



LEARNING **FIRST** ALLIANCE

**COLLABORATION AND INSTRUCTIONAL REFORM:**

**A DISTRICTWIDE APPROACH TO RAISING  
ACHIEVEMENT IN THE MINNEAPOLIS PUBLIC  
SCHOOLS**

A Project of the Learning First Alliance

May 2003

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## **The Learning First Alliance**

The Learning First Alliance is composed of 12 educational organizations who have come together to unleash the joint strength and commitment of more than 10 million Americans working to improve student learning, including our nation's teachers, principals, parents, teacher educators, local and state school boards, school administrators, curriculum experts, and national, state, and community leaders. Learning First Alliance member organizations include:

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- American Association of School Administrators
- American Federation of Teachers
- Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development
- Council of Chief State School Officers
- Education Commission of the States
- National Association of Elementary School Principals
- National Association of Secondary School Principals
- National Association of State Boards of Education
- National Education Association
- National Parent Teacher Association
- National School Boards Association

For more information about the Alliance, please visit <http://www.learningfirst.org>.

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## Prologue

The Minneapolis Public Schools case study is one of five case studies that stem from a two-year study of improving high poverty districts conducted by the Learning First Alliance. The five case studies culminated in an analytical report entitled *Beyond Islands of Excellence: What Districts Can Do to Improve Instruction and Achievement in All Schools*. The report looks at how districtwide strategies to improve instruction have helped the five study districts raise student achievement across races and ethnicities.

More specifically, the study sought to address the following questions:

- How did the districts create the will to begin instructional reform?
- What strategies guided these reform efforts?
- In what ways did districts change their approaches to professional development?
- How did interactions among the stakeholders facilitate or hinder instructional reform?
- How was leadership distributed across stakeholders to facilitate improvement?

To explore the questions, we studied five school districts: the Aldine Independent School District (Texas); the Chula Vista Elementary School District (California); the Kent County Public Schools (Maryland); the Minneapolis Public Schools (Minnesota); and the Providence Public Schools (Rhode Island). We selected the districts based on their ability to exhibit at least three years of improvement in student achievement in mathematics and/or reading across multiple grades and across all races and ethnicities. We also sought districts that represented a cross section of characteristics, including size, region, urbanicity, and union affiliation.

While this case study is largely a story of improvement, a few caveats are in order. First, although the district demonstrated improvements, all students had not achieved high levels of proficiency; instead, the district was on an upward trajectory toward improving student achievement. Second, this study concentrated on district efforts to improve instruction. The district employed additional strategies that may have contributed to academic success but were beyond the scope of this study. Finally, this case study represents a snapshot of the district in 2001–2002 and not a longitudinal study of district progress.

We do not presume that Minneapolis or any of the districts in this study has all the answers. Stakeholders we interviewed were candid about the challenges they faced. Nonetheless, we believe this case study and the report of which it is a part provide valuable lessons for districts interested in improving teaching and learning across entire systems.

The individual case studies of the five districts we studied, as well as the analytical report (*Beyond Islands of Excellence*) and a Leadership Brief summarizing its findings, can be downloaded or ordered at <http://www.learningfirst.org/bie/bie.html>.

## Refocus and Renewal in Minneapolis Public Schools

With a K–12 student population of 47,470, a teacher corps of 4,658, and more than 1,200 educational assistants, the Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) is the largest urban school district in Minnesota.<sup>1</sup> Over the past 20 years the public school system has seen a dramatic increase in the number of children in poverty as well as the degree of ethnic and linguistic diversity. In 2001–2002, 44 percent of the district’s students were black, 26 percent were white, 11 percent were Hispanic, 15 percent were Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino, and 4 percent were Native American. The poverty level of the district’s students has also increased dramatically—from approximately 31 percent of MPS students qualifying for free or reduced lunch in 1981 to 66 percent in 2002 (See Table 1, page 2).<sup>2</sup> In addition, the number of students classified as English Language Learners tripled in the 1990s to reach about 12,000; over 80 languages are represented in the district. The 1990s also marked the onset of a generational turnover of MPS teachers and principals. In 2001–2002, approximately 80 percent of the district’s teachers had fewer than 10 years of experience.

It was within this context of coinciding demographic shifts that the story of the district’s education reform was born. The genesis of the reform efforts in the Minneapolis Public Schools cannot be traced to a single event. Rather, a combination of factors spurred the district to take a serious look at its overall education system and the challenges it faced.

In general, poor test results (only one-fourth of MPS students were reading well by third grade), low graduation rates (scarcely above 40 percent), and accountability pressure from the state were coupled with increased demands for action from the municipal government, the business community, the school board, and community advocacy groups. A system that had once enjoyed community support was now facing a crisis of confidence that was being translated into a threat of decreased funding.

Over the last decade and a half, Minneapolis schools have undergone several waves of reform. The first wave came in the late 1980s as union leader Louise Sundin pushed the district to establish more intense professional supports for teachers. As a result of union leadership, Minneapolis was an early implementer of mentoring programs for new teachers and set districtwide standards for professional development. Yet, despite the fact that the union advocated for reform and teacher professionalism, in the early 1990s the district was characterized by fractured programming and relationships among the board, union, central office, and city leadership. The city’s changing demographic landscape brought significant complexity and an imperative to serve the needs of the increasingly high numbers of children in poverty.

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<sup>1</sup> Statistical data from the district as of the 2001-2002 school year, *Measuring Up* report 2002 unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> NASB interview of MPS superintendent, 2001.

Concerned about low student achievement, poor operational functioning, and relational difficulties, the school board sought change in the district leadership. In 1993, the board hired Peter Hutchinson as superintendent, giving him a mandate to bring cohesion to district practices and relationships. Hutchinson was an unusual choice. He was a well-respected leader in the state, but not an educator. During Hutchinson's tenure, the district began to develop processes for a more coherent approach to improving student achievement. By instituting an accountability framework, a quality improvement process, school improvement planning, and other such initiatives, Hutchinson improved business practices and laid the groundwork for further education reforms.

Yet by the mid-1990s, test scores remained low. Dissatisfaction with the district's performance prompted the Greater Minneapolis Chamber of Commerce to refuse to support a school board request for a tax levy. Additionally, when state test results in 1995 revealed a significant minority achievement gap among the district's students, the Minneapolis chapter of the NAACP sued the state, arguing that racial and economic segregation in some Minneapolis schools deprived students of an adequate education. That withdrawal of support, combined with the low achievement scores, galvanized leaders to shift the focus to a new set of needs: providing a deeper focus on improving instruction and closing the achievement gap.

In September 1997, the board recruited Dr. Carol Johnson from the superintendency of a neighboring district to lead MPS. A former Minneapolis teacher, principal, and district administrator, Dr. Johnson was noted for her strong leadership in curriculum and instruction—just what the district needed, the board believed.

<b>Table 1 Minneapolis District Data 2001–2002</b>	
<b>Per-Pupil Budget (\$)</b>	10,854
<b>Number of Schools</b>	128
<b>Number of Students</b>	47,470
<b>Student Racial/Ethnic Distribution (%)</b>	
White	26
Black	44
Hispanic	11
Asian/Pacific Islander/Filipino	15
Native American/ Alaskan Native	4
<b>Free and Reduced Lunch Eligibility (%)</b>	67
<b>English as a Second Language (%)</b>	24
<b>Number of Full-Time Equivalent Teachers</b>	3,629

## Building a Framework for Success

The most current wave of reform in Minneapolis was ushered in during the mid-1990s, when the district began to put in place an infrastructure to improve student achievement. This infrastructure began with a districtwide vision, a multi-measure accountability system, and a set of content standards and grade-level expectations to guide principal and teacher work.

### Designing a Clear Vision for Improvement

As a first step in building this framework, district leaders set about constructing a collective vision for success in Minneapolis. They built on the initial effort developed during Superintendent Hutchinson's tenure and known as the *Strategic Direction*. The Strategic Direction constructed a broad vision for the district to improve student achievement. In addition to this basic vision document, the district developed a more specific planning tool known as the *District Improvement Agenda (DIA)*. When Dr. Johnson took the helm, she sought to expand the use of the DIA as a guiding document. As data revealed a continuing gap between minority and poor students and their more affluent peers, Dr. Johnson led an effort to develop a specific plan to address this gap. This strategic plan became known as the *Twelve Point Plan*. Both the DIA and the Twelve Point Plan are described in greater detail in the following pages.

