Leadership in Smart Systems

Annenberg Institute for School Reform | *Voices in Urban Education*

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Robert Rothman

Ever since Ron Edmonds and his colleagues identified strong leaders as components of effective schools, leadership has occupied a prominent place on the education agenda. But the issue has taken on new urgency in the last decade. Studies have found that leadership is second only to teachers in its effect on student achievement (Marzano, Waters & McNulty 2004), and researchers have identified new conceptions of leadership that more accurately reflect the realities of schools and school systems as organizations.

Specifically, these conceptions focus more on *leadership* than on *leaders*; that is, they look at leadership functions rather than the individuals who perform them. In so doing, these researchers, notably James Spillane of Northwestern University, have suggested that leadership is actually distributed across organizations, and that these functions are not necessarily performed by those at the top of an organizational chart.

This idea has enormous implications for the way schools and districts are run and the way school and district leaders are prepared. Instead of issuing orders down the chain of command, leaders set the vision and hold people accountable for achieving it. Many people throughout the organization take the lead in coming up with ideas and seeing projects through. Leaders – all of them – need a new set of skills.

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The notion of distributed leadership also has particular importance in districts that form partnerships with community organizations and agencies to support children, youth, and families. These systems, which the Annenberg Institute for School Reform calls "smart education systems," recognize that schools are not solely responsible for children's development and academic growth. And in sharing responsibility, these systems also share leadership functions.

This issue of *Voices in Urban Education* examines the idea of leadership in smart systems from a range of perspectives.

- Deborah King and Margaret Balch-Gonzalez lay out the need for a new concept of leadership to ensure that school systems prepare *all* students to succeed and suggest some strategies for putting those ideas into practice.

- James Spillane argues that leading and managing instruction requires a new mindset for school leaders, one focused on diagnosis and design.

- Andrew Lachman, Richard Lemons, Margaret Terry Orr, and Mónica Byrne-Jiménez describe an initiative to prepare school leaders in four Connecticut districts.

- Philip Weinberg discusses his school's partnership with a nonprofit organization under a city policy to connect schools with groups in order to provide support and assistance.

- Ben Sherman talks about his role as a leader in a school with multiple partners that provide support for student learning in and out of school.

These articles illustrate many of the ways leadership takes shape in schools and school systems. And they highlight the fact that the current generation of leaders might not be prepared for this new reality. Weinberg and Sherman, for example, both say that their preparation programs focused more on management than on leadership, and that they learned

how to operate as leaders through their experience as apprentices in schools. New preparation programs, such as the Connecticut program, might succeed in preparing a new generation of leaders who are equipped to take on these responsibilities.

Yet initial preparation might not be enough. Leaders need ongoing support as well. The turnover of superintendents remains high, and principals increasingly are burning out and retiring early. New York City's school-support organizations offer an example of one kind of response, but in other districts, such support is hard to come by, particularly in these tough budget times. Yet, if we believe that leadership is critical, support for leaders should be a high priority.

Reference

Marzano, R. J., J. T. Waters, and B. A. McNulty. 2004. *School Leadership That Works: From Research to Results*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

Building Leadership Capacity in Smart Education Systems

Deborah K. King and
Margaret Balch-Gonzalez

A new approach to leadership is needed to ensure that school systems equitably and effectively prepare all *their community's young people to succeed.*

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Our cultural landscape is filled with images of the individual hero battling against the diabolical forces of evil or the dead weight of ineptitude. In public policy, as in film and television, the solution to large and complex problems is often portrayed as finding the right hero to sweep in and save the day.

Education reform has its own versions of this heroic narrative: leaders such as the new superintendent who inherits a slew of challenges from the previous administration, the mayor who takes over a struggling school district, or the outside expert who brings in a new reform model are sometimes seen as lone superstars who fix a problem without help – or with active resistance – from the community and other stakeholders in their districts.

But more and more education leaders are finding that a different approach to leadership yields better results and greater equity. These leaders see their role less as superheroes and gatekeepers and more as partners and conveners of the many sectors that must work together to meet the challenges of eliminating systemic inequities and preparing their community's

young people to succeed in the twenty-first-century postsecondary world.

The Annenberg Institute for School Reform supports this view. Through our work in urban districts around the country over the last decade, we have come to see leadership as collective, rather than individual, and as embedded in local context, practice, and relationships, rather than embodied in a particular reform model, leadership style, or individual action. This concept of leadership has also been informed by evolving bodies of work by scholars such as James Spillane (2009, 2006) in his seminal work on distributed leadership and a "leader-plus" approach. Andy Hargreaves and Dennis Shirley (2009) have gone further to consider distributed leadership an essential element of sustainable leadership, which focuses on building capacity and leadership succession as part of a "dynamic and integrated strategy for change" (p. 97).

Leadership in Smart Education Systems

Our work with districts and their partners is consistent with Hargreaves and Shirley's view. Shared leadership is not simply a nice extra – it's an essential foundation for sustainable,

equitable improvements to school systems at scale. It's not enough to bring together a diverse group of people around a table to talk, or for charismatic leaders to bring together small teams to create pockets of excellence within a struggling, dismally performing district. Shared leadership must take place within large-scale, high-functioning, cross-sector partnerships across an entire district and community that support young people's learning and development in a broad range of outcomes, both inside and outside of school – especially in historically underserved communities.

We call such a network of partnerships a *smart education system* (Simmons 2007, 2009). Each sector of the community – educators, administrators, parents, youth, community organizations, elected officials, funders, universities, unions, businesses, and civic organizations, among others – has a role to play in this network and assets to contribute, and each sector must develop the capacity to constructively participate and to hold itself accountable for results. The goal is to improve student results through two major strategies:

- ensuring that learning opportunities and supports both inside and outside of schools are equitable, comprehensive, and aligned;
- using evidence as a basis for transparent decision making and mutual accountability among partners.

These strategies require all shareholder groups to invest substantial time and effort in building relationships, leadership skills, and the capacity to work together. In this article we will look at some of the school communities around the country who are doing this hard work and the implications for district leadership. The outcomes are encouraging, and many of the lessons learned can be applied to other communities.

What a Community Can Bring to the Table

The voices most often left out of the debates around education policy belong to the very people who are most affected: the parents, young people, and other residents of low-income, high-minority communities with struggling schools. When these groups are not included in the discussion, it's easy for other shareholders to assume that academic failure is due to a lack of interest, intellectual capacity, or morals on the part of students, families, and communities. These assumptions, or simply a lack of knowledge of community needs, sometimes lead policymakers to design solutions that do little to address the problems – or that abandon the attempt to improve the district at scale altogether and concentrate on fostering excellence for a limited number of students.[1]

But our work has also shown that many parent, community, and youth groups have built the capacity to develop leaders, gather and interpret data, present evidence to policy-makers, design solutions, form alliances around common interests, attract resources, gain meaningful participation in decision making, and apply pressure when necessary – and that when this happens, they have become effective and powerful partners in school reform.

This view of the community as bringing independent assets to the

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1 See Simmons 2009 for an analysis of the lack of inclusion of community voices and equity concerns in federal policy.

table rather than needing intervention for its deficiencies was amply supported by a recent six-year study that examined the influence of community and youth organizing for education reform in seven urban communities.[2] District administrators and city officials in all the sites gave ample credit to parent and youth organizing groups for calling attention to serious problems and coming up with innovative solutions that brought concrete improvements to the school system.

- In Oakland, an initiative by an organized community transformed the district by converting *all* high schools to small schools, resulting in a significant increase in student achievement. The study found that the community organization "received unequivocal credit from district administrators, teachers, and other key stakeholders for its role in winning the small schools policy" (Shah, Mediratta & McAlister 2009b, p. 1).

- In South Los Angeles, youth leaders gathered data showing vast disparities in course offerings across Los Angeles; curricula in their community's high schools prepared them for low-wage jobs, not college. A youth-led campaign to apply a rigorous curriculum more equitably convinced the Los Angeles school board to mandate a college preparatory curriculum in all Los Angeles high schools. The school board president called the mandate "one of the most significant reforms this district is embarking on in the last twenty years" (Shah, Mediratta & McAlister 2009a, p. 19).

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2 For more information about the study and to download the case studies, see <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/Mott.php>.

Strategies for Building District Leadership Capacity

Building leadership capacity for smart systems in the ways posited by this article – to work collaboratively with community groups and key partners – requires a fundamental shift in district culture, posing one of the most difficult challenges to change. Jesse Register, former superintendent of Hamilton County (Tennessee) Schools, and Joanne Thompson of the Annenberg Institute (2007) note:

> It is crucial that district leaders put aside old behaviors and attitudes.... Too often, as districts engage in partnerships with community-based organizations, there is a mindset that the district must be in control. While district control is appropriate in some respects, district leaders need to understand that engaging partners as equals has much greater potential for success. (p. 22)

We have found that district leaders in communities with strong cross-sector and community partnerships have developed a set of skills and dispositions that foster collaboration

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with partners: being open to input and critique, respecting cultural differences among constituencies, sharing their own struggles and collaborating on developing solutions, dedicating time and public space for open and honest dialogue, shifting their view of accountability from the district being the sole accountable entity to sharing accountability among partners, and using data to inform decisions.

