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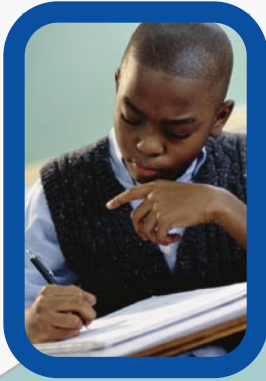
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# A STUDY OF LEADERSHIP FOR LEARNING IMPROVEMENT

How Schools, Districts, and States Support Learning and  
Learning-Focused Leadership

Dr. Michael S. Knapp, Principal Investigator

## Who we are and how the study is supported



With support from The Wallace Foundation, a team of researchers from the Center for the Study of Teaching and Policy at the University of Washington is undertaking an investigation of leadership in districts and state systems that seek to improve both learning and leadership in schools and classrooms.

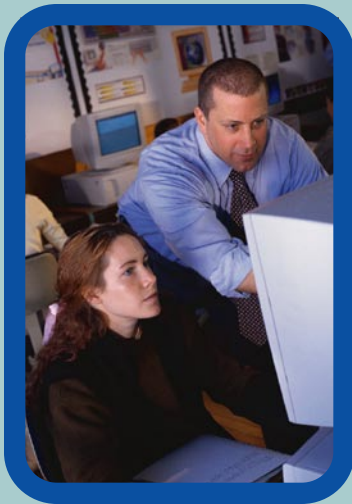
## What this study is about

What does it take to promote powerful, equitable learning in a school, in the district central office that serves the school, and in the state system of which school and district are a part? That is the fundamental question facing leaders at all levels of the educational system. The answer has many facets and depends, in part, on the conditions and history of a particular state or local setting. But among them, three issues are emerging as especially important and worthy of close examination:



- **The reconfiguration of school leadership roles.** To maximize support for the improvement of teaching and learning, some schools are evolving new conceptions of leadership roles, that distribute leadership among different school staff—including, but not limited to, the principal—and that support the exercise of learning-focused leadership more actively.

- **The transformation of the district central office.** Some central offices are shifting from a regulatory posture meant to ensure schools' compliance with federal, state, and local directives, to an emphasis on a dynamic, supportive relationship with schools in pursuit of learning improvement goals. This transformation process prompts new structures and expectations for central office administrators' daily work, a partnership relationship with schools, and engagement in data-based inquiry.



- **Rethinking the reallocation and development of staffing resources.** By shifting assignments, deployment, and incentives, often in the face of inertia and resistances, some districts are aligning the system's "staffing resources"—both the individuals who instruct young people and others who directly support instruction (e.g., mentors, instructional coaches, school administrators, various central office staff)—more closely with priorities for learning improvement. They are also developing the capacity of these staff—through professional development, peer networks, instructional coaching, and other interventions (including creative use of the collective bargaining process and the restructuring of the district's personnel and professional support functions).

In this investigation, we will describe and analyze leadership roles, resources, and support in selected states, districts, and schools that have placed high priority on these aspects of a broad-based effort to improve teaching and learning across the system. Through case study research over the next year and half, the study team will document what leaders throughout the educational system are doing, identify the challenges they are encountering, and show how they are meeting these challenges.

## What the study involves

The study explores how leadership actions and conditions at one level of the system impact other levels. The study investigates all three leadership issues in two large urban districts that have been working closely with The Wallace Foundation over the past five years to improve the quality and impact of educational leadership, in schools within these districts, and in the corresponding state systems. Several other sites will be included as well, though with emphasis on one of the leadership issues that has become most salient in that site.

Within each study site, we will be gathering information of several kinds; across an 18-month period (from early in 2007 through June, 2008), we will:

- Examine personnel, fiscal, and performance data from available sources.
- Interview key participants, emphasizing those who currently or potentially exercise leadership related to learning improvement.
- Observe leadership and leadership events in action.
- Construct an inventory of state policies related to staffing resources.
- Review local archival sources that indicate how staff are deployed (e.g., master schedule and school improvement plans; district strategic plans).
- Survey all school and district leaders, to understand their roles, participation in resource allocation, and other leadership activities.
- Conduct a network analysis based in survey data to reveal formal and informal patterns of leadership and its exercise in districts and schools.

The study is designed to track a full annual cycle of leadership activity, and to identify the consequences for teaching and leadership practice.

## Expected Contributions

The study will generate a detailed picture of how learning-focused leadership is exercised at several levels of the educational system and how it is supported in urban contexts. The study will provide several forms of feedback to participating sites, as well as analyses and reports for wide dissemination among interested audiences in the field.

## For Further Information

Please contact the Principal Investigator:  
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## Related Substudies

This investigation combines three substudies, each addressing one of the three central leadership issues:

- **School Leadership Roles for Learning Improvement: How Schools Reconfigure, Assess, and Support Learning-focused Leadership Roles**

Principal Investigators:

Dr. Bradley S. Portin  
Dr. Michael S. Knapp

- **District-level Leadership for Learning: How School District Central Office Administrators Participate in Strengthening Learning Opportunities for All Students**

Principal Investigators:

Dr. Michael A. Copland  
Dr. Meredith I. Honig

- **Rethinking the Allocation and Development of Staffing Resources to Support Learning Improvement and Learning-focused Leadership**

Principal Investigators:

Dr. Margaret L. Plecki  
Dr. Michael S. Knapp