### The DIA and Twelve Point Plan

As the district's reform effort evolved, so, too, did the DIA—from a strategic planning document to an accountability document. This was not a casual evolution but rather a deliberate one. At the beginning of Dr. Johnson's tenure, the board and central office sought to create greater districtwide buy-in of the MPS goals. As a result, over the course of a year, a team of central office staff conducted meetings with hundreds of stakeholders from the classroom to the boardroom to gain their input on strategies for raising student achievement.

What emerged was a refined District Improvement Agenda. The revised DIA was not simply a strategic plan, but an accountability document. It laid out multiple goals and subgoals as well as specific indicators of progress. Throughout Dr. Johnson's tenure, district and school leaders have reviewed and refined the DIA to ensure that it represents the district goals.

Today, the DIA includes four main goals:

1. Enrich and accelerate academic achievement for all students
2. Welcome and engage students, families, and the community in education
3. Implement accountability systems for providing, assessing, and supporting quality instruction
4. Ensure effective and integrated management of the business enterprise.

These four goals were supplemented and enhanced by multiple subgoals and indicators of progress. (An example of the DIA goals and strategies is outlined in Table 2.) All district departments and schools are expected to use the goals set forth in the DIA as a basis for planning, decisionmaking, and accountability. As one administrator noted, “The DIA has focused [the district, so] it is much clearer today what our goals are and [in which] areas we need to be spending our resources for professional development.”

District leaders described the DIA as a living strategic plan or road map of the district’s goals. What began in its early years as a basic work plan known only to a few people evolved into a widely understood public engagement tool and strategic plan for the district. (The complete DIA can be accessed at [www.mpls.k12.mn.us/about/dia.html](http://www.mpls.k12.mn.us/about/dia.html).)

**Table 2**  
**Excerpt from the Minneapolis District Improvement Agenda**

<b>Goal 1: Enrich and Accelerate Academic Achievement for All Students</b>	
<b>Results</b>	<b>We will know that we are making progress when:</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Each student will graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to pursue further education and work.               <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Each student will enter kindergarten with basic readiness skills.</li> <li>b. Each student will master basic skills of reading, math, and writing.</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><u>Kindergarten Readiness and Basic Standards</u> The percentage of students successfully demonstrating pre-kindergarten and math and literacy skills and concepts increases.</p> <p><u>Basic Skills</u> The percentage of students:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Reading well by third grade increases as measured by the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) in Reading.</li> <li>▪ On track to graduate and pass the MN Basic Skills Tests in Reading, Mathematics and Writing as measured by Northwest Achievement Levels Tests (NALT) and MCA increases.</li> <li>▪ Achieving more than one year’s growth in reading and math as measured by NALT and MCA increases.</li> <li>▪ Passing the MN Basic Skills tests each year increases.</li> <li>▪ Yet to pass the MN Basic Skills tests who significantly improve their scores increases</li> </ul>

While the DIA set performance targets for all students, district and community leaders remained acutely concerned about achievement gaps between white and minority students. As a result, the district embarked on an intensive process to develop a plan to address the achievement gap. This new plan, the *Twelve Point Plan*, adopted in 2001,

outlined specific goals and strategies “for improving the academic performance and graduation rates of students of color with a particular focus on black, Native American, and Hispanic/Latino students.” The DIA and the Twelve Point Plan were not disconnected entities. As one principal explained, “Everything in the district starts with the DIA. The DIA is a general blueprint for improving student achievement. The Twelve Point Plan coordinates with the DIA.” In fact, in 2002, the district formally combined the objectives of the Twelve Point Plan into the DIA.

### **Establishing Rigorous and Clear Accountability Structures**

District leaders knew that simply having a clear vision was not adequate for building a framework of success; they had to be able to determine the extent to which their goals were being met. As a result, throughout the mid and late 1990s the district developed and refined its accountability monitoring and reporting efforts. With the help of external partners, the district invested countless hours in developing a multi-measure accountability process to monitor school and student improvement.

This intensive focus on accountability has resulted in a sophisticated accountability structure that includes more than 28 high school and 33 elementary school indicators. These indicators include a wide array of testing measures, attendance rates, suspension rates, satisfaction ratings, student and staff perceptions of school safety, and other markers of progress. For example, recognizing that stakeholders’ perceptions affect school reform, the district administers annual teacher and student school climate surveys. These surveys provide data for performance indicators associated with goals like school safety, teacher respect for students, and general satisfaction with the quality of teaching and learning in schools.

Minneapolis leaders assert that this multi-faceted accountability system provides them with a more accurate picture of school success than simply the state testing system. In 1996, the state introduced the Minnesota Basic Standard Test (MBST) as its first entry into statewide standardized testing. Students take the MBST reading and math tests in eighth grade and must pass the tests in order to graduate. Several years later the state also added a tenth grade MBST writing test. In addition to the MBST, in 1998 the state initiated the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). The MCA is administered in math and reading in third and fifth grades.

District personnel criticized the state system for both its limited range of performance indicators and its inability to assess student growth and progress over time. While the district was and is still required to administer the state tests, MPS students also take the district’s own Northwest Achievement Levels Tests (NALT). Developed in 1996, the NALT enables MPS educators to assess and track students’ annual academic growth in reading and mathematics against grade-level norms. Unlike the state tests, the NALT allows the district to take student mobility into account when assessing school performance and enables educators to assess student learning progress from year to year.

As the district became more sophisticated in its approach to monitoring progress, the community also sought more transparent accounting of the district’s successes and challenges. As a result, district and community leaders came together in 1999 to develop an external report of district progress. The public reporting document, *Measuring Up*, was first published in February 2000 and is now a semi-annual publication. Within *Measuring Up*, schools are rated according to their success on the multiple indicators and are designated as belonging to one of three categories. Schools whose overall quality performance indicators are low for two consecutive years are subject to review by an external team appointed by the MPS school board. In 2002, six schools (8 percent) were designated as Intervention Schools; another 35 (45 percent) were classified as Working Toward the Standard; and 36 schools (47 percent) were listed as Meeting and Exceeding the Standard.

Published in *Measuring Up*, the district accountability system is indicative of the district’s and the civic and business communities’ ongoing commitment to working together to identify, monitor, and address needs for change. Furthermore, *Measuring Up* testifies to the district’s commitment to being publicly accountable for its performance and to openly addressing its challenges. One parent noted that she could feel that “the attitude of the district had changed dramatically” to be more accountable to students and parents.

### **Building a Systemwide Curriculum**

District leaders recognized that while a collective vision and structured accountability system provided a blueprint for reform, improving instruction required more coherent curricular supports for teachers. The district began the architecture for standards-based curriculum under Superintendent Hutchinson; Dr. Johnson in subsequent years engaged stakeholders in an effort to foster deeper understanding and implementation of the standards across all stakeholder groups.

In the mid-1990s, Minneapolis teachers and administrators developed content standards and grade-level expectations across all grades. To accomplish this, district leaders brought teachers, administrators, and community members from throughout the district together to decide what Minneapolis children should know and be able to do in each content area at each grade level. Teacher and administrator teams took this feedback and crafted content standards. The work began first in core subjects—math, language arts, science, social studies, and arts—and then expanded to include an additional five content areas. Based on content standards, the district then adapted curriculum that aligned with the content standards (e.g., Houghton-Mifflin Reading, Every Day Math, and McDougal Litell Middle School Reading). To provide additional direction, the district created detailed guides for classroom instruction. These guides included organizing principles, expectations, sample activities, and instructional strategies.

With the new content standards established and aligned to state standards, attention turned to engaging students in the new curriculum. The district managed to leverage a number of multi-million dollar grants from several sources to support teacher training in

content standards and instructional strategies to address those standards. As an example, the district engaged in a multi-year effort to integrate the arts into the curriculum across subject matters and grade levels. Furthermore, following the initial push to enhance teachers' instructional strategies, the district undertook a multi-year program to encourage teachers to experiment with alternative teaching methods.