Confronting Beliefs and Challenging Assumptions about Class and Culture

Cultural differences are one of the biggest challenges to collaboration. To confront one's own beliefs about race, class, and culture is a difficult but necessary task, as decisions and actions flow from values and beliefs. The predominant White, middle-class culture in schooling is often an invis-

ible and unacknowledged influence on decisions about what opportunities are made available to low-income and minority children. James Scheurich and Linda Skrla (2003) describe the characteristics of leaders who help create high-achieving, equitable classrooms, schools, and districts: they are willing to confront those who do not believe that all children can succeed if given access to opportunity and the inequitable decisions based on that belief; and they are relentless in insisting on keeping excellence and equity in the forefront.

This type of leadership calls for leaders to challenge their own and others' assumptions, such as the notion that parents of color and low-income parents lack interest in and/or understanding about their child's education or lack the skills to prepare them for school. Different cultures and ways of life can provide a foundation to build education experiences that encourage group learning – and collective work and responsibility – over individual work and that create opportunities for parents and community members to actively contribute.

Routinely Using Evidence to Examine and Address Systemic Disparities

The process of confronting beliefs and assumptions, along with the massive amounts of data that schools and districts must collect to meet increased accountability demands, can unearth some uncomfortable realities. Disaggregated performance data generated by the requirements of No Child Left Behind leave little doubt that traditional public systems do a far better job of meeting the needs of White, middle-class children than the needs of poor and minority children. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) note that inequities are

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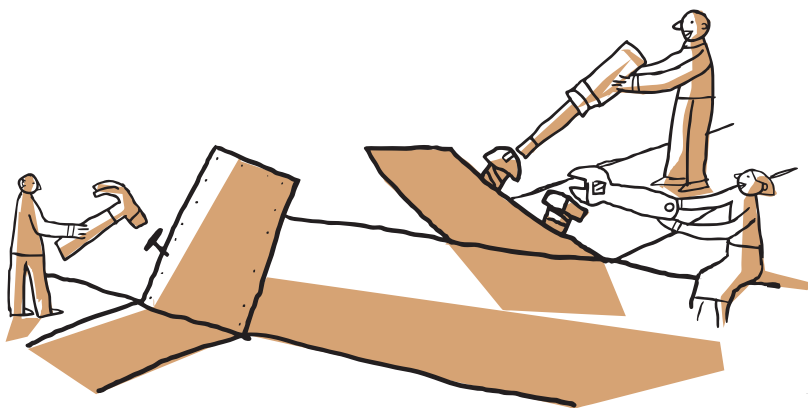
built systematically into the processes and procedures of school systems and have become part of the norms for public education.

Our work with districts and their partners has shown that knowing how to gather and, most important, how to *use* evidence – qualitative and quantitative data and research on proven best practices – is a fundamental capacity that leaders in all stakeholder groups need to develop. Using evidence as a basis for discussion and decision making allows different stakeholders to find common ground, develop workable solutions, and keep the discussion from degenerating into a shouting match between opposing opinions or ideologies. Data can help identify patterns that hinder or prevent all student groups from being equally successful and suggest solutions that create new patterns of equity.

For example, the Annenberg Institute's Central Office Review for Results and Equity (CORRE), completed in a number of urban districts around the country, is a complementary set of processes and tools designed to build the capacity of multiple education stakeholders to collaborate on developing evidence-based practice.[3] Superintendents, school board members, central office staff and administrators, teachers, principals, students, and community partners form a site team that works together to identify a key issue, gather data about related central office policies and practices, and develop a plan based on the findings. The development of leadership beyond formal district hierarchies builds the sense of ownership and shared accountability for outcomes on the part of a broad spectrum of stakeholders.

Documentation is an important aspect of using data to sustain a reform. Districts' attempts to implement changes in practice are often marred by the lack of institutional memory or documented accounts of the successes and challenges of districts' prior reform efforts. Organizational survival and leadership capacity is increased as breakthroughs and best practices are captured and shared within and across

3 For more information on CORRE and downloadable versions of reports on findings from different sites, see <www.annenberginstitute.org/WeDo/CORRE.php>.
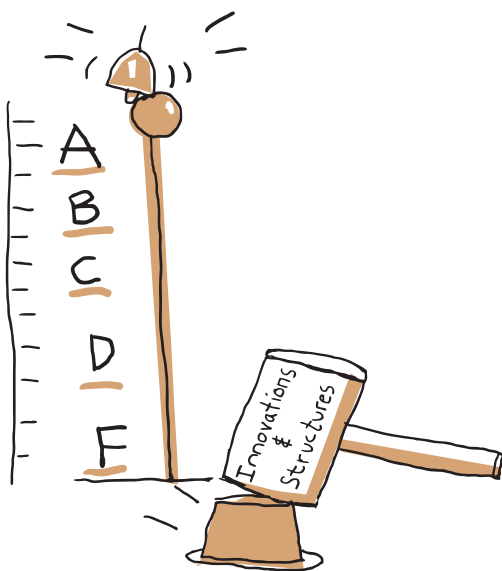
stakeholder groups. Documenting evidence of how a particular reform effort or change in instructional practice led to improved learning and outcomes for adults and students is key.

In Boston, for instance, the Aspen Institute and the Annenberg Institute (2006) conducted a study at the request of superintendent Thomas Payzant as he approached retirement to document what the district's ten-year focus on instructional improvement accomplished and what was left to do. The report aimed to provide a useful document of the reform for the new district leadership, to help sustain the reform, and for other districts facing the challenges of a transition in leadership.

Broadening Measures of Student Outcomes

The current national focus on standards and accountability calls for schools and districts to show evidence of the impact of innovations and structures on student achievement. But measurable outcomes resulting from the capacity-building and cross-sector partnership work described in this article take longer and are more difficult to capture, analyze, and share with a public that sees standardized-test scores as the primary measure of progress. In response, schools and districts are beginning to develop strategies for collecting data (qualitative and quantitative) and documenting how working collaboratively leads to improvements in individual and collective practice.

One important, and often missing, piece of the puzzle is "leading indicators" that show early signs of progress in education – as they are used in economics – rather than lagging indicators, like test scores, that are gathered too

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late to help students and schools who have already failed.

- Ellen Foley and colleagues (2008) identified eight leading indicators that district leaders and other stakeholders have used in four communities to make informed decisions about student learning. For instance, early reading proficiency, the most common indicator, was used by the study districts to provide interventions both at the student level (tutoring and extra reading instruction to individual students not reaching the benchmark) and at the system level (investment in early childhood education to increase the numbers of students meeting the benchmark).

- John Garvey (2009) argues that among other obstacles to college access for New York City's students, Regents exams and SATs are often poor indicators of student readiness for college. One of his recommendations is an index for college readiness that would reveal problems before students arrive at college and discover they must do extensive remedial work.

- Carol Ascher and Cindy Maguire (2007) describe how some high schools in New York City were able to "beat the odds" – greatly increasing college access for students with the same demographics as other schools with high dropout rates and low college-going rates. The study found that effective and creative use of data, including tracking credit accumulation, GPAs, GED scores, and college application rates, was one major strategy used by these schools.

Cultivating Collaborative Cross-Sector Partnerships

District leaders who invest in developing partnerships, take advantage of the assets and expertise each group brings, are willing to share leadership, and are sensitive to the culture of each group find a much richer set of resources available to support educational improvement and an increased sense of ownership among the community and other partners. Ultimately, this will lead to a more sustainable reform.

Ogawa and Bossert (2000) note that because stakeholders have individual resources, regardless of their formal positions and roles, all can potentially lead and use their resources to exert influence in their respective domains. Community assets, for instance, cannot be measured only in dollars and cents – they can be viewed as dollars and "sense": local intelligence about what's important to the students and families. In the Bronx, for example, community organizers and the district's facilities director worked together to locate vacant buildings that could be used to relieve severe overcrowding. The organizers had the deep knowledge of the community that enabled them to suggest spaces, and the facilities director used his specialized knowledge to evaluate which were viable sites (Mediratta, McAlister & Shah 2009).

Register and Thompson (2007) describe the importance of cross-sector partnerships in two major reform initiatives in Hamilton County that were designed to eliminate the achievement gap in its high-poverty schools and achieve systemic high school reform. Register and Thompson attribute the success of these reforms to the care with which multiple partnerships were developed and sustained. These partnerships included district and school
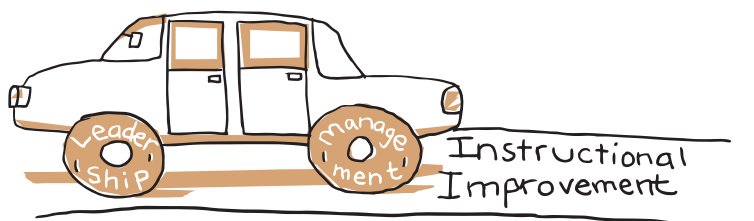
administrators, local and national funders, city and county elected officials, local business and community leaders, the teachers union, higher education, parents, and students. Register and Thompson note that the leadership team, consisting of the superintendent and a few other individuals from the district and from the local education fund

> did not make all the decisions, and, in fact, one of the strengths of the reform effort was that many teachers and parents were involved over time in the planning and implementation of high school reform. Schools were given flexibility; outside partners were involved at the district and the school levels, and business and higher-education organizations were involved in key decisions. The level of ownership in the reform effort was extensive, and the superintendent stayed closely involved in the work through the leadership team. (p. 24)

An important contribution the district made in these partnerships, because of its unique perspective, was to be the partner that keeps the big picture in mind. Other partners were more narrowly focused on single issues, which was often helpful in areas the district could not address by itself. But the success of the first set of schools in Hamilton County created pressure to provide the same opportunities across the district; Register and Thompson note that the district is the only partner likely to feel the pressure to scale up. The district, therefore, is in a unique position to champion equity by insisting that reforms be systemic and not merely create pockets of excellence.

