University's College of Education.

Carrie R. Leana

George H. Love Professor of Organizations and Management, University of Pittsburgh

At the University of Pittsburgh, Carrie Leana is director of the Center for Health and Care Work (CHCW) and is on the advisory boards of the European Union Center and the Center for West European Studies. Her research and training are in the areas of organizational behavior and management. She has published more than 100 articles on such topics as authority structures at work, employment relations, and the process and effects of organizational change and restructuring. Her research is field-based and has been conducted in such settings as steel mills, public schools, insurance claims offices, aerospace contractors, police departments, and nursing homes.

Her book (with Denise Rousseau) *Relational Wealth: The Advantages of Stability in a Changing Economy* (Oxford University Press) describes the tension between stability and flexibility in work design, and how both can be used to the mutual advantage of employees and employers. Her earlier book *Coping with Job Loss: How Individuals, Organizations, and Communities Respond to Layoffs* (with

Daniel Feldman) was short-listed for the National Academy of Management's Best Book of the Year Award. Her article "Social Capital and Organizational Performance" (with F. Pile) received the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's 2007 Best Paper Prize in Industry Studies. She was also named the 2007-2008 winner of the Aspen Institute's Faculty Pioneer Award for Academic Leadership, awarded for generating cutting-edge scholarship with a focus on social impact.

Thomas Payzant

Senior Lecturer, Harvard University

Former Superintendent, Boston Public Schools,
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Thomas Payzant is a professor of practice at the Harvard Graduate School of Education. Prior to that, he served as superintendent of the Boston Public Schools from 1995 until his retirement in 2006. Previously, he served as assistant secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education under President Clinton. Over the past decade he has led a number of significant systemic reform efforts that have helped narrow the achievement gap and increase student performance on both state and national assessment exams, and he has served as superintendent of schools in San Diego, Oklahoma City, Eugene, Oregon, and Springfield, Pennsylvania.

In 1998, he was named Massachusetts Superintendent of the Year. In 2004, he received the Richard R. Green Award for Excellence in Urban Education from the Council on Great City Schools. *Governing Magazine* named him one of eight "Public Officials of the Year" in 2005. He also

received the McGraw Prize for his leadership of the San Diego school system from 1982 through 1993. Throughout his career, he has not only kept abreast of the professional and research literature as a practitioner, he has also contributed to it regularly, with fifty-one publications between 1967 and 2005. His essays, book chapters, book prefaces, and book reviews have been directed to both professional educators and policymakers.





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