While the district was not committed to a specific repertoire of instructional practices, there were recurrent references to broad instructional concepts such as personalized instruction, active learning, hands-on learning, and project-based learning with real world applications. The overall aim was to discover what teaching and learning practices worked best to motivate students and to help them learn. The district expected teachers to base their instructional strategies on data about what works, not merely on their personal preferences and style.

It is important to note that district curriculum work began before state curriculum standards were developed; the curriculum teams subsequently were charged with aligning state and district curricula as state standards were passed.

In addition to curricular guidelines, the district, with the leadership of the union, adopted another framework to guide instructional quality: the *Standards of Effective Instruction*. The Standards, which are outlined in the teachers' contract, are designed jointly by teachers, principals, and the district administrators "to assist with decisionmaking and planning for improvement of instruction and student learning." The Standards draw upon standards published by organizations such as the National Board for Professional Teaching Standards, the Educational Testing Service, and the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program, and focus on areas such as subject matter knowledge, student learning processes, instructional strategies, learning environment, communication, assessment, professional development, and relationships.

### **Special Initiatives**

In addition to specific accountability measures and curricular guidance, the district has focused on a number of special initiatives to improve instruction and raise student achievement. We outline a few of these initiatives here.

#### *Early Literacy*

The Early Literacy Initiative, launched in August 2001, is aimed at helping the district achieve its goal of all third graders reading at or above state standards on the MCA. The initiative is staffed by a director and three literacy coordinators who focused on school readiness; staff development for kindergarten teachers on the use of literacy assessment tools and strategies for literacy development; and inservice training for first grade teachers on the use of the direct instruction reading program with students who were assessed as not ready for the regular reading curriculum. The reading readiness aspect of the initiative, which is implemented in partnership with a county School Readiness Collaborative, involves training local pre-school providers in early literacy development concepts and methods.

### *Attendance*

Citing research that supports the link between attendance and student achievement, the district also adopted a student attendance policy in 2000 that mandated a maximum of four unexcused absences per semester. To help families and the community promote this attendance policy, the Minneapolis Public Schools, the Hennepin County Attorney's office, and several community groups have joined together to establish a School Attendance Review Board (SARB) that defined a five-step process for responding to truancy, ranging from a letter to parents to legal action.

### *Middle School Reform*

The district's middle schools were the focus of a deliberate reform initiative beginning a year prior to Dr. Johnson's appointment. The initial phase of the middle school reform initiative, which was aimed at implementing the elements of effective middle schools such as integrated curriculum, advisory groups, teaming, flexible scheduling, etc., was supported by an external grant from the Edna McConnell Clark Foundation. The district invested considerable time and resources into developing a "middle school platform" as a guiding philosophy and template for change in schools.

To evaluate the effects of the reform, the Clark Foundation invited the Minneapolis League of Women Voters to conduct an independent evaluation of the implementation of the middle school platform. The evaluation process was unique and followed a research strategy called a "shadow study." Dr. Johnson, new to the post at the time, endorsed the initiative and directed principals to cooperate. More than 100 trained volunteers from the community went into the schools for several days to shadow students, teachers, and principals, and to systematically record what they observed using observation guidelines based on the middle school platform.

The results of the first shadow study were disappointing, particularly in terms of the perceived lack of implementation of engaging teaching practices in the classrooms. The results also were surprising given the depth of research-based instructional reform strategies embedded in the initiative. Many district leaders attributed the slow change to an extremely high turnover rate of middle school teachers. District leaders were aware of the challenges and were addressing ways to increase teacher retention at the middle grades.

### *High School Reform*

The first Measuring Up report (2000) conveyed alarmingly low high school graduation rates, high drop out rates, and continuing low academic achievement, particularly for black students. To better address these issues, the district took advantage of an offer by a high-profile management consulting firm to help MPS develop a design for high school reform. The plan, which was adopted in spring 2001, centers on reforming the high schools' learning environments into small learning communities (SLCs). According to the plan, all high school students must participate in an SLC—of up to 160 students per grade. Each SLC has a specific "focus," which is determined by principals and teachers in each school. The SLC strategy stresses individual learning plans for every student, strong student–teacher connections, high academic expectations, instruction that

emphasized real world applications and interdisciplinary projects, and community participation. At the time of this study, it was too soon to tell what impact, if any, this reform will have on high school student achievement.

## **Supporting Instruction—Reconceptualizing Professional Development**

To support teachers in implementing the new curriculum and standards for effective instruction, the district reconceptualized professional development. Professional development practices in Minneapolis extended beyond the traditional strategies for staff growth and development such as workshops and conferences to a variety of innovative, research-based strategies. For example, they promoted widespread use of data to guide instructional decisionmaking, sought to develop clear connections between district goals and school-level instruction, established networks of instructional experts, increased supports for new teachers, and provided multiple personnel and financial supports to increase the level of collaboration among teachers.

We will outline these strategies in the coming pages and look at how each contributed to the overall structure of professional development within the Minneapolis Public Schools.

### **Setting the Context for Professional Development Decisionmaking**

#### *The Union and Professional Development*

Before exploring the different layers of professional development in Minneapolis, it is important to underscore the strong role of the teachers union in shaping professional development policy and practice in the district. As we will discuss in greater detail, the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) originated, shaped, and supports many of the district's innovative professional development strategies.

The union played a key role in developing programs to support new teachers as well as veterans. More specifically, union leaders were instrumental in establishing and implementing a number of institutionalized programs including a mentoring program for all new teachers, professional development centers that established libraries of current research and curricular materials inside many schools, and an innovative teacher support process called PDP (professional development program), which we discuss in detail in the coming pages.

The depth of MFT involvement in teacher professional support is articulated in the teachers' contract. The contract delineates a clear vision for teaching practice, outlines support services for new teachers, and codifies a professional career ladder for teachers. Interestingly, the contract also includes guidance to schools regarding allocating staff development funds, using official staff development time, and implementing school-based professional development centers. That the contract covers so many issues related to teacher development is indicative of the long-term collaborative relationship between the MFT and the district. It also reflects the union's progressive stance with regard to supporting not merely the basic working conditions of its members, but also the professionalization of teaching.

The MFT also works closely with the central office on the difficult issue of addressing the needs of struggling teachers. The district and union collaborated to ensure that teachers received the necessary support, but also that the district is able to dismiss

teachers who did not excel. As Superintendent Johnson noted, the MFT is “very instrumental in helping [the district] make tough decisions about both new and continuing teachers,” and that “resulted in [the district’s] discontinuing contracts for people who were not competent but supporting teachers who had a chance of being competent but needed more support.”

#### *Guiding Professional Development in the District*

Several formal oversight groups contribute to decisionmaking about professional development. These groups are composed of multiple stakeholders—teachers, principals, and administrators—and provide supervision for different facets of professional development. Two such structures are the Staff Development Advisory Committee and the Teacher Development Council. Both are multi-constituency planning and advisory groups whose membership included teachers, educational assistants, principals, district office staff, and administrators from relevant district departments.

The Staff Development Advisory Committee is state mandated and works with the district’s Department of Teacher and Instructional Services to implement MPS’ annual staff development plan. The Teacher Development Council is primarily concerned with the district’s collaboration with universities and colleges involved in pre-service teacher education, teacher recruitment, induction, and professional development.

Two other groups play a large role in guiding professional development in the district. By providing mentoring and other services, the Career in Teaching (CIT) focuses on the induction and retention of new teachers. Appointed by the MFT President and the Superintendent, the CIT Advisory Panel is a joint labor management group comprised of an equal number of voting members representing teachers and administrators, which governs the CIT program. The District Professional Development Process Committee, whose members are drawn from several stakeholder groups, created and guides the implementation of a professional process for staff to help improve the quality of teaching across the district.