Another example of a cross-sector partnership for systemic reform is led by Metropolitan Nashville Public Schools, where the district has recently begun the three-year major reform project MNPS Achieves. Eight Transformational Leadership Groups, comprising more than 100 administrators, teachers, community members, and parents with relevant knowledge or expertise, will examine critical areas in need of improvement that affect the quality of instruction and learning. The project is designed to build the capacity of participants, distribute leadership, and empower them to make decisions.[4]

Ensuring the Sustainability of Leadership Practices That Increase Equity

Perhaps the most challenging aspect of building leadership capacity is to sustain this strong, shared leadership over the long term, through leadership transitions, budget pressures, and political swings. The strategies described in this article are long-term strategies

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4 For more information, see <www.mnps.org/Page4.aspx>.

designed to build political will and for-mal structures to act on what the data show, create a "web" of leadership that goes beyond one individual and will survive the departure of that individual, and build multiple back-up mecha-nisms into the system.

To build political will, Scheurich and Skrla (2003) encourage leaders to sustain themselves by building broad alliances and networks, use every inter-action to share the message of equity, create a climate where others are comfortable exchanging differing ideas and opinions, and build trust by honor-ing commitments made to others (pp. 104–108).

Building formal structures is important because communities can easily be overwhelmed by the number and depth of problems that surface when examining and addressing sys-temic inequities. A key leadership function is to shepherd the follow-up process to ensure that the emergent issues are addressed, working collabora-tively to develop mechanisms, priorities, practical steps, and support needed to follow through on recommendations and document and share progress along the way. Scheurich and Skrla (2003) citing a 2000 report by Skrla and colleagues, note that

> districts with cultures where student failure to learn was deemed unac-ceptable created multiple overlapping processes to ensure that all students learn. Like power plants, multiple systems are built in to perform the same functions in case the primary system or the first backup system fails. (p. 112)

Working Together to Improve Results for All Students

Leadership as described in this article is a practice, not a person. And the practice of leadership means organiz-ing the roles, relationships, resources, and responsibilities of various groups of individuals with a stake in the out-come of producing well-educated, informed citizens and participants in the workforce. This kind of leadership development goes beyond traditional workshops, seminars, and conferences designed to build yet another group of individual superheroes. Along with fundamental skills in facilitation, con-sensus building, inquiry processes, and conflict resolution, stakeholder groups need opportunities to learn together in ways that build on their strengths, offset their weaknesses, and defuse cul-tural tensions.

In school communities that have made the effort to develop leaders with the capacity to participate con-structively in cross-sector partnerships, the results can be remarkable. District

The practice of leadership means organizing various groups of individuals with a stake in the outcome of producing well-educated, informed citizens.

administrators and policy-makers rely on a well-organized, articulate, well-informed, independent, and powerful community as an asset to a district, not an enemy. Community and parent leaders present strong evidence in an effective way with a united front and are able to find common ground and develop solutions with powerful institutions like teachers unions and school and district administrations, even in cases where those groups are former adversaries. Youth leaders prove themselves to be an invaluable asset in pinpointing the actual conditions and problems in schools and proposing solutions that adult policy-makers might not have thought of.

> The results of cross-sector leadership development have been clear and well documented: better policies; safer schools; more equitably allocated supports, learning opportunities, and resources; greater public will to support schools; and improved student achievement.

The results of this kind of cross-sector leadership development have been clear and well documented: better policies; safer schools whose culture and conditions are more conducive to learning; more equitably allocated supports, learning opportunities, and resources; higher-quality teachers with better professional development; greater public will to support schools; and improved student achievement (McAlister, Mediratta

& Shah 2009; Mediratta, McAlister & Shah 2009; Mediratta, Shah & McAlister 2009; Shah, Mediratta & McAlister 2009a, 2009b).

The Real Heroes

It is often observed that our nation's ability to compete in a knowledge-based, global economy depends on a skilled and educated workforce. But the urgency of developing a new kind of leadership for educational excellence and equity does not end there. Even more important are basic principles of justice and democratic ideals. With thoughtful leadership development and structural supports for ongoing dialogue and collaboration, low-income communities, young people, district and union leadership, and other education stakeholders can work together to address many of the thorniest problems of urban education reform. No one needs to be left out of the discussion because of lack of capacity.

More and more education stakeholders are letting go of the traditional American fairy tales about leadership. They are not looking for – or trying to be – the knight in shining armor or the handsome prince who will defeat the evil enemy and save us. The true heroes of education reform in the twenty-first century are those forward-thinking leaders – from school districts, parent, student, and community groups, mayors' or governors' offices, teachers unions, philanthropic organizations, universities, or the myriad other groups that are an indispensable part of an education community – who share a commitment to equity and understand that we are all in this together.

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Leading and Managing Instruction: Adopting a Diagnostic and Design Mindset

James P. Spillane

The key role for school leaders in improving instruction is to diagnose problems and design solutions, rather than to implement externally developed designs.

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There is no shortage of talk and text about school administration, especially about school leadership. Recipes, prescriptions, and approaches for "effective" school administration are plentiful. Ideas come and go at a fast pace and some occasionally cling, at least for a bit. Still, many commentators, for good reason, wonder about the connections between school-administration research and development work and administrative practice in schools.

While a managerial imperative dominates school principals' work (Cuban 1988), a leadership imperative appears to dominate writing on school administration. Management is about efficiently and effectively maintaining current organizational arrangements and ways of working. Leadership involves influencing organizational members to achieve new, hopefully desirable, goals; more often than not, this involves initiating change. In day-to-day life in the schoolhouse, leading and managing work in tandem and are often wrapped up in the same organizational routines (Spillane & Diamond 2007). Hence, research and development work on school administration has to be about both leadership and management. More important, it has to be about leading and managing *instruction* – the technical core of schooling. This facet was overshadowed by leader and principal development research, especially by work on developing formally designated leaders such as principals, until about a decade ago. However, it remains the leader's critical responsibility to diagnose and design for effective instructional advancement in a school, a condition not met by simply implementing external designs for improvement.

School Administration Matters

There is reason for the attention given to school administration by policy-makers, practitioners, and scholars: the available research evidence suggests that school administration is critical to school improvement. Though the empirical evidence has limitations, it has consistently pointed to the critical role of administrative support in school reform and policy implementation (Berman & McLaughlin 1977; Fullan 2001; Leithwood et al. 2004; Liberman, Falk & Alexander 1994; Purkey & Smith 1985; Rosenholtz 1989; Seashore Louis & Kruse 1995; Sergiovanni 1996). School administration is especially criti-

cal in schools that serve impoverished students (Leithwood et al. 2004).

The literature on school administration also offers insights on *what* matters. For schools to run effectively and efficiently, three sets of macro-organizational functions must be addressed: compass setting, human development, and organizational development. Studies have consistently identified both setting and maintaining a direction as critical for school success. This involves developing an instructional vision that is shared by school staff (Bryk & Driscoll 1985; Newman & Wehlage 1995). In many urban schools, a key component of direction setting entails raising school-staff expectations for students' academic capabilities. At Kelly School in Chicago, for example, the principal and her leadership team designed and implemented organizational routines intended to raise teachers' expectations of students' academic abilities and their sense of responsibility for student learning (Diamond 2007).[1]

Developing the school's human capital is another critical function. Teacher hiring, summative and formative monitoring of instruction and efforts to improve it, support for staff development and growth, and recognition of individual successes are all aspects of developing the school's human capital. Another macro-organizational function is building and maintaining a school culture in which norms of trust, collaboration, and collective responsibility for student learning support ongoing conversations about instruction and its improvement. Further, maintaining an orderly and safe work environment and procuring the necessary resources for the organization to run effectively are also essential.
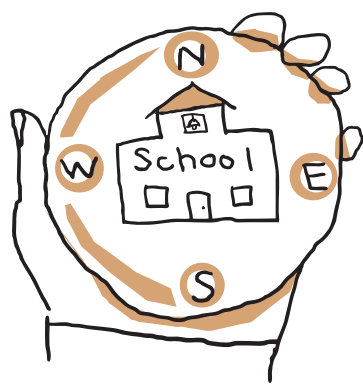
Appropriately attending to these macro functions takes time and a vast range of knowledge and skill. Equating school leadership and management solely with the school principal's work fails to acknowledge that one person cannot sufficiently master the essential knowledge. Moreover, the available empirical evidence suggests that others, in addition to the school principal, are involved to varying degrees in the duties of leading and managing (Camburn, Rowan & Taylor 2003; Spillane, Hunt & Healy, forthcoming; Spillane, Camburn & Pareja 2007; Spillane et al. 2009).

Diagnosis and Design: The Core Challenge

An implementation mindset dominates much of the work in school leadership and management research and development. While implementation has its place, we also need to cultivate a *diagnostic and design* mindset among school leaders and those who work on leadership development. Even the "best" designs by agents and agencies outside the schoolhouse will necessitate diagnostic and design work on the part of school leaders.

