



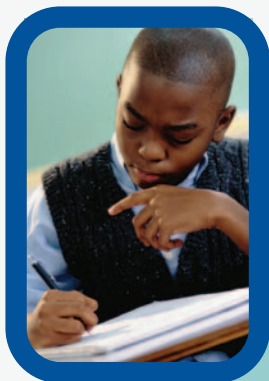
Center for the Study of
Teaching and Policy

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SCHOOL LEADERSHIP ROLES FOR LEARNING IMPROVEMENT:

How Schools Reconfigure, Assess, and Support
Learning-focused Leadership Roles

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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

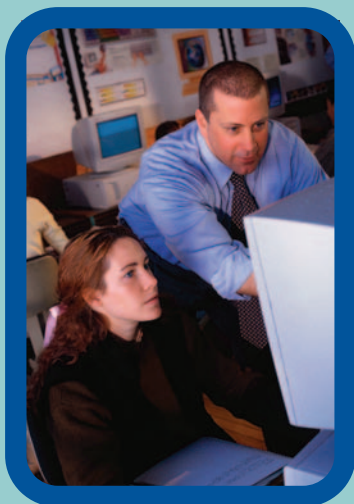
The central interest in this study is learning-focused leadership at the school level. We build this exploration on both emerging practice and persistent questions about how school leaders can help to create and shape equitable and powerful learning opportunities for students across a range of local contexts. When learning becomes central to all members of the school community, leadership—in all its forms—is one means to ensure that the conditions and direction for daily work in schools meet the challenges that educators are encountering.



Improving learning conditions and outcomes in schools implicates the need to re-imagine and reconfigure how leadership is exercised in schools. This means paying attention not only to what those in traditionally prescribed roles (such as principals) do, but also to new sets of skills, capacities, and supports for all who exercise learning-focused leadership in the school. This study explores how school leaders make sense of these new expectations in light of their own unique school characteristics and how districts and the larger policy environment shape and support what occurs in learning-focused leadership in schools.

Four main areas of inquiry drive this study:

- (1) how the school defines and frames learning improvement challenges in the context of local concerns and larger policies;
- (2) how the school's unique characteristics shape the way learning-focused leadership is exercised within it;
- (3) how the district and state guide, support, and assess reconfigured and expanded leadership in schools; and finally
- (4) how schools and their contexts resolve differing expectations for leaders' roles and ensure that individuals have the capacity and authority to take on these roles.



Expected contributions

The study will generate a detailed picture of how learning-focused leadership is exercised in schools in the nation's urban centers and the change this may entail for the education of young people. 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.

What this study involves

This study pursues these matters through close examination of leadership in a dozen schools—four elementary schools and four each at the middle and high school levels—spread across four urban districts. Schools are selected for their attempt to reconfigure school leadership roles to better support learning improvement. Within each site we will be developing detailed descriptions of school leadership at work, and the accompanying changes in local policy, structure, and culture that enable leadership to be exercised this way. The research will benefit from a “nested” research design that allows us to examine the influence of state and district actions or conditions on the school level.

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:

- Conduct interviews with individuals exercising formal and informal leadership in the schools.
- Observe leadership in action within the school, through attending key events and shadowing leaders’ work.
- Analyze school artifacts and symbols that convey messages about school mission, commitments, and character.
- Survey all school staff and carry out network analyses to identify leadership patterns.
- Interview selected district and state staff and conduct artifact analysis to identify conditions and actions that influence the configuration of school leadership roles.

The study is designed to track school leadership activities through a full annual cycle of activity, commencing in mid-year, as participants look to the future, take stock of what they are accomplishing, redirect effort for the following school year, and then enact their plans across that school year.

For Further Information

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Companion Studies

This investigation is closely linked to two other studies which address related aspects of learning-focused leadership and leadership support:

• 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

Related Research

Additional information may be obtained in the following reports, which are available on the CTP website:

Leading, Learning, and Leadership Support

Michael S. Knapp, Michael A. Copland,
Margaret L. Plecki, Bradley S. Portin,
& Colleagues

Redefining Roles, Responsibility, and Authority of School Leaders

Bradley S. Portin, Christopher R. Alejano,
Michael S. Knapp, & Elizabeth Marzolf

Purposes, Uses, and Practices of Leadership Assessment in Education

Bradley S. Portin, Sue Feldman, &
Michael S. Knapp