

# Thinking About Districts

In Ways That Might Make A  
Difference....

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**Driven to Discover<sup>SM</sup>**

# Two Foci

- Districts as a context for leadership and accountability
- Districts as institutional actors

# Methods....

- Secondary Analysis of data from Leadership for Learning study (Wallace Foundation)
- Principal and Teacher Surveys, 2008

# Teacher Assessments of Leadership

1. Parent Teacher Shared Leadership ([Gordon & Louis, 2009](#))
2. District and School Leadership Influence ([K. S. Louis et al., 2010](#))
3. Principal as Instructional Leader ([Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008](#))
4. Shared Leadership within the School (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
5. Teacher Influence (Louis, et al., 2010)
6. Reflective Dialogue (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
7. Collective Responsibility (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
8. Shared Norms (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)
9. Teachers Perceptions of Parent Influence (Gordon & Louis, 2009)
10. Principal as Trusted Colleague (Wahlstrom & Louis, 2008)

# Leadership and Context (Teacher Perceptions)

- 10 Teacher Leadership variables are associated with building level
- 9 are associated with state
- 8 are associated with district size, urbanicity, and school-level poverty
- 7 are associated with school-level diversity

# Instructional Leadership and Context

- District and school size variables have a significant negative relationship with teachers' experience of IL
- Building level has a significant effect, with secondary schools being less likely to experience IL
- Neither poverty nor diversity have a significant independent effect, and their interaction is also insignificant.
- The equation is significant, but  $R^2$  is relatively low at .04.
- IN SUM: DISTRICT SIZE SEEMS TO MATTER

# Professional Community and Context

- Building level and size are the strongest predictors of teachers' experience of PC, and both have a strong negative relationship;
- District size contributes significantly, and again negatively;
- Poverty within the school has a strong negative effect on PC, as does the interaction effect between building size and poverty.
- The R2 is somewhat greater than with IL (.075)
- IN SUM: DISTRICT SIZE IS IMPORTANT FOR TEACHER LEADERSHIP

# District As Agents: Beyond Vision

- Leadership for accountability is difficult because of the many “mental models” in schools that emphasize boundaries
- District boundary spanning as a critical element in promoting improvement and accountability because it can be integrative.
- The defining feature of integrative leadership is “spanning levels, sectors and cultures to help diverse groups remedy the most difficult shared public problems” ([Crosby & Bryson, 2010](#)).

# Shared Leadership as Boundary Spanning

- Principal assessments of district shared leadership behaviors are associated with building and district size ( $R^2=.11$ )
- When urbanicity is added, the district size becomes a more significant predictor and building size becomes insignificant
- **IN SUM: SHARED LEADERSHIP OCCURS LESS OFTEN IN LARGER AND MORE URBAN DISTRICTS**

# Teacher Assessments of District's Leadership

- Teacher assessments of districts improvement focus and shared leadership predict principal assessments of shared leadership ( $R^2=.11$ )
- When context variables are added, they dramatically increase the variance explained ( $R^2= .215$ ); Significant predictors are district improvement focus, district size and school level.
- IN SUM: DISTRICT SIZE IS STILL IMPORTANT BUT IS MODERATED BY SCHOOL LEVEL.

# District Effects on Teachers and Students

- Principal assessments of district efforts to create WITHIN-DISTRICT NETWORKs are indirectly associated with student achievement (through positive associations with PC and focused instruction)
- District use of TARGETS AND DATA AS ACCOUNTABILITY TOOLS are negatively associated with focused instruction, but positively associated with PC. (This is, however, probably outweighed by the strong negative effect of building level on PC)
- IN SUM: THE AN ACCOUNTABILITY FOCUS IN THE ABSENCE OF MORE CREATIVE BOUNDARY SPANNING MAY UNDERMINE ACHIEVEMENT.

# Some Implications

1. *For principals, district size per se inhibits shared leadership, irrespective of the characteristics of the student body.*
2. *Principals, particularly in larger district and school settings, need more specialized support from the district level.*
3. *Embedded (or better) professional development for leaders is necessary, but won't "solve" educational problems.*
4. *Within-district networking should be considered as a critical form of support.*
5. *Data driven decision making is not, by itself, THE answer. Other district behaviors are probably more important.*
6. *We need to know more, particularly about medium and larger districts that serve many of the disadvantaged students who are performing poorly.*