Diagnosis and design work in harmony. We diagnose the cause or

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1 All names are pseudonyms.

nature of a thing, usually prompted by something unusual in our environment. Diagnostic work is not about *discovering* problems, but rather about *constructing* them. Data, after all, do not speak for themselves. Instead, by marshaling the available data and information, sometimes gathering new data, we *construct* evidence of a problem and advance a particular prognosis. *Diagnostic framing* centers on defining problems, identifying their source, and assigning blame, whereas *prognostic framing* centers on articulating a solution and the strategies for carrying it out (Benford & Snow 2000; Coburn 2006; Snow & Benford 1992).

At Baxter School on Chicago's Northwest Side, school leaders re-analyzed student achievement data to look at actual growth in achievement over time. When compared with other district schools, Baxter was one of the better performing. But when school leaders crunched the numbers longitudinally, they identified some surprising grade- and cohort-level trends: compared with the twelve top-performing schools in the district, students at Baxter were at the bottom of the list when it came to actual growth. Acknowledging a problem, school staff at Baxter set out to gather data using staff surveys and classroom observations in order to define the causes of stagnant student achievement at their school (Burch 2007; Spillane 2006). Student achievement data on its own could not explain *why* student growth was flat at Baxter.

Diagnostic work is not an end in itself; it is, some times more than others, the basis for design and redesign work. Of course, people sometimes design without diagnosis or their designs are based on weak diagnoses. We typically think of design as a grandiose activity, confined to the world of high fashion, architecture, or engineering. But design is an everyday activity in schools as leaders attempt to shape aspects of their organizational infrastructure to meet new ends (Spillane & Coldren, in preparation). At Adams School on Chicago's South Side, Principal Williams and her leadership team designed routines including Breakfast Club, grade-level meetings, Teacher Talk, Teacher Leaders, Five-Week Assessment, Literacy Committee, and Mathematics Committee to address various problems tied to classroom instruction (Halverson 2007; Zoltners Sherer 2007).

Coming to Adams, Principal Williams sought to establish curricular coherence within and across grades, raise teachers' expectations for student academic ability, and get staff to talk with one another about instruction. Williams remembered, "I had to create the structures for the teachers to come together and talk" (Spillane et al. 2007). The Breakfast Club, a monthly meeting of staff, for example, was designed to tailor professional development to staff needs and build norms of collaboration among staff around instruction (Halverson 2007). It was intended to address the macro function of human development.

A diagnosis and design mindset sees school leaders as the key agents in improving school leadership and management. School leaders can still beg, borrow, and buy from the school administration bazaar, but the success and/or failure of their purchases will ultimately depend on their own diagnostic and design efforts. Outside

designs can help, to the extent that they address the school's particular problems and circumstances. But these external designs cannot substitute entirely for local diagnostic and design work. Hence, developing a diagnostic and design mindset among school leaders is critical to improvement.

A Framework: A Distributed Perspective

An analytical framework focuses and guides our diagnosis and design work, influencing which features of a social phenomenon, such as school leadership and management, we see or do not see. We often use these frames without ever clearly acknowledging them, which can be problematic. For example, much of the thinking about leadership is still, either implicitly or explicitly, framed by a "heroics of leadership paradigm" (Yukl 1999, p. 292). However, a "heroics of leadership" frame tends to equate leadership with the work of the school principal or some other formally designated leader. It focuses our attention on individual *actions*, rather than the *interactions* among staff. Further, this frame tends to focus on the *formal* organization, with limited attention to the *informal* organization – the organization as experienced by school staff and students.

Becoming aware of the frameworks we use is important, especially when working in teams on diagnostic and design work. School leaders must settle on an analytical framework and, equally important, develop a taken-as-shared understanding of that framework. This ensures that school staffers are roughly on the same page when it comes to improving school leadership and management and prevents unnecessary confusion about meanings, intentions, and goals.

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New frames, such as a distributed framework, can offer fresh insights into familiar phenomena such as school leadership and management. It is not a blueprint for leading and managing, a stepped program, or a how-to script for doing that work. Rather, researchers and practitioners may use a distributed framework in diagnosing leadership and management practice and designing for its improvement. This framework has two central aspects – a leader-plus aspect and a practice aspect (Spillane 2006).

The leader-plus (or principal-plus) aspect recognizes that the work of leading and managing may involve multiple leaders. Moreover, some of these leaders may have neither a formal leadership designation nor responsibilities in the formal account of the schoolhouse. Thus, the distributed frame forces us to recognize and record

that the arrangement of leadership and management responsibilities emerge – through design or default – in the lived organization.

Another facet of the distributed frame is the practice aspect. Understanding leadership and management using a distributed frame means attending to the *practice* of leading and managing – not simply behaviors, styles, or approaches. Attention is drawn to what happens on the ground from one day to the next, as a distributed frame sees this practice as taking shape in the interactions among school leaders and followers as mediated by aspects of their situation (Gronn 2000; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond 2001, 2004; Spillane 2006).

Aspects of the situation such as organizational routines and tools of various sorts do not simply allow us to practice more or less effectively or efficiently; rather, they contribute to defining the practice of leading and managing. To understand the practice, then, we have to move beyond an exclusive focus on the actions of individual leaders and attend to the *interactions* among school staff. These interactions, as mediated by the situation, should be our primary concern as we engage with diagnosing leadership and management practice and designing for its improvement.

Leading and *Managing Instruction*

Instruction has not figured prominently into research and development work on school administration in the U.S. Though visible on the radar screen in recent decades, instruction is still something of a fringe interest. Student achievement and teachers' working conditions are typically the dependent variable of interest, rather than instruc-

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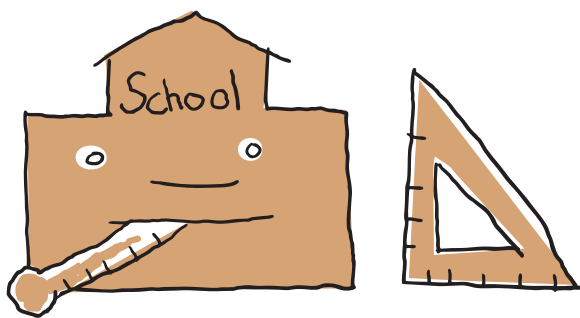
tion. More important, instruction is rarely used as an exploratory variable in research on school leadership and management.

Just as instructors specialize in fields of teaching (reading, mathematics, etc.), so, too, do school leaders specialize in particular school subjects within their leadership and management of instruction. This highlights the problematic nature of the inattention paid to instruction and legitimizes the demand that research and development work on leading and managing instruction must be anchored in the school subject because the subject matters. Specifically, how school leaders think about the work of leading and managing, the arrangement of formally designated leaders, and the patterns of interaction among school staff differ by subject (Burch & Spillane 2003; Burch 2007; Hayton & Spillane 2008; Zoltners Sherer 2007; Spillane 2005, 2006).

School leaders do not treat all school subjects the same and occasionally design organizational routines that target some subjects but not others. At Adams School on Chicago's South Side, for example, the Real Men Read routine focused exclusively on reading. Concerned that their African American male students perceived reading as something that was not masculine, they designed and implemented the Real Men Read routine, where prominent African American males from the community read to students. The routine was intended to challenge popular perceptions of reading among male students in an effort to motivate their involvement in reading instruction. For practitioners and researchers, diagnostic and design work has to take serious account of instruction – both the curricular domain and the aspect of instruction (e.g., teaching approach, content coverage).

The Real Men Read organizational routine at Adams School also foregrounds two additional issues about leading and managing. First, by focusing only on the interactions among school staff, interactions involving students – which may be critical occasions for leading and managing instruction – are overlooked. In the performance of the Real Men Read routine, students are key. A study employing Experience Sampling Methods logs of forty-two school principals in one mid-sized urban school district in the southeastern U.S. is informative with respect to the role of students. Overall, school principals in the study reported co-performing almost half (47 percent) of the administration and the instruction- and curriculum-related activities that they led, though among principals there was tremendous variation. Principals reported co-leading 14.3

Getting to Design

Viewed from a distributed perspective, the practice of leading and managing is emergent. One cannot design practice but can diagnose practice and design for its improvement. One way of doing this is through attention to the infrastructure that enables and constrains leadership and management practice in schools. Leaders can focus their design work on multiple facets of the school infrastructure from the protocols they use to do their work (e.g., teacher-evaluation protocols) to organizational routines (e.g., grade-level meetings, school improvement planning).

Organizational routines are one aspect of the infrastructure that enables and constrains leadership and management practice. Organizational routines involve "a repetitive, recognizable pattern of interdependent actions, involving multiple actors" (Feldman & Pentland 2003, p. 311). To count as an organizational routine, something must be repeated over time, be recognizable to school staff, and involve two or more staff members. Organizational routines are staples in schools, as they are in all organizations.

The design and redesign of organizational routines figured prominently in school leaders' efforts to transform the practice of leading and managing in order to reform instruction in the Chicago schools we studied (Spillane 2006). Indeed, organizational routines were one of the primary mechanisms used by school leaders in an effort to build stronger connections between school leadership and management, on the one hand, and classroom instruction, on the other (Spillane et al. 2007). At Kelly School in Chicago, Assistant

percent of these activities with students (Spillane, Camburn & Pareja 2007).