#### *The Role of Data in Guiding Professional Development*

Data have been critical in all levels of the MPS professional development process. Administrators encourage staff members to use a variety of data to guide their decisionmaking and school improvement planning. To assist their efforts, the district research office produces and disseminates School Information Reports. These reports chart each school’s annual progress on all of the district’s *Measuring Up* indicators. The expertise and resources of the MPS research office, which exceed the capacity of the state education unit’s research and assessment department, have been essential components of the district’s accountability system and greatly enhance the district’s capacity to undertake a sophisticated process of performance goal setting, tracking, and reporting.

#### *Time for Development*

The district sought to create time for districtwide and school-level professional development. The district calendar formally allocates and schedules 10 days annually as district staff development days. In the past, the district reserved a greater proportion of

these days for district-sponsored professional development initiatives; today, however, schools are given greater latitude to use some of the district time for site-based professional development.

Beyond the district days, principals and teachers are encouraged to find ways of creating additional time for site-based professional development activities that support school improvement plans and teacher development plans. In addition to using staff meeting time for professional development activities, schools developed a variety of in-school activities to promote educator growth. In one elementary school, teachers arrived early for planned professional development activities on designated days and were given time back on other days. In another school, the principal brought in a team of substitute teachers every Thursday so teachers could meet in teams, observe one another, etc. Teachers in one high school organized weekly brown bag lunch meetings during which interested teachers met as an informal study group.

Even with these efforts to find time for professional development, it would be inaccurate to imply that the time for professional development was sufficient to meet school needs. However, central office leaders were cognizant of and working to address the challenges inherent in generating time for professional learning.

#### *Standards for Professional Development*

Professional development in MPS operated according to a formally codified set of standards that, among other things, called for professional development practices to be data-driven, to provide greater opportunity for collaboration among colleagues, to provide opportunities for continual learning, and to use appropriate learning strategies. These practices emerged after careful consideration of the research—including standards put forward by the National Staff Development Council, Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium, National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education, and the Minnesota Educational Effectiveness Program—and were aligned with Minnesota Standards of Teaching Practices for relicensure. Furthermore, the union led an effort to codify *Standards for Effective Instruction* into the teachers' contract. In turn, the central office and union leadership used these standards as tools for promoting more rigorous, ongoing training for teachers (See Box 1). The president of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers, Louise Sundin, observed that “it is important to model by the adults everything [the district expects] of children.” Therefore, she concluded, “having adult standards in everything [the district does]” is “one of the major strengths” of Minneapolis Public Schools.

## Innovative Initiatives

Minneapolis uses a large number of innovative processes to enhance its research-based professional development. While the professional development innovations are too numerous to discuss in detail, we outline here two key initiatives: the Professional Development Process and the Achievement of Tenure Process. Both initiatives were generated through union leadership and in partnership with the central office. We address professional development initiatives for new teachers in the following section.

### *Professional Development Process*

The Professional Development Process (PDP) is a peer review teacher assessment and development process created in the early 1990s by teachers, principals, parents, administrators, community and business partners, and the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers. While it began as a pilot project in 12 schools, the PDP eventually was extended to all schools and codified in policy in the teachers' contract.

Under the provisions of the PDP, teachers submit an annual personal professional development plan to the school's professional development coordinator. Teachers are expected to use data to determine the needs of their students and their own instructional needs and to propose professional development goals, strategies, and indicators to help meet these needs. To help teachers develop their plans, the teachers' contract provides a menu of recommended "PDP goal attainment activities," such as coaching, professional portfolio, classroom observation, journaling, action research, videotaping, and study groups.

Prior to submitting the plan, teachers are required to form a PDP team that includes the principal (nominally a member of all teams), several colleagues, and others such as mentors, university professors, community members, and students. Team members are charged with helping teachers to form their professional development plans and providing ongoing guidance. PDP teams meet in the winter and the spring to address progress and support teachers' efforts. The teachers submit interim and final reports to the school PDP Coordinator.

The PDP system places a high degree of control and trust in teacher professionalism individually and collectively. Teachers are charged with using student learning needs to form the basis for PDP plans. While individual teacher needs are evident in the PDP, those needs are aligned in the context of student achievement, district goals, and the school's improvement plan.

Implementation of the PDP system is supported at both the district and school levels. Since 1991, the district has employed a district PDP coordinator whose primary responsibilities are:

- To conduct workshops to explain process to teachers
- To hold individual PDP conferences with teachers upon request
- To coordinate and deliver PDP-related workshops (e.g., peer coaching, effective teaming, goal setting)

- To support the work of in-school PDP coordinators
- To act as a consultant to site leadership teams about the use of PDP
- To serve as chair of the District PDP Advisory Committee.

In most schools, teachers serve as voluntary PDP coordinators in addition to their classroom teaching jobs. Thus, management, support, and implementation of the PDP system are largely under the control of teachers in collaboration with school and district administrators. The PDP system works as a peer-supported professional assessment and professional development planning process. However, it was created prior to the state and district curriculum standards and testing and prior to the adoption of district performance goals and accountability processes. Integration of the PDP into the district improvement agenda and accountability system is an ongoing challenge.

The use of the PDP process varies across schools. In some schools, teachers form PDP teams based on shared interests and needs associated with school improvement priorities aligned with the DIA. In such schools, many teachers indicated the importance of the PDP process in their work. A high school math teacher acknowledged that the PDP enabled her to challenge herself and to improve her teaching. As she explained, “I’ve made myself do things because I’ve set goals and said I’m going to work toward [them].” In other schools, teachers appear to form PDP teams to comply with the process but lack a genuine commitment to the process or to system/school goals. These differences can be attributed to the engagement of teachers and principals in implementing, promoting, believing in, and setting time aside for the PDP process.

At the district level, the central office and union worked together to incorporate the PDP system more effectively into the overall professional development work of the district and to align it with the accountability structure. Even with its challenges, there is little doubt that the PDP system has contributed greatly to teacher and principal awareness, interest, and skill in the use of innovative, site-based, peer-supported professional development activities. As one teacher observed,

The camaraderie of the staff has improved tremendously. There are no cliques or pockets of people. We do peer coaching all the time. We meet every week as a staff, and people are comfortable bringing up difficult issues. There is a lot of sharing; the environment is not competitive. There is a spirit here, a culture of trust. We have cross grade level groups that promote cross-fertilization of teachers. Also, the kids see that the teachers like one another.

**Box 1**  
**Minneapolis Staff Development Standards**

- [Includes] objectives [that] have a clear connection to the DIA, the School Improvement Process, Curriculum Standards, or District Performance Goals.
- [Ensures] decisions are made by a group that is representative and inclusive of all stakeholders, and the budget allocation process is identified and articulated to all stakeholders.
- Addresses the needs of the various communities of project participants and serves as a model for the whole District community.
- Creates opportunities for all project participants to practice the professional Standards of Effective Instruction and reflect on their experiences with colleagues through the Professional Development Process.
- Takes place within a supportive professional climate and a design that supports discussion of practice, collaboration in creating materials and lessons, and informing and coaching one another.
- Provides for on-going assessment of professional growth, learning community climate, and student performance.
- Demonstrates a clear cost/benefit relationship between specific goals and results. Number of participants will be a critical factor.
- Addresses accountability needs of both staff and District and the requirements of and communication with resource providers.

\* Excerpt from the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers contract.

*Achievement of Tenure Process*

Another professional development innovation is the district's three-year tenure process, which is outlined in the teachers' contract and state and district policies. To achieve tenure, teachers must participate in the PDP or PSP (professional support process), have knowledge of state and local curriculum standards, be able to assess student performance in relation to those standards, and successfully complete annual administrator observation and evaluation cycles. Additionally, under the teachers' contract, probationary teachers participate in the district mentor program, attend 20 hours of training in peer coaching, and take part each year in at least 4 hours of additional professional development.

Teachers are expected to maintain a professional growth portfolio as “a tool for reflection and documentation of progress toward professional goals.”

The tenure process also includes an incentive option for new teachers seeking a “tenure bonus.” Those who choose this option engage in a range of supplementary professional growth experiences, including action research, observation of exemplary teachers in job-like positions, analysis of student work, surveys of students and families (using tools developed by the district), and additional hours of elective professional development.