Second, individuals outside the school, such as the community members in the case of the Real Men Read routine, are also important in thinking about leading and managing in schools. In the study mentioned above, principals identified non–school members including parents, community members, and district staff as either leading or co-leading some of the activities in which they participated, though they identified them much less frequently than school staff (Spillane, Camburn & Pareja 2007). Other recent studies also underscore the need to extend investigations of leading and managing beyond the schoolhouse walls to school districts (Mayrowetz & Smylie 2004; Firestone & Martinez 2007; Leithwood et al. 2007). Diagnostic work on leading and managing instruction in schools must take into account those individuals who, though not a member of the school organization, still take responsibility for the work of leading and managing in that school.

Principal Brown, collaborating with teachers, developed a "skill chart" that teachers were to use in tracking student progress, as well as to align their lesson plans to standardized tests, district standards, and students' skill mastery. Teachers were expected to use the skill charts, described by Ms. Brown as "a tool to keep you focused and on track," to plan instruction (Diamond 2007). When Principal Koh took over at Kosten School, she redesigned existing organizational routines and designed new ones, including Report Card Review, Grade Book Review, and Lesson Plan Review, in an effort to improve student achievement (Hallett 2007). At Baxter school, Mr. Stern worked with his staff to design and implement organizational routines that would involve teachers in decision making about instruction. Central to his efforts were the Faculty Leadership Group and Grade-Level Cycle routines. The Faculty Leadership Group met monthly and included the chairs from each grade-level cycle, along with key school administrators. Grade-Level Cycles (K–2, 3–5, and 6–8) met twice a month and were designed to allow teachers to plan curriculum together (Burch 2007).

Organizational routines are often taken for granted by school staff. As staff members come and go, the theory of action and design principles behind routines can be lost. Moreover, school leaders often inherit organizational routines from prior administrations, and some routines are mandated by external authorities. Considering the time and effort most schools put into implementing routines, it is important to conduct periodic inventories of organizational routines to explore their theories of action and their effectiveness.

Getting to the Practice of Leading and Managing

The practice of leading and managing must be central in school leaders' diagnosis and design work. Getting to practice is difficult, especially given that roles, positions, and styles dominate the conversation about improving school leadership and management. But *practice* is where the rubber of leadership and management meets the road of instructional improvement, through direction setting, human capital development, and developing the organizational infrastructure. Practice is about interactions. Hence, diagnosing it and designing for its improvement is all the more challenging.

It is time for school leaders to embrace their role as key agents in improving the practice of leading and

One cannot design practice but can diagnose practice and design for its improvement. One way of doing this is through attention to the infrastructure that enables and constrains leadership and management practice in schools.

managing. It is also time for those who work with school leaders on developing that practice to recognize that an implementation mindset only goes so far. Even the best-laid designs will ultimately depend on the savvy and skill of school leaders on the ground. Hence, cultivating a diagnosis and design mindset among school leaders and honing the skills needed to adequately do this work should be central in efforts to develop school leadership and management.

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Developing Instructional Leaders

Andrew Lachman,
Richard W. Lemons, Margaret Terry Orr,
and Mónica Byrne-Jiménez

An effort in Connecticut is aimed at developing cadres of school leaders for urban districts who are prepared to lead instructional improvement.

Leadership is not about control. It is about guiding people to think and act differently.

— A participant in the Urban School Leaders Fellowship

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School leadership matters. Recent research demonstrates that second only to the quality of teachers, effective principals are the most important schoolhouse variable linked to the improvement of student learning, achievement, and attainment (Leithwood et al. 2004). School leadership matters even more in the persistently low-performing schools that Education Secretary Arne Duncan has targeted for improvement. In their review of the research on leadership effects on student learning, Kenneth Leithwood and his colleagues found that "there are virtually no instances of troubled schools being turned around without intervention by a powerful leader" (p. 3).

For urban districts, the principal leadership crisis is more than just a human resources issue; it is a vexing systemic problem impeding large-scale improvement. Given the essential role of effective leaders in urban school improvement, districts must put in place a comprehensive leadership development strategy. They need to figure out how to identify and develop a viable pool of aspirants; make sure that as these aspirants become applicants for leadership positions they are prepared for the context-specific realities of urban schools; and foster the organizational conditions that can support and retain these leaders once hired. This multi-dimensional problem requires a systemic solution.

A Need for Strategic Partnerships

Traditionally, districts have relied upon universities to produce and certify – in conjunction with state departments of education – principal candidates. More recently, several districts have created their own leadership academies and principal induction and mentoring programs in order to ensure a pipeline of quality applicants. In addition, organizations such as New Leaders for New Schools and charter management companies have challenged the university cartels and entered the marketplace with

alternative routes to principal preparation programs. But while large urban districts are able to launch and take advantage of such programs, smaller urban school districts are often poorly positioned to identify, develop, and retain leaders because they lack economies of scale and access to leadership development expertise (Campbell, DeArmond & Schumwinger 2004).

Ultimately, solving the urban leadership problem may be beyond the capacity of any one institution, especially for small districts. One solution may be for districts to work collaboratively and in concert with partners who can bring the necessary leadership development expertise, professional learning experience, and financial support to the enterprise. The Urban School Leaders Fellowship (USLF) is such a partnership – one that engages multiple organizations in a strategic effort to support school improvement through leadership development.

USLF is a collaborative partnership founded and funded by the Fairfield County Community Foundation (FCCF). Faced with low-achieving schools in four urban communities and demographic data that indicated that 40

percent to 50 percent of the principals in those districts would be retiring over the next ten years, the foundation formed the fellowship to identify and develop the next generation of instructional leaders. The partners, including the foundation, the four urban districts, an educational improvement organization, and three institutions of higher education, designed and operate USLF.

From its inception, USLF was structured to accomplish more than simply prepare principals; it was also conceived as a tool to foster systemic instructional improvement within the districts. This article describes the inter-organizational partnership that created USLF, the program design, and the lessons learned that may inform the work of other districts and organizations committed to the development of instructional leadership.

The USLF Partnership

USLF was the brainchild of the FCCF, launched in response to identified needs to develop the next generation of urban principals in the Bridgeport, Danbury, Norwalk, and Stamford public schools in Connecticut. FCCF and the four districts partnered with the

Districts provide the authentic contexts for the work, ensuring that USLF is a job-embedded improvement initiative, as opposed to an add-on program.

Connecticut Center for School Change, a not-for-profit educational support organization that consults to districts to improve student outcomes through systemic improvement efforts. The partners then collaborated with faculty at the University of Connecticut's Institute for Urban School Improvement. Finally, faculty members at Bank Street College and Hofstra University joined the collaboration, with the role of conducting a formative and summative program evaluation.

The USLF program has three goals. The first is that fellows who complete the program have a better understanding of how schools and districts function, the principal's role, and their own leadership potential and that they improve their ability as effective school leaders. The second is that fellows complete a leadership project that develops their leadership capacity, addresses a student achievement issue in their school, positively influences instruction, and reduces the school's achievement gap. A final, long-term goal is that within three to five years of program completion, 60 percent to 70 percent of the fellows will become principals.

In its first year (2008–2009), the program served twenty-nine assistant principals and teacher leaders in cohorts of six to ten candidates from each of the four participating districts. To be eligible, participants had to already have state administrative certification. The program did not provide course credits or any additional state-sanctioned professional credential. Since the program costs were fully underwritten by FCCF, there were no direct costs to the districts, although they absorbed significant indirect costs for released time and coverage. Fellows received a $2,000 stipend upon successful completion of the program.

How the Program Works

The USLF program includes a five-day summer institute and monthly all-day seminars during the school year. The curriculum framework draws on the state's common core of leading, with special attention to two domains: systems thinking, and teaching and learning. The sessions are structured around essential questions such as: What does research suggest about high-quality learning and teaching? What does high-quality teaching and learning look like? What are high-leverage strategies for reducing the achievement gap? What core beliefs inform my personal leadership? What is my leadership style?

USLF is organized as a community of practice and the teaching methods are grounded in adult learning theory, with problem-based learning and critical examinations of problems of practice. The curriculum is delivered through video observations, case studies, readings (e.g., Ron Ferguson, Richard Elmore, John Kotter, Ron Heifetz), and thought-provoking exercises and assignments (e.g., shadowing a student for a day, drafting a theory of action for school improvement). The focus is on putting learning into practice. The daily reflection sheet that fellows complete asks: What did I learn today? How will this impact my practice? How will this help my students? Fellows also undertake individual action-learning projects where they can exercise leadership and take risks. Finally, they produce a portfolio throughout the year-long program to document their leadership development.

How the Districts Support the Program

The four districts have invested substantial amounts of time, money, and intellectual capital in USLF, in several ways:

- release fellows for the full-day sessions, provide substitute coverage, help to design the session content and format, meet with fellows to advise and supervise their projects, and troubleshoot and smooth the path back at the fellows' schools;
- identify potential leaders and encourage them to apply;
- determine leadership advancement opportunities and support mentoring and supervision structures for new leaders.

Districts also provide the authentic contexts for the work, ensuring that USLF is a job-embedded improvement initiative, as opposed to an add-on program. The district leaders – primarily assistant superintendents – serving as program faculty bring considerable experience within and knowledge about urban schools and the particular conditions of their districts to the enterprise. The district leaders supervise the fellows' work on the leading learning projects, act as their advisors, and mentor them. As part of the USLF faculty, they help fellows connect theoretical notions of leadership (theory of action, accountability, instructional practice, assessment) to the actual practice of district improvement efforts.

Roles of Each Partner

In addition to conducting the research that led to the genesis of the program, FCCF secured the financial resources to start and sustain the program, contributing real dollars and in-kind support, and worked with individual donors and other foundations to obtain full funding. Leveraging relationships and professional connections, FCCF executives

Eighty-five percent to 90 percent of the fellows rated the program as excellent in providing highly relevant content on leadership, urban schools, and instructional improvement.

and board members brought prospective donors to USLF sessions, allowing advocates of educational improvement to see the promise of the fellows as well as the rigorous learning exercises in which they took part.

The Connecticut Center for School Change is an organization with distinct expertise in district-level leadership coaching around systemic improvement. The Center also has a well-developed infrastructure – from administrative support to curriculum design – for supporting high-quality leadership development programs. Consequently, the Center provides much of the back-office support to the program while providing leadership for curriculum development. Center staff also teach within the program, sharing experience and expertise about school-level leadership with the fellows.

The institutions of higher education have contributed different expertise to the partnership. The University of Connecticut faculty member researches and works with numerous districts on issues of systemic instructional improvement and instructional leadership. He led the development of the

curriculum, facilitated collaboration across the multiple organizations, and served as the central instructor for the program. The professors from Hofstra University and Bank Street College possess expertise in evaluating leadership development programs. These faculty members serve as external evaluators, systemically studying the efficacy of the program. They provide a fresh and unbiased perspective, feeding back patterns they observe and raising issues and questions of program structure, content, and implementation for the USLF faculty to consider.

USLF is an inter-organizational collaboration that attempts to identify and leverage the most appropriate and advantageous contribution of all the partners. The University of Connecticut faculty member does not help fellows solve day-to-day dilemmas – from scheduling to discipline – that tax the lives of urban leaders. District leaders do not try to provide theoretical frameworks that offer new means of seeing and reflecting upon leadership practice. Evaluators do not raise money for the program. Instead, the respective partners work at what they do best.

Successes and Challenges

USLF faculty members, district administrators, and foundation executives are believers in this new leadership development partnership. The program is job embedded and experiential, the curriculum challenging and relevant. Fellows reported the program had a positive impact on who they are as educational leaders. Here are some typical comments:

- "I went by my school this morning and I just stood outside for a moment. It didn't feel like the same school – meaning I know that I am not the same."

- "After this, I'll never be the same. I will never look at classrooms through the same eyes."
- "USLF made me more aware of what I did not know about myself and how I frame situations and think about my own leadership. I see more of a connection now between leading and teaching. I learned so much more in this program than in my college administrative prep program."

The external evaluation found that USLF fellows experienced changes in their practice as a result of participation in three areas: using data to monitor progress and solve problems, providing professional development, and engaging others in change efforts. Fellows gained new leadership perspectives, developed a shared understanding of quality instruction, demonstrated improvement in leadership skills, and led teams in new ways. Eighty-five percent to 90 percent of the fellows rated the program as excellent in providing highly relevant content on leadership, urban schools, and instructional improvement.

Other signs of success have also emerged. FCCF secured the funding required to support the 2009–2010 cohort. There were more applications for the second year's cohort, and thirty-seven candidates were selected. District leaders are beginning to report systemic results, noting how USLF is impacting hiring practices and other professional development. Fellows from the 2008–2009 cohort continue to meet on their own or with support from their central office and the Connecticut Center for School Change. Four fellows, one from each district, have been hired as principals.

Despite these accomplishments, the USLF program still has much work to do in terms of its larger goal of transforming the districts. Liz City, Richard Elmore, Sarah Fiarman, and Lee Teitel (2009) write in their new book that instructional improvement at scale requires that professional development move beyond individuals and groups of educators to the school and district level. They suggest that improvement efforts have to become embedded in the district's DNA and central to the core work of the district. The USLF program was developed and implemented not solely as high-quality professional development for individual aspiring leaders, but as a central element in changing the organizational conditions of how districts support instructional improvement.

To change those conditions, though, schools and districts will have to change some deeply engrained practices. In its first year, the program has

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USLF was developed not solely as high-quality professional development for individual aspiring leaders, but as a central element in changing the organizational conditions of how districts support instructional improvement.

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found that it has bumped up against district practices in the following areas:

- Identifying quality teaching
- Putting learning into practice
- Sharing learning with others
- Aligning messages about leadership roles and strategies for school improvement
- Leveraging a critical mass to facilitate systemic change

Identifying Quality Teaching

In the summer sessions and follow-up fall seminars, the fellows clarified what constitutes good teaching, using a constructivist approach: they viewed videos of classroom teaching, compared their individual ratings, and learned how divergent their assessments of good teaching were. They developed a more fine-grained, learner-centered framework to analyze and describe teaching and learning.
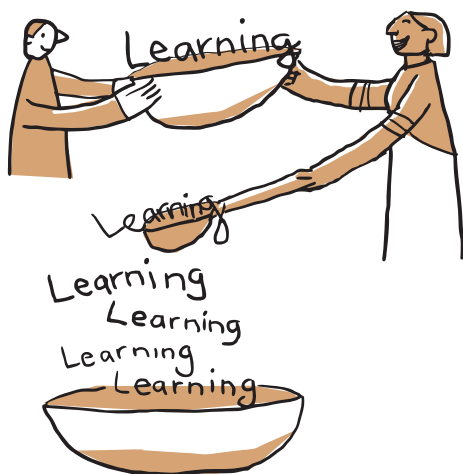
Through this work, they gained understanding of the effects of good teaching and how to recognize it. The USLF exercises revealed that despite the four districts' investments in systemic reform, there was not a strong shared understanding of the attributes of quality teaching, nor a means by which the fellows' new perspectives could be reconciled with existing district expectations.

Putting Learning into Practice

With new insights on quality teaching, fellows who were assistant principals noted how they looked at their own schools' teachers differently, while fellows who were teachers reflected on how USLF pushed them to think differently about their teaching. With each session, the fellows gained insights into promoting quality teaching and learning, reducing the achievement gap, and addressing systemic change. They wanted to bring those insights into work the next day.

This turned out to be an unexpected tension in the program, because the intent had been to facilitate the fellows' development for future leadership positions and not about how they might change their current roles and work to capitalize on what they were learning in the moment.

Sharing Learning with Others

An unexpected consequence of the program was that the fellows wanted to share their learning with their schools' leadership teams, particularly their principals and other school administrators. They wanted to try out some new ideas and methods such as how to work with teachers to improve student engagement and learning. They wanted to engage their colleagues in

collaboratively trying new approaches and jointly reflecting on what they were learning. Some of the fellows engaged in informal conversations with their principal or peer administrators, and others circulated readings and organized video-based discussions about teaching and learning, as they had done in the seminars.

The principals and other school leaders varied in their receptivity to this new information – from active interest, to resentment that they did not receive the same learning opportunity, to fear that they were at risk of being replaced.

Aligning Messages about Leadership Roles and Strategies for School Improvement

Throughout the USLF program, there were discussions of how effective leaders could facilitate school improvement both through work with individual teachers and through collective work with teaching faculty in fostering a vision, raising expectations, using data, and facilitating collaboration.

While district officials provided input into the program content and facilitated fellows' discussions at each session, there was limited discussion about each district's systemic improvement plans and leadership expectations and how these and the program's expectations were aligned (or not). Thus, it was left up to each fellow to sort out the alignment issues and tensions, sometimes with their building leaders and sometimes not.

Leveraging a Critical Mass to Facilitate Systemic Change

As the program unfolded throughout the academic year, participating district officials and the fellows began to see the benefits of having a shared language and shared expectations about quality teaching, instructionally effective leadership, and strategies for enhancing student learning. These shared insights and expectations helped, in some cases, to generate a critical mass of people with leadership expectations and capacity for systemic reform work.

Building Partnerships for Long-Term Improvement

The USLF partners invested in building collective ownership so that all partners felt responsibility for the success of the entire program. This investment required significant time and planning.

The partners also found that utilizing comparative advantages required explicit conversations about how each organization and individual could best contribute, working under the explicit assumption that differentiated contributions may produce the most desirable result. As differentiation increased, so did the need for coordination. It took ongoing collaboration and communication across organizations to knit together the various aspects of the work into a coherent whole.

Finally, improving the program required ongoing reflection about practice based upon real data. Some of the most significant modifications to the program were direct responses to evaluation findings. The partners created opportunities to meet as a team and learn from and examine results of the program evaluators' data gathering. This enabled the team to continuously improve the program and to re-engineer the curriculum and structural components to better meet the needs of the fellows and the districts.

The USLF partnership model is not a silver bullet for remedying all urban leadership problems. It is not a simple, packaged program that can be bought off the shelf and easily inserted into schools and districts. USLF is a complex initiative woven into the complicated work of four urban districts. It is a strategic and systemic effort intended to have a lasting impact upon the leadership capacity of the districts. The identification, development, and support of aspiring leaders within these four districts are being accomplished through a unique, effective, inter-organizational partnership.