The tenure process seems noteworthy, in part because of the emphasis on non-traditional (research-supported) forms of job-embedded professional development such as peer coaching and observation, professional portfolios, action research, and analysis of student work. As one administrator noted, the district has “been very committed to ‘embedded staff development,’ not one-shot workshops.” By providing these kinds of professional development opportunities in policy and practice, the district and the teachers union also have committed themselves to developing and maintaining the expertise to support teachers in those kinds of professional learning and to acknowledge and reward teachers who took part. Participation in this tenure process contributed to a districtwide culture of professional learning that went beyond workshops, courses, and conferences. The involvement of peer review teams and mentors in tenure decisions also marked a significant shift from mere reliance on classroom visits and evaluations by administrators, to a more professional model of tenure.

### **Building Networks of Teacher Leaders**

As teachers became more adept at implementing curriculum and new instructional strategies necessary to ensure student achievement, it was important for the district to develop and support teacher leaders at the district and school levels. In the early years of Dr. Johnson’s tenure, the district focused on enhancing district-supported teacher leaders, including a large cadre of mentor teachers and curriculum specialists in science, literacy, and math.

Then, as the importance of school-based leadership developed, the focus shifted toward creating more school-based teacher leader positions—especially in reading and math and at low-performing schools. These part-time site-based personnel were expected to conduct workshops, observe teachers, demonstrate lessons, and provide one-on-one coaching. The presumption was that the in-school teacher leaders would increase the frequency and intensity of follow-up support for district and school-based inservice initiatives and improve the quality of classroom implementation of new programs and practices.

The establishment of teacher leader positions at the district and school levels was enabled in part by the teachers’ contract, which defined a wide variety of teacher categories. For example, the category Teachers on Special Assignment allowed the district to appoint resource teachers on a temporary basis to address specific needs without the constraints of teacher seniority policies.

As one administrator noted, district leaders knew that teacher leaders would be most effective if the district could “cultivate buy-in in the [schools]. So for each building, [district leaders] pushed for the concept of a teacher leader.” The same administrator explained that “this was not a top-down reform. There was so much room for evolution in this process.”

### **Support for New Teachers**

The 1990s saw a high rate of turnover of MPS teachers and principals. By 2002–2003, two-thirds of district teachers had 10 years or fewer of experience. Given this influx of new teachers to MPS over the past decade and the increasingly diverse and mobile student population, it was vital that the district pay particular attention to the induction of new teachers. They did just that with implementation of two programs that tapped the experience of veteran teachers and promoted the development of beginning teachers.

#### *Mentor Teacher Program*

Developed collaboratively with the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers in the mid-1980s, the district mentor teacher program ensures that all teachers new to the system (both beginning teachers and experienced teachers moving to the district) are assigned a mentor during their first year. Mentors help new teachers develop their professional support plans; hold weekly meetings with new teachers in their schools; coach them in the classroom; arrange observations of experienced teachers; and participate in promotion/retention meetings. Some also provide additional classroom support to struggling new teachers as well as experienced teachers who are not meeting their PDP goals, Standards of Effective Instruction, and/or the teacher job description. In schools with significant numbers of new teachers, district mentors also consult with school improvement teams about the annual plans for site-based staff development.

Although the district mentor program was formalized in the teachers’ contract, ongoing financial cutbacks have reduced the number of district-level mentors the district is able to fund, thereby increasing the number of schools and teachers each mentor serves. The district has attempted to compensate by encouraging schools to appoint in-school mentors through its cost-sharing strategy. The district pays .5FTE (Full-Time Equivalent) and the school the other .5FTE. Schools that choose to do so have the flexibility of deciding whether the position should be taken on by a single individual or divided among several teachers as a part-time position. High schools have been most likely to appoint in-school mentors and often divide the position so mentors are available to new teachers in several subject areas (e.g., .2FTE English, .2FTE mathematics).

#### *Resident Teachers*

Another support for new high school teachers in the district is the Resident Teacher program. Although the program is currently used only in one school, the uniqueness and strength of the program makes it worthy of discussion. Resident Teachers are licensed beginning teachers who teach 80 percent of the time during their first two years of teaching and continue professional studies the other 20 percent. During the “residency”

they are supported by mentor teachers, PDP teams, and other more experienced colleagues. They also receive continuing support from university professors, including targeted coursework and assistance with action research.

When the program began a decade ago, Resident Teachers were paid 80 percent of the average teacher salary. This led to allegations that principals were filling teaching positions with Resident Teachers as a cost-saving measure and that they were using the Resident Teacher program to deny experienced teachers access to openings in their schools. (Schools participating in the Resident Teacher program are not obliged to give senior teachers priority for teaching positions advertised as Resident Teacher positions.) Today, Resident Teachers receive a full salary at the beginning teacher scale; however, district funding for these positions is calculated on the basis of average teacher salary, which is considerably higher than that of a beginning teacher. A principal is able to use the difference to fund professional development support for the Resident Teachers.

The program has been regarded as successful. Yet its design has been problematic, conflicting with the teachers' contract and norms of seniority. Despite modifications to the program and attempts to revive it, continuing opposition from teachers to the preferential hiring provisions of the Resident Teacher program led to the virtual demise of what many, including teacher union leaders, saw as a progressive form of continuing teacher education and professionalization. Current efforts by union and central office leaders are underway to expand the program.

### **Challenges to Developing Teacher Capacity**

MPS leaders have encountered many challenges in this large school district with a complex support system for building teacher capacity. We describe below three key challenges: teacher assignment, effective use of data, and funding.

#### *Teacher Assignment*

The most frequently cited challenge to developing teacher capacity in the district is related not to professional development per se, but to the policies governing teacher assignment. The teachers' contract required schools to give preference to teacher seniority when filling teaching positions. Thus, principals were often obligated to hire teachers on the basis of their seniority in the system, even if teachers with fewer years of experience had more expertise in a needed specialty area.

The situation was further complicated by "bidding" provisions in the contract. Teachers were allowed to "bid" for open teaching positions at six different points during the school year. Final "bids" for each year were made in August, just prior to the first day of school in September. As a result, schools were in jeopardy of losing experienced teachers at the last moment. In addition, the length of the bidding process impeded the district's ability to promise specific positions to new teacher recruits in the spring of each year. Principals, teachers, and administrators alike spoke of how this process decreased the district's competitive edge, as the best candidates went to neighboring districts that were able to offer contracts early in the spring.

One of the cumulative effects of the process was frequent teacher turnover, particularly in middle schools and low-achieving schools, and among special education teachers. Turnover of special education teachers was particularly high because special education positions were often seen by teacher candidates as an entrée into the system, after which they bid out into regular teaching positions. Additionally, struggling schools were often left with large numbers of new, inexperienced teachers. At one elementary school, 19 of the 25 teachers were first-year teachers in 2001.

The frequent turnover, the continuous loss of site-specific expertise, the need to constantly devote professional development resources to mentoring and re-training rather than to strengthening knowledge and expertise in the building, and the disproportionate balance of inexperienced versus experienced teachers worked against building teacher capacity in MPS schools.

The MFT was sympathetic to those arguments (there used to be 22 bidding dates throughout the year); however, union leaders argued that the real issue was getting effective principals into all schools and improving the quality of school leadership. Indeed, many of the principals regarded as effective leaders seemed to work well with the existing system and, as their schools began to turn around and to gain better reputations, saw less teacher turnover. These principals involved their teachers in the hiring process and communicated high expectations in job interviews.

Nonetheless, the current seniority and bidding provisions of the teachers' contract were often cited as working against district efforts to develop strong professional learning cultures and continuous improvement in "high needs" and low-performing schools across the system. At the time of the study, district and union leaders were working to address the bidding timeline and to establish incentives to attract experienced teachers into the most challenged schools.<sup>3</sup>

#### *Making Effective Use of Data*

Another challenge in the system was using data consistently and effectively. Data were a vital component of the MPS overall framework for improvement at the district and school levels. In the early years of reform under Peter Hutchinson and then Superintendent Johnson, MPS invested heavily in the development of its own system for assessing annual student achievement and its own system of quality performance indicators to compensate for what it saw as deficiencies in the state testing and accountability system. A continuing focus of and challenge for building teacher capacity, however, was increasing teachers' ability to interpret and use the assessment data to inform and improve their instruction.