As other districts across the nation struggle with developing a deep pool of building leaders who have the skills and knowledge to improve teaching and learning, they should ask: What is our comparative advantage relative to solving this problem? How can we strategically ally with organizations that offer different and complementary assets and strengths? How can we invest in the collaborative to produce a high-functioning partnership?

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Partnership with a Shared Mission

Philip Weinberg

A principal and a partner organization work in tandem to lead improvement in a New York City high school.

Located in a Gothic-style building in Brooklyn, overlooking New York Harbor, the School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology was designed to be a school for the twenty-first century. As its name implies, it has a heavy emphasis on technology, with a television studio, its own Web server, and technology infused throughout the curriculum. It has also been recognized for its global education program and humanities curriculum, and it is part of the Transatlantic School Innovation Alliance, a partnership with schools in London that is supported by the Annenberg Institute for School Reform.

Under a system established by the New York City Department of Education, the school has formed a partnership with New Visions for Public Schools, a local nonprofit organization, to provide support and assistance. The school's principal, Philip Weinberg, spoke to *Voices in Urban Education* editor Robert Rothman about the partnership and his role as school leader.

Philip Weinberg is principal of the School of Telecommunication Arts and Technology in Brooklyn, New York.

Tell me about your school.

We're located in Brooklyn, New York. There are about 1,250 students in attendance. We serve grades nine through twelve. We're pretty representative of the borough of Brooklyn demographically, or at least socio-economically. We're relatively poor; there's a high percentage, and in our school especially, of Latino students. Seventy percent [are eligible for] Title I.

What kinds of partnerships do you have with community organizations?

The chief partnership right now is with New Visions, which is a new way the Department of Education is running schools. Other partnerships have been on much smaller scales, with local community groups down in Sunset Park, who worked with agencies we could refer students to for everything from employment to health services to general family counseling and stuff like that.

What is your role as a leader in a system with partnerships? How might that be different from a system in which you are only responsible for your own building?

In a crude sense, the biggest difference is that I have to figure out how this partnership can benefit the larger school community and make sure that we're aligned so that the work of the partnering organization supports the mission of the school.

The difference in the kind of partnerships the Department of Education has created now is that the partner fulfills some of the role of the person who used to be my boss, who was the superintendent. By disempowering the superintendent and, in name at least, empowering the principal, the partner has to take on some of the jobs of the superintendent without any of the regulatory power the superintendent had. It's been interesting to watch the partner try to negotiate that difference, try to be the support organization without having any regulatory authority. They're great at it in some ways. But it must be frustrating if you can see a way a school can get better or do the right thing and they choose not to do it. Four years ago a superintendent would have said, much like a parent, I don't care if you don't want to do it, you have to do it, because I know what's best for you. Now that interaction can't exist. It would be interesting to hear from a group like New Visions how they're negotiating that aspect of working with people.

The sooner we get to understand the folks with whom we work and their strengths and the things that they can offer our community, the sooner we can negotiate a good working relationship.

How do you go about aligning the work of the school with that of the partner organization?

Like most things in most places, it really is about people. And so the sooner we get to understand the folks with whom we work and their strengths and the things that they can offer our community, the sooner we can negotiate a good working relationship and a relationship that's beneficial to the school.

Did your preparation as a principal provide you with the skills to do that?

It depends on what you mean by preparation. The academic training I had to be a school leader, as most folks would say, was not about being a principal. Academic programs for school leaders are really just certificate programs.

The training I really had was with the previous principal of our school, when I worked as an assistant principal. One of the things that I think he was masterful at was knowing the folks around him, both inside the school and outside, and figuring out how to make sure that we were well positioned to work well with them.

How do partners hold one another accountable?

That's going to be dependent on the formation of each different partnership and what people want from it. There are tons of partnerships that schools have where the outside organization has a grant and so they have their focus on making sure they fulfill the terms of their grant, no matter what the school needs or wants. And so they'll hold the school accountable for making sure they get the information they need to meet their funder's criteria. We'll participate or not participate based on whether we feel that the grant is good for the school.

In other instances, like in our working relationship with New Visions, because we both know we're going to be here for a long time and working together, we tend to be more open in terms of a dialogue about what's working and what's not working and how we can work well together. The interesting thing about this partnership the city's created, these new kinds of working relationships, is that in the end, at least from my work with New Visions, they seem to have very little invested in being right or getting what they want and more invested in making sure they're serving us. I think they're trying to provide ideas that will better serve schools, but like a good teacher, they want us to grasp those ideas ourselves and to name them as our own, rather than having to lecture and say, "Now I want you to know this and do this." And it's been an interesting approach.

They've been the most successful partnership I feel like we've had. Partly because their investment is in seeing us do well. They're not fulfilling the terms of some grantor.

Has partnership changed the way you look for staff? Do you look for people with a particular set of skills who can work with outside organizations?

No. The [liaison to the] outside organization is going to be me and the administrative staff, for the most part. If the outside organizations have things to offer, we find staff for them to work with and then go forward.
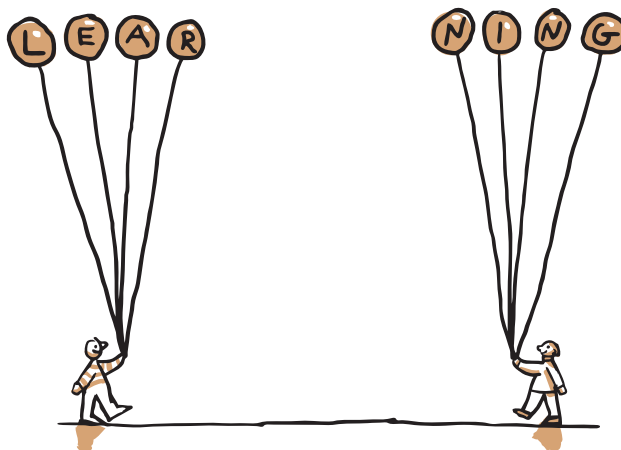
The business of running schools is not dealing with kids, for the most part. No matter how successful or interesting it is, it's an ancillary part of education.

New Visions seems to have very little invested in being right or getting what they want and more invested in making sure they're serving us.

I understand the district set up this arrangement, where you get to choose the organization you wanted to work with. Do they provide additional support, either linking you with a partner or working through some issues if you might have some?

They probably would provide support with issues if you had some. It's interesting, because the Department of Ed plays two roles here. It is one of the support organizations, too. So they're a little bit schizophrenic.

As with many things with the Department of Ed these days, there was a business model that they were following. Somebody with an MBA had the idea. They never quite thought through what their role was. We're in the third year of this now. The first time through, it happened too fast. The information was available in print and you could go to a meet-and-greet fair, sort of a "speed dating" kind of thing to get to know people. Much like other organizations, I think what's happened since then is people talk. Word of mouth has been a much more valuable tool in terms of discerning how things work,

whom you might work well with, and the negotiating the partnership stuff happens in a less formal way, because the Department of Ed has tried to decentralize this part of its work.

There's the ability to move, which is one of the ways the department facilitates the process. But I can't speak well to this because I haven't had a problem. We've worked very nicely with our partner.

Just from being a principal for quite some time now, I've seen the many iterations of the Department of Ed over the last nine or ten years. This is functioning nicely for our school and for us, partly because I had the experience of having a boss and knowing what would have been expected of me, and partly because what this group does is very smart and thoughtful and helpful.

Making Connections: Linking Schools and Communities

Benjamin Sherman

A New York City principal sees it as part of his mission to draw on community resources to expand learning opportunities for students.

The East-West School of International Studies in Queens, New York, was created in 2006 as part of New York City's effort to expand student options by creating new small high schools. With 427 students in grades six through twelve, it is one of the smallest schools in the city.

In keeping with its name, the school has a strong focus on international studies and languages, particularly Asian languages. All students are expected to study Chinese, Japanese, or Korean for five hours a week. The school is also part of the Transatlantic School Innovation Alliance, a partnership between schools in New York City and London, for which the Annenberg Institute for School Reform provides support.

Benjamin Sherman, East-West's principal, spoke to *Voices in Urban Education* editor Robert Rothman about leading a school with vibrant community partnerships.

Benjamin Sherman is principal of the East-West School of International Studies in Queens, New York.

The focus of this issue is on leadership in schools that engage community partners. I wanted to get your perspective on what your role as a principal is in such a system and how that might be different from what you might be doing if you were just responsible for your building. How do you see your role in terms of working with partnerships?

I like to get the kids out of the building for experiential learning. And I like to use resources in the community to bring experiences in for the kids. So I see my role as a connector, someone who goes out and creates a relationship and then puts the key pieces into place so that the relationship grows for the benefit of children.

That's pretty much it. And then I try to manage the relationships with external partners once they're up and ready. It's not perfect, but it moves along.

What are some of the partnerships you have?

We have a partnership with an organization called OATS – Older Adult Technology Services. This is a small nonprofit that builds on another partnership we have with a place called Self-Help Senior Services, which is a senior citizen residence – not a nursing home, but a senior citizen residence – for senior citizens who are living close to the poverty line or below the poverty line. They're about a block away from

our school. We get our kids in there volunteering with the seniors, and through OATS, our kids are trained to teach the seniors technology. That's a very exciting partnership.