The district's strategy for encouraging educators to use accountability data combined elements of pressure and support. The pressure came from the district's requirement that teachers justify their professional development plans with data. But the district supported that requirement with annual School Information Reports (SIRs) and Teacher Information

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<sup>3</sup> Note: In 2003, the final bid was pushed back to June.

Reports (TIRs), which provided much of the data teachers needed to support their plans. In addition, the district offered the services of a team of assessment consultants who helped school staff interpret the data contained in these reports.

Teachers also received inservice training in the use of specific assessment instruments to further hone their understanding of assessments and assessment data. For example, kindergarten teachers learned to use diagnostic tools to assess the early literacy skills of children as they prepared for first grade.

The challenges of using data for school improvement and professional development planning were greater for high school teachers. Because the state and local testing programs applied mostly to the lower grades (3 to 8), there were fewer data available about student performance in high school. The limited range, quality, and reliability of student achievement data available to high school teachers inhibited teachers' ability to use data effectively.

#### *Funding for Sustained Development*

Funding for school and district reform efforts was a perpetual problem for the district. The district had to cope with \$25-30 million budget deficits in 2001 and 2002. Obviously, this affected the district's capacity to provide the services needed to support continuous learning and improvement for teachers, such as the district mentor program. The district had obtained external grants to fund districtwide curriculum and teaching initiatives; however, this funding was limited to start-up and initial inservice training and curriculum development activities. The grants did not fund the costs associated with sustaining teacher development.

MPS' shift toward an increased emphasis on job-embedded continuous teacher development activities, cost-sharing among the schools, grants, and increased school control over the district's official professional development calendar were effective to some extent in addressing the funding issue. However, the financial challenges of sustaining research-based professional development advocated by district leaders persisted across the system.

## **Developing and Distributing Instructional Leadership**

As they built their framework for success, education leaders in Minneapolis recognized that the responsibility for improving instruction could not fall to the central office alone. Rather, improving instruction required redefining leadership throughout the district so all stakeholders would play a role in driving improvement efforts. Within this new structure of shared leadership, district leaders, principals, union leaders, and community members took on the roles that they were best suited to lead.

We will examine the roles of each stakeholder group and how they combined to provide a strong system of leadership for instructional reform.

### **School Board Leadership**

The Minneapolis school board has a history of leading and supporting district reform efforts. The board primarily views its role as a policymaking body, working hard not to engage in day-to-day decisionmaking. As a result, in the mid-1990s, when the board responded to community concerns about low test scores, it focused on policies that would support strong teaching and learning.

To that end, the board vigorously endorsed Superintendent Johnson's efforts to bring structure to the district's system of instructional supports. Board members promoted policies that enabled the central office to clarify and develop consensus around system goals, to standardize curriculum across the district, to further develop the MPS accountability system, to support quality teaching, and to engage diverse community groups as partners in the district's improvement agenda.

Yet the board's transformation to a policy-oriented body did not occur overnight or without external support. In 1999–2000, after participating in training sponsored by the Illinois State Board of Education, the Minneapolis board adopted the formal policy governance model promoted by board leadership guru John Carver. The Carver approach emphasized the board's role in establishing goals, setting indicators, aligning resources to the goals, monitoring progress, holding the system accountable through the superintendent, and communicating with the public. Using the tenants of the Carver model, the board members began to speak with one voice and avoided micro-managing the district administration and school affairs. As one board member explained, "We hired [Superintendent Johnson] to run the shop, and I want us to stay out of the way."

Board members also became regular users of data. They realized that in order to carry out their monitoring role effectively, they needed various kinds of information. Yet they were realistic about the volume of information they could digest and use for decisionmaking. As a result, when faced with interpreting raw performance data from the district's Research, Evaluation and Assessment (REA) office, the board requested that the REA office summarize data visually (e.g., using charts and graphs) and offer some interpretation.

Another strategy that school board members used to improve their work was to focus on their own professional development. In addition to enhancing their skills in governance and data use, board members participated in activities that enhanced their understanding of the district's reform efforts. For example, board members read education literature and research, attended workshops on education issues, and sought information about and from other school districts through their association with the Council of the Great City Schools.

While the Carver method gave the school board a framework in which to work on collaborating, the school board's efforts succeeded in large part because of the relationships between the board and other stakeholders in the district. The rapport between board and central office leaders was collegial, not adversarial. Furthermore, board members expressed respect for the teachers union as a key player in the district's instruction-oriented, accountability-driven reform efforts. According to one board member,

Other districts... always marvel at MPS' relation between the union and the board. The secret is two-fold: a) the board values [the union president]; b) the board understands not to blame the teachers for the problems [it faces].

The board's concerted efforts are recognized by the union. The union president praised the school board for hiring "superintendents based on the premise that they have to get along with the teachers union and include us in the agenda in the district."

### **Central Office Leadership**

Like school board members, central office leaders seek to improve instruction and achievement by focusing on areas they are best suited to influence. Dr. Johnson focuses her central office staff on providing instructional support for those on the front line: the teachers and principals.

As an example, the district is structured so that academic superintendents provided a layer of support to the district's three divisions: elementary, middle, and secondary. These assistant superintendents help provide support to principals and teacher leaders and acted as a bridge between the central office and the schools. Additionally, an executive leadership team comprised of executive directors from the various district departments, such as communications, curriculum and instruction, English Language Learners, special education, human resources, and research and evaluation, meets weekly with Superintendent Johnson to discuss the implementation and monitoring of the District Improvement Agenda goals.

As a means of monitoring progress as well as solidifying the board–district–school relationship, district leaders are expected to have "performance conversations" with principals and site leadership teams regarding the extent to which their school

improvement plans are in line with the DIA, Twelve Point Plan, and other system initiatives. This information, in turn, is relayed to the board to help inform their decisionmaking.

Dr. Johnson's longevity in her position, which she has held since 1997, also contributed to continuity in district reforms under her leadership. People across the system credit her with fostering an atmosphere of support and bringing all stakeholders together to develop consensus on goals and to collaborate in the district's reform initiatives. She is respected—and achieved results—for her willingness to hold herself and others in the district collectively responsible for understanding and solving problems.

### **The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers**

Another key leader in promoting instructional reform in Minneapolis is the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT). Although teachers unions are not typically recognized for being closely involved in and promoting instructional reform, MFT created and remains an integral part of a sustained instructional reform effort. Under the leadership of union president Louise Sundin—a proponent of Albert Shanker's vision of teacher professionalization—MFT expanded its focus from teacher salaries, benefits, and basic working conditions, to improving teachers' professional capacity.

In Minneapolis, the union is in the vanguard of developing and implementing structures and initiatives to enhance teacher capacity. The union took the lead in building the professional development process, the career in teaching mentoring program, and the Achievement of Tenure Process that required high levels of professional development for teachers. Union leaders worked closely with administrators on numerous grants and initiatives to introduce greater opportunities for professional development into the schools, including a year-round induction program for new teachers and the establishment of professional development centers in low-performing schools to provide greater resources to teachers. The union also initiated and supported the creation of numerous teacher leader positions that provided teachers with a continuum of professional opportunities as they progressed in their careers.

The positive working relationship among the MFT, the district administration, and the school board has endured through several changes of leadership in the central office and in the principals association. This is in part due to the stability in the union leadership. (Ms. Sundin has been president of the local chapter for 19 years).

The strong relationship among Minneapolis's lead stakeholders is also attributable to a number of long-term strategic actions. One key action is the union leader's and superintendent's quest to find common ground and to bridge differences. The union president and superintendent meet regularly to discuss issues and strive to communicate openly and honestly about ideas and challenges, providing the foundation for productive engagement.

A second key element is the partnership between the central office and union leaders in creating, planning, and developing major initiatives. Ms. Sundin noted, “Almost everything we do is collaborative.” For example, central office and union staff work together in implementing the PDP, mentoring program, professional development centers, and other key initiatives.