We have another partnership with a group called iMentor, which arranges one-on-one mentor relationships with our tenth-grade students. The relationships primarily consist of weekly e-mail letters from the mentor to the mentee and from the mentee to the mentor, on a set topic, following a curriculum. It involves tremendous reading and writing, use of technology, and an outside organization that trains mentors. Just another adult for kids to touch base with.

We have another relationship with a place called Community Works. Community Works is based out of Manhattan. It's another small nonprofit. Right now they are sending an outside artist to our school for a multi-year push on a program focusing on an exploration of the Japanese American experience as internees in the internment camps during World War II. So the kids are learning about that experience, they're creating artwork to interpret it, they're working with this outside artist, and the artwork they're creating is part of a multi-year traveling arts exhibition, which is travelling around the United States.

We're working with TSIA, the Transatlantic School Innovation Alliance. That's a partnership with the Annenberg Institute for School Reform and a school in London. Each of us is studying kids who are having difficulty with literacy. We've been able to move kids through this partnership.

There are others I wish would happen. I'm looking at a swimming partnership that will get our kids into the local public pool. That one hasn't

happened. I'm trying to make that happen. I would like to get our kids in a partnership with an outfit called Recycle a Bicycle, where someone comes in and teaches the kids how to fix a clunker bicycle. They learn about the mechanics of bicycle repair and they learn a marketable skill. And then they get to keep the bicycle that they've just spent half a year fixing. That one hasn't happened yet. I was able to bring that into my old school, but I haven't been able to bring that relationship into my new school. But I'm still working on it; it's in the works.

Building the Skills to Work with Partners

Did your preparation as a principal provide you with the skills you need to serve this role as a facilitator and manager of partnerships, or did you learn that along the way?

No, I learned that along the way. My training programs did not address the use of partnerships at all. But my interest in bringing outside opportunities in for kids is something that began when I was a teacher. And I think that was one of the things that actually helped me get into the principals' program and into the leadership role that I do today.

Along the way, in the past three years as a principal, I've learned how to say no to partnerships that don't really work in our best interest. I've learned how to negotiate prices. I've learned how to look at relationships and figure out which are sustainable and which ones aren't, and who do I have on my staff who will feel comfortable doing whatever is required, and who will not.

I've learned not to jump at every possibility and to prioritize. For example, we had an opportunity last year to do a tae kwon do program. We do a

study of Korean and Asian culture, so a tae kwon do program, all expenses paid, would have been a good thing for us. Except the partner wanted to do the classes in an off-site place fairly far from the school. They couldn't guarantee that it was going to be a multi-year partnership. I just looked at it and thought, gee, this is a great opportunity, but it takes about a year to get a partnership up and running, and if they can't guarantee funding for the second year, I'm going to be burning a whole lot of kids and their parents who are going to get all gung ho and jump into the first year and, in the second year, the partnership pulls out, then I'm going to be the one left holding the bag. The kids are going to be the ones who are going to lose. So, rather than taking that risk in year one, I just said no. I'm looking for sustainable partnerships.

One of the problems of doing the partnership is points of contact. Ideally, when my school becomes involved in a partnership, I want my organization and the other organization

I've learned how to say no to partnerships that don't really work in our best interest. I've learned how to negotiate prices. I've learned how to look at relationships and figure out which are sustainable and which ones aren't.

to grow together. We start off with a single point of contact – me and someone in the organization – and then expand the contacts so that it's me and a teacher or two plus their main point of contact and lower-level people, and then expand it so that we start to mesh and communicate at many different levels. If, over time, that's not happening, then that's an indication to me that the relationship really is not building. It's not happening.

The real danger there is, if their person leaves, then we don't have a relationship anymore. That happened with an outside organization that we worked with in year one. We had kids going to this off-site nonprofit a couple times a year, helping to plant a community garden and interacting with mem-

bers of the community. Then the main point of contact, a social worker, left for another job elsewhere, and the whole relationship just disappeared overnight. That forced me to take a look and see where the problem was. The problem was, the relationship was really me and this one person. We had a relationship, and she was not able to grow the relationship on her side. So, as soon as she left, the whole thing collapsed.

So, now, that's always in my head: are there particular points of contact with the partner, and how does the partner want to change and want to grow as a result of the relationship? And how can we hold each other accountable?

Outcomes and Accountability

How do the school and the partners hold one another accountable?

It's primarily through face-to-face meetings at scheduled points along the way. So there are scheduled checkpoints. There are typically reports that the partner creates – annual reports or semi-annual reports – and at these checkpoint meetings, it's "How's it going? Where are the difficulties? Are there teachers who are involved in the relationship who are causing difficulties or not doing what they're supposed to be doing? Or is everything going okay?"

Are there certain outcomes that everyone is supposed to achieve?

Yes, there are always outcomes. There are almost always quantifiable outcomes. And if the outcomes aren't being achieved, then the questions are: Why not? Where's the stumbling block? What can I, as the principal, do in moving things along? Or what can the partner do in moving things along?

For example, with iMentor, they monitor the number of e-mails that go back and forth – the number of e-mails

> If the outcomes aren't being achieved, then the questions are: Why not? Where's the stumbling block? What can I, as the principal, do in moving things along? Or what can the partner do in moving things along?

the mentor writes and the number of e-mails the student mentee writes. They monitor the number of times that the mentors meet with their mentees. They monitor the number of times the students can get on the computers or can't get on the computers, and they hold me accountable for that. And I hold them accountable if the mentors don't show up or if the mentors don't write back.

It works, but sometimes it's uncomfortable. There are uncomfortable conversations that happen between us, or between me and my teachers.

Have you had a situation where you found the partnership wasn't working out and you had to end it?

Yes. We're involved right now in severing a major relationship with an outside organization that in our opinion really has not worked to meet the needs of the school. We're actually using the third party that brought us together to help facilitate the meetings to facilitate a non-aggressive disengagement – to help keep us from getting to each other's throats. To disengage gently, which is difficult.

Staffing and Support

When you're bringing on staff, do you look for people with the skills to work with outside organizations? Is there a difference in the kind of people you look for?

Yes, absolutely. I'm always looking for people who have outside partnership experiences or who have volunteer experiences, people who have worked with the Boy Scouts, with the Girl Scouts, people who worked at homeless shelters or at soup kitchens, or have done internships at nonprofits. I'm always looking for such people.

Does the Department of Education provide support for your work with partners?

Not at all. They envision the principal as the captain of the ship. I'm given great freedom to do what I want, as long as there are quantifiable student academic results. I'm given a budget to run a school that is not sufficient, so it's really up to me, the captain of the ship, to pull in other resources that will help the ship to move forward. That's where I bring in nonprofits and for-profits and different relationships that will help to make the school an exciting place.

Does the support the partner provides change over time? Do they get more involved with the school and want to do other things?

Ideally, yes, but I haven't really seen that yet. Usually a partnership happens because of a specific need or a specific purpose the partner has. They get a grant to do X and, hopefully, over time, X, Y, and Z will happen, but very often, it's tightly focused around X.

With iMentor, there are other possibilities that hopefully will happen, but largely they haven't happened. The mentors have not gotten involved
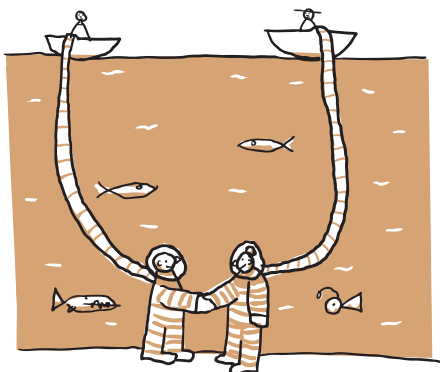
in our school. Other people from the organization have not gotten involved. It's a very tightly focused purpose. It would be great if more people would be touched and if they started to remove some of the blinders that they wear and if they could see that we have this need and they could meet that need, but that hasn't happened.

Most of the partnerships we have are tightly focused around one purpose. There isn't a great deal of expandability into other purposes.

The Challenges of Deepening the Relationship

Could you foresee a situation where the partner really got involved in the core curriculum of the school?

We started the school with a partner, and the idea was that they would get involved in the core curriculum. In the first year, they made it very well known to us that they were not interested at all in getting involved in curriculum, that wasn't their area of expertise, they didn't feel comfortable, and they didn't want to do it. But we would be open to a partner doing something like that.

We've written grants with Queens College that would have moved us in that direction.

We were founded with that idea: that this was going to be a community-partnership school. But it really hasn't happened like that. The community wants to make noise about certain things, and then once their needs are met, they step back and they don't want to help too much, don't want to really get involved in curriculum, and I think don't want to get involved in accountability for curriculum or for outcomes.

People and organizations have very tight focuses and don't want to move beyond those tight focuses, in general, from our experience. I'm always jealous of schools like the KIPP schools that get these deeper partnerships that affect the school, or so it seems from newspaper articles that I read.

A lot of times the partners say the schools are not open to that kind of relationship and want to protect their prerogatives. But you seem open and willing to have them involved in that way.

Yes, but it takes time. I don't need anyone who's going to come in and say, "Fix this," and then step back and not do anything. I'm interested in someone who can say, "Let's meet and talk about how we can fix it together," or "How can we create this opportunity together? And we're willing to look for resources to help support this." That would be great. Sure.

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