A third strategy used in Minneapolis is the inclusion of key strategies for professional development in the teachers’ contract. For instance, the contract includes the district’s principles of professional development, outlines a multitude of teacher leader positions, provides guidance on a complex peer assessment system, and codifies several joint committees that manage district professional development activities. The contract language provides leverage for both union and district leaders to push for strong professional development.

The union has played a fundamental role in building the district’s framework for reform, as its work has created and institutionalized the district’s support system for building teacher capacity.

## **Principal Leadership**

In keeping with the model of distributive leadership, the district has emphasized school-based decisionmaking. As such, the role of principals as instructional leaders has become vital. Principal leadership in MPS can be examined in four contexts: principals as instructional leaders, principal leadership in turnaround schools, district support for principal development, and the role of the principals union.

### *Principals as Instructional Leaders*

Although principal leadership roles are not clearly outlined in district policy documents, central office leaders see principals as instructional leaders. As such, principals are expected to work with teachers to ensure school improvement plans are grounded in data, to provide opportunities for and hold teachers accountable for professional growth, and to operate within the context of the district goals.

### *Principal Leadership in Turnaround Schools*

While our evidence is not conclusive about instructional leadership provided by principals across the district, we looked closely at principals in “turnaround” schools—previously low-performing schools that had significantly increased student achievement. Our data reveals marked similarities in principal work in these schools.

Turnaround principals emphasized that they had worked to establish a climate of trust and a commitment to change among teachers. Common practices included scheduling individual meetings with all staff to solicit their views on school and individual strengths and needs, addressing teachers’ basic resource needs and concerns (e.g., supplies, photocopy access, class size), recognizing school strengths, and inviting teacher participation in decisions about the focuses and plans for improvement.

These principals also set high expectations for students and teachers and communicated these expectations publicly and in individual conferences with teachers. Teachers unwilling to satisfy these expectations were invited to leave. Interestingly, the high rate of teacher turnover in failing schools actually created a window of opportunity for effective principals to recruit new teachers who were committed to the school improvement processes.

Given the high expectations for students and adults, it is not surprising that principals in these schools held teachers accountable for student results. To monitor student performance and assess their instructional practices, principals strongly encouraged teachers to use multiple forms of data. Principals noted that using data to inform instructional decisionmaking was a change in practice for many teachers and involved becoming more intentional about why they teach the way they do.

The principals also worked to create a cultural shift to replace traditional norms and structures of teacher isolation and competition with teacher collegiality. This occurred in part by promoting opportunities for teachers to share expertise, plan in teams, and observe each other's practice. The culture of collaboration also manifested itself in principal attention to teacher relations and group process. One principal introduced consensus-building seating arrangements in staff meetings and a conflict resolution process for teachers to deal with differences.

#### *District Support for Principal Development*

Despite the district's expectation that principals be instructional leaders, interviewees from stakeholder groups at the district, board, school, and community levels noted the lack of a strong program of professional development for aspiring, new, and experienced principals.

Yet the district does have some supports in place for principals. District leaders have attempted to inject more professional development into area and district principals' meetings. In addition, many principals take part in a study group program in which six to seven principals meet three hours a month to investigate and discuss issues pertaining to the Twelve Point Plan. The district also has an internship program and a principal mentoring program for new principals. Many district principals spend a year or more as interns before becoming principals. As well, the central office, Principals' Forum (described in the next section), and teachers federation are jointly involved in a leadership development program for aspiring principals with professors from the University of St. Thomas.

Although the district is responsible for helping to fund, evaluate, and plan initiatives to support principals at different stages of their careers, funding and time for principal development activities has been an issue. Mentoring for newly appointed principals has been cut back due to budgetary constraints. At the time of the study, the Principals' Forum was negotiating with the district to access a portion of the state-mandated staff development budget for principal development activities.

### *The Principals' Forum*

Although the principals' responsibilities for leadership are not clearly outlined by district policy documents, their interests are represented by the Minneapolis Principals' Forum—the local principals union. The Principals' Forum is an active collaborator and supporter of district reform efforts, and its cooperative relationship with other lead stakeholders is one of the key ingredients for success in Minneapolis Public Schools. A significant product of the Forum's leadership is the principals' contract, which provides a public context for clarifying expectations regarding the principal's role in school improvement and is full of language that characterizes this role as “chief instructional leader and manager” in schools. The contract emphasizes leadership that supports district goals for student achievement, instructional quality, and accountability. It also makes clear that principals are expected to involve teachers and other stakeholders in site-based decisionmaking about school improvement needs, resource allocation, strategies, and the like.

Unlike the MFT, the Forum's executive leaders change annually, which may have somewhat decreased the group's high-profile influence in the system.

### **Teacher Leadership**

To further its instructional reform strategies, the district relies on teacher leaders. Teacher leaders reside at both the district and school levels and include such positions as: PDP coordinators, mentor teachers, site lead teachers, and professional development center coordinators. Another category known as Teachers on Special Assignment provide the district and schools with flexibility to create temporary positions at the site or district levels to meet specific needs for services.

The main function of the teacher leaders is not to teach students, but rather to support teachers by assisting in planning and problem solving. Teacher leaders demonstrate lessons, conduct inservice training, and facilitate study groups and other professional learning activities.

In schools deemed as low performing, the district requires schools to appoint teacher leaders. In such cases, the district shares part of the cost with the schools. In addition, principals arrange financing for teacher leader positions by using existing funds, by applying for grants, and by taking advantage of donations.

The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers is both a source of and an advocate for teacher leadership. The union solidified through the teachers' contract, a wide range of organizational structures and processes that enable teachers to contribute to instructional leadership at the district and school levels. At the district level, this includes teacher participation in decisionmaking about professional development needs and plans via the Teacher Development Council; the MFT Professional Educators Committee; and the Career in Teaching, the Staff Development, and the Professional Development Advisory Committees. At the school level, it includes teacher participation in site leadership teams

and in school improvement and staff development committees. Teachers also have responsibility for implementing the peer-supported Professional Development Process.

Another example of structured support for teacher leaders is the Resident Teacher program. While the program has not flourished in the district as was hoped, it has become a vehicle through which schools can develop a culture of job-embedded professional learning, including action research groups and study groups, that draw in experienced as well as new teachers.

### **Box 2**

#### **An Innovation in Teacher Leadership: The Case of Patrick Henry High School**

The principal of Patrick Henry High School took a bold step toward enhancing teachers' professional leadership at his school by restructuring the school management model and establishing the Patrick Henry Instructional Leaders—an innovative leadership team that includes the principal and an assistant principal; teacher leaders in the areas of student development, accountability and data collection, curriculum and instruction/standards, mentoring, and professional development; and the conventional department heads. In addition, two co-coordinators help guide new teachers through tenure requirements. These teacher leader positions are all part-time appointments for two to three years as teachers continue teaching in the classroom.

The principal funded this innovation by eliminating two assistant principal positions and using those funds to finance the new instructional leader positions. The coordinators and the five instructional leaders who work with him are responsible for overseeing all the strategic planning related to teaching and instruction and their integration into school activities. The school also has entered into a partnership with the district, the union, and adjunct professors from two local colleges to run an on-site school leadership institute for aspiring and current teacher leaders across the system. At the time of this study, the new structure for instructional leadership and the leadership development program were in their first year of implementation. It was too soon to determine their actual impact on teacher quality and student learning in the school or on incipient efforts to scale up the concept of professional development centers modeled in part on the Patrick Henry example. However, as Superintendent Johnson noted, Patrick Henry “[has] really created a professional learning community of teachers who work cohesively.... The teachers take a lot of responsibility and leadership.”

## **State Leadership**

While the state legislature and its education department are not perceived as leaders in Minneapolis school reform, the state helped set the context for reform in MPS through the state curriculum standards, accountability system, and requirement that all districts set aside funds for staff development. State policy requiring districts to intervene in schools not making adequate yearly progress on state accountability measures exerted additional pressure on the district to address the needs of students and teachers in “failing schools.” State leadership for local instruction reform is also manifested in the district’s efforts to leverage and align state funding for instructional improvement with the District Improvement Agenda and site-based school improvement planning processes.

### **Community Leadership**

The story of reform in Minneapolis Public Schools would not be complete without recognizing the role of the community in calling for change. Pressure from community, business, and civic leaders in the mid-1990s to respond to widespread failure in student performance on state accountability tests was at the heart of the genesis of change in MPS. This pressure was a primary force underlying the creation and implementation of the district’s performance-based assessment and accountability system and its focus on closing the achievement gap. The Minneapolis Public Schools foundation secured external funding to help finance district improvement initiatives. The public passed three class size referendums that enabled the district to hire additional teachers to keep class sizes small. Finally, MPS has been working for a decade to increase collaboration with parents on teaching and learning issues.

## Concluding Comments

The improvement story in Minneapolis has been an evolutionary one. During the early years of reform, Minneapolis engaged in what might be called a “centrally driven support system.” Under the guidance of central office and union leadership, the district developed a blueprint to guide teachers and principals. This blueprint included a well-articulated vision, systemwide content standards and grade level expectations, core principles and systemwide professional development practices, and a multiple-measure accountability system. The district reform efforts concentrated initially on curriculum and teaching in the elementary schools and then in the middle schools. The focus on the early grades included an emphasis on school readiness, particularly as it pertained to literacy, and on alternative programming for children identified as not meeting the system performance expectations. Since 2001, the district has turned in a more deliberate and focused way to high school reform.

Once the basic blueprint was in place, the approach shifted toward a “district-facilitated school-based approach.” While district leaders provided a framework of goals and supports, principals and their staffs had significant power and flexibility in decisionmaking. Among other things, school leaders determined how to allocate their staffs and their budgets, which challenges to address, and how to provide professional development in their schools. Another part of the progressive targeting of supports to schools was the continuing effort to make accountability data more accessible and useable for teachers.

Coinciding with the evolution of this framework was the distribution of leadership roles and responsibilities throughout the system. Everyone with a stake in the future of MPS students had a part to play in the process. At the district level, the superintendent’s strengths in the areas of curriculum development, alignment, and instruction were without question. She underscored the creation and use of a data-driven accountability system to support district goals, forged consensus among district and school personnel, and worked collaboratively with the board to carry out its vision.

The board completely revamped its governance process to emphasize its role in determining system goals, standards, and performance indicators. Board members focused on empowering the superintendent and holding her accountable for district plans and progress in addressing those goals. The board also acted as the liaison to the community in soliciting community input about system goals, performance, and concerns.

Equal leadership importance must be accorded to the teachers union. The Minneapolis Federation of Teachers was a driving force and creator of many of the district’s innovative efforts to support teacher professional development.

While the central office emphasized the importance of school-based leadership, developing principal capacity did not receive as much systematic attention. That’s not to imply that principal leadership was ignored, only that it has not been a strong system

initiative to date. However, the district emphasized the importance of teacher leadership and supported schools by establishing a variety of district and school-based teacher leader positions.

While MPS has made significant progress in increasing school-based supports for teachers, constraints still exist. Adequate time for teachers to plan and problem solve together, to study their own practices, and to support each other's learning remains a challenge, as does funding district initiatives.

Yet regardless of these challenges, progress had been made. The number of eighth graders passing the Minnesota Basic Standards Test in reading rose from 33 percent in 1997 to 56 percent in 2000. In math, the percentage increased from 36 percent to 45 percent. Even more impressive is the fact that the percentage of fifth grade black students in Minneapolis who passed the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment of Reading rose from 14 percent in 1998 to 33 percent in 2002—a preliminary indication that the focus on closing the achievement gap is working.

These successes cannot be attributed simply to a rational distribution of instructional leadership. A key feature of leadership across the system concerns the positive relationships that have endured among leaders of major stakeholder groups. The collaborative relations among the district administration, the MFT, the school board, the principals organization, and community groups were and continue to be vital to the district reform efforts.

Another “lesson” to be taken from the MPS story is that districts can benefit from including multiple stakeholders at the goal setting and planning stages of reform and in encouraging openness to listening to and learning from one another. The willingness of the MPS school board and administration to draw upon the local business community expertise to help them review and revise their management systems is a good example. Furthermore, by being responsive to the criticisms and concerns of municipal, business, and community leaders about the district's performance, the district ultimately has gained significant political and financial support for its reform efforts.

**Appendix I**  
**Minneapolis Public Schools**  
**Achievement Data**

**Table A.1 Minneapolis Public Schools**

Percentage of Students Scoring at or above Level IIb on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment—Reading—1998–2002

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total % Change
<b>READING, Grade 3</b>						
American Indian	21	23	29	34	41	20
Asian/Pacific Islander	13	17	15	30	29	16
Hispanic	22	26	24	24	24	2
Black	16	18	21	30	28	12
White	60	63	68	73	74	14
<b>READING, Grade 5</b>						
American Indian	15	19	29	41	41	26
Asian/Pacific Islander	18	21	22	29	32	14
Hispanic	18	20	28	31	30	12
Black	14	18	26	31	33	19
White	60	62	70	79	80	20

*Notes:* Most students in Level IIb are working successfully on grade-level material and are on track to achieve satisfactory work in the state’s content standards. Minneapolis was selected based on achievement data from grades K–8, the grades on which district-level reform had focused thus far. The district began high school reform efforts in 2001–2002.

*Source:* These data were provided by the Minneapolis Public Schools.

**Table A.2 Minneapolis Public Schools**

Percentage of Students Scoring at or above Level IIb on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment—Mathematics—1998–2002

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total % Change
<b>MATHEMATICS, Grade 3</b>						
American Indian	22	25	39	35	38	16
Asian/Pacific Islander	19	28	34	41	44	25
Hispanic	17	30	30	25	31	14
Black	13	17	24	28	28	15
White	58	67	72	72	73	15
<b>MATHEMATICS, Grade 5</b>						
American Indian	14	16	26	31	40	26
Asian/Pacific Islander	19	25	29	34	45	26
Hispanic	14	16	25	34	30	16
Black	8	11	19	22	30	22
White	54	58	67	74	78	24

*Notes:* Most students in Level IIb are working successfully on grade-level material and are on track to achieve satisfactory work in the state’s content standards. Minneapolis was selected based on achievement data from grades K–8, the grades on which district-level reform had focused thus far. The district began high school reform efforts in 2001–2002.

*Source:* These data were provided by the Minneapolis Public Schools.

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**Table A.3 Minneapolis Public Schools**

Percentage of Students Passing the Basic Skills Test—Reading and Mathematics—1998–2002

	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	Total % Change
<b>READING, Grade 8</b>						
American Indian	26	45	53	46	42	16
Asian/Pacific Islander	33	39	52	43	46	13
Hispanic	24	39	38	38	38	14
Black	24	30	42	37	40	16
White	73	78	84	83	85	12
<b>MATHEMATICS, Grade 8</b>						
American Indian	29	32	41	32	44	15
Asian/Pacific Islander	39	45	55	50	57	18
Hispanic	21	27	29	32	33	12
Black	21	20	25	22	30	9
White	73	75	75	74	79	6

*Notes:* Minneapolis was selected based on achievement data from grades K–8, the grades on which district-level reform had focused thus far. The district began high school reform efforts in 2001–2002.

*Source:* These data were provided by the Minneapolis Public Schools.

## Acknowledgments

Many staff members in the Minneapolis Public School District gave generously of their time and expertise. We offer deep appreciation to these talented and thoughtful individuals who strive daily to provide a nurturing and effective education for the students in Minneapolis. We especially want to thank Ginny Craig, Judy Farmer, Ossie Brooks-James, Carol Johnson, and Louise Sundin.

We also wish to acknowledge the editing support of Patricia George.

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Development and production of this report were supported by grants from the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation and from the Office of Educational Research & Improvement, U. S. Department of Education. The findings and conclusions presented in this report do not necessarily represent the official positions or policies of the Office of Educational Research & Improvement, U. S. Department of Education (grant no. R215U000007-01) or the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation.