

The Reincarnation of Effective Schools Research: Rethinking the Literature on District Effectiveness

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Purpose

- Compile methodological and conceptual profiles of DER
- Compare and contrast DER and SER
 - Notions of success
 - Purposes of schooling
 - Contextualized nature of school performance
 - Theoretical interpretations of student success

Guiding questions

- What are the major correlates of effective districts, and how do they compare to earlier correlates of effective schools?
- What are the major methodological designs for studying effective districts, and how do they compare to earlier designs for studying effective schools?
- What are the major conceptual dimensions of the district effectiveness research, and how do they compare to the dimensions of the earlier school effectiveness research?
- What are the implications of the district effectiveness research for the study of educational leadership, improvement, and equity?

Data sources

50 primary documents on district effectiveness

- 34% peer-reviewed journal articles
- 16% books or book chapters
- 26% conference papers, lab reports
- 20% foundation, think tank, advocacy reports

Bounding the review

- Original results from studies of relationship between district-level policies, routines, behaviors and classroom-level outcomes
- ERIC database, Google Scholar, literature reviews, bibliographies of district-related literature, internet inquiries

Rounds of analysis

Round 1

- Coded methodological features

Round 2

- Coded correlates of effectiveness

Round 3

- Coded correlates according to major conceptual themes from critiques of SER

SER: Contributions

- Instructionally effective schools existed for poor, urban children
- Reinvigorated discourse on organizational and instructional characteristics of schools that affect student achievement
- 7+ correlates of school effectiveness

SER: Methodological concerns

- Inadequate sampling
- Inadequate comparisons
- Lack of longitudinal analyses
- Inadequate designs for studying school- and classroom-level processes
- Inadequate measures of effectiveness

SER: Conceptual concerns

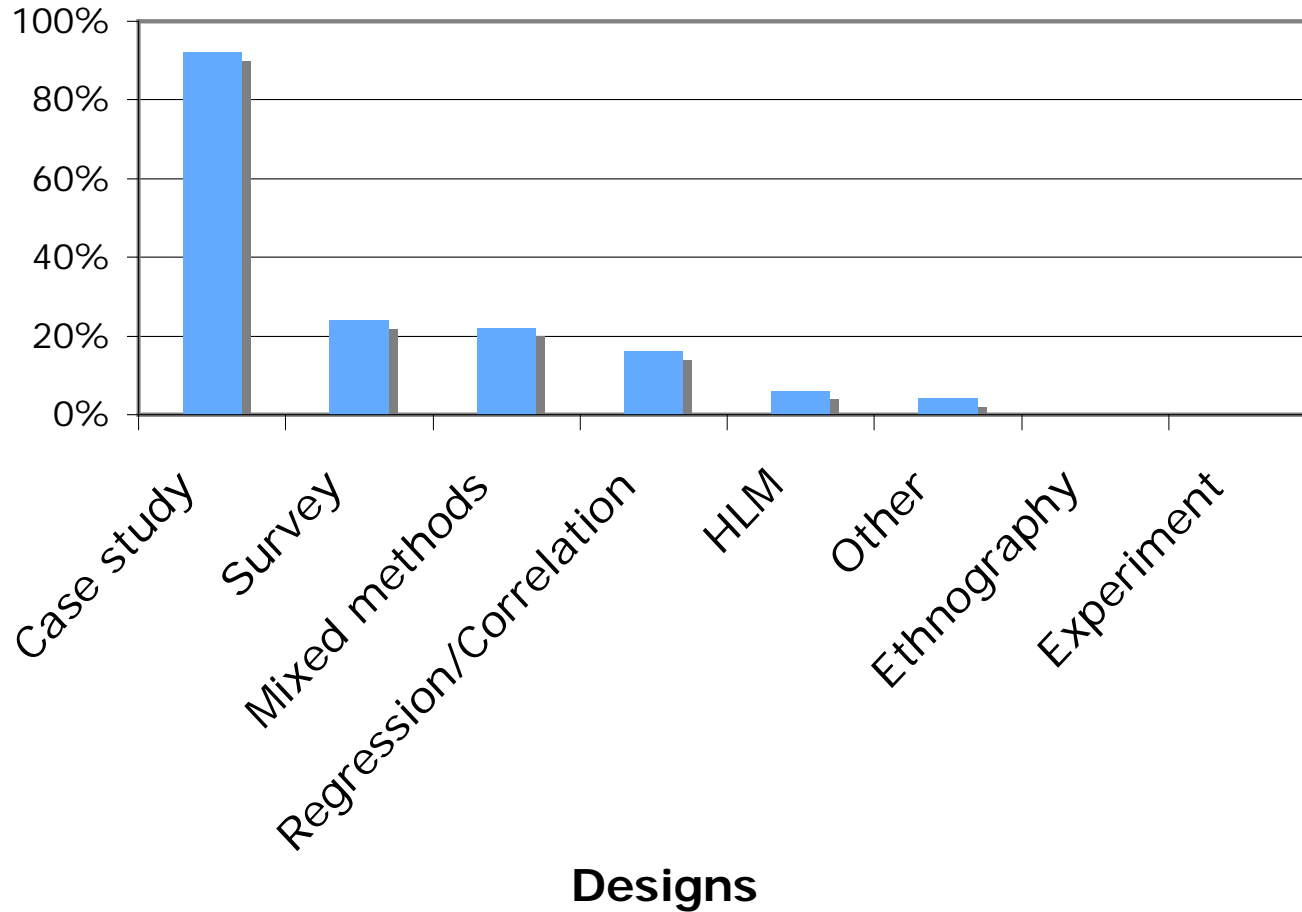
- Reductionist view of purposes of education
- Inadequate treatment of socio-political and normative contexts of schooling
- Inadequate theoretical frames

District Effectiveness Research: Methodological characteristics

Sampling and selection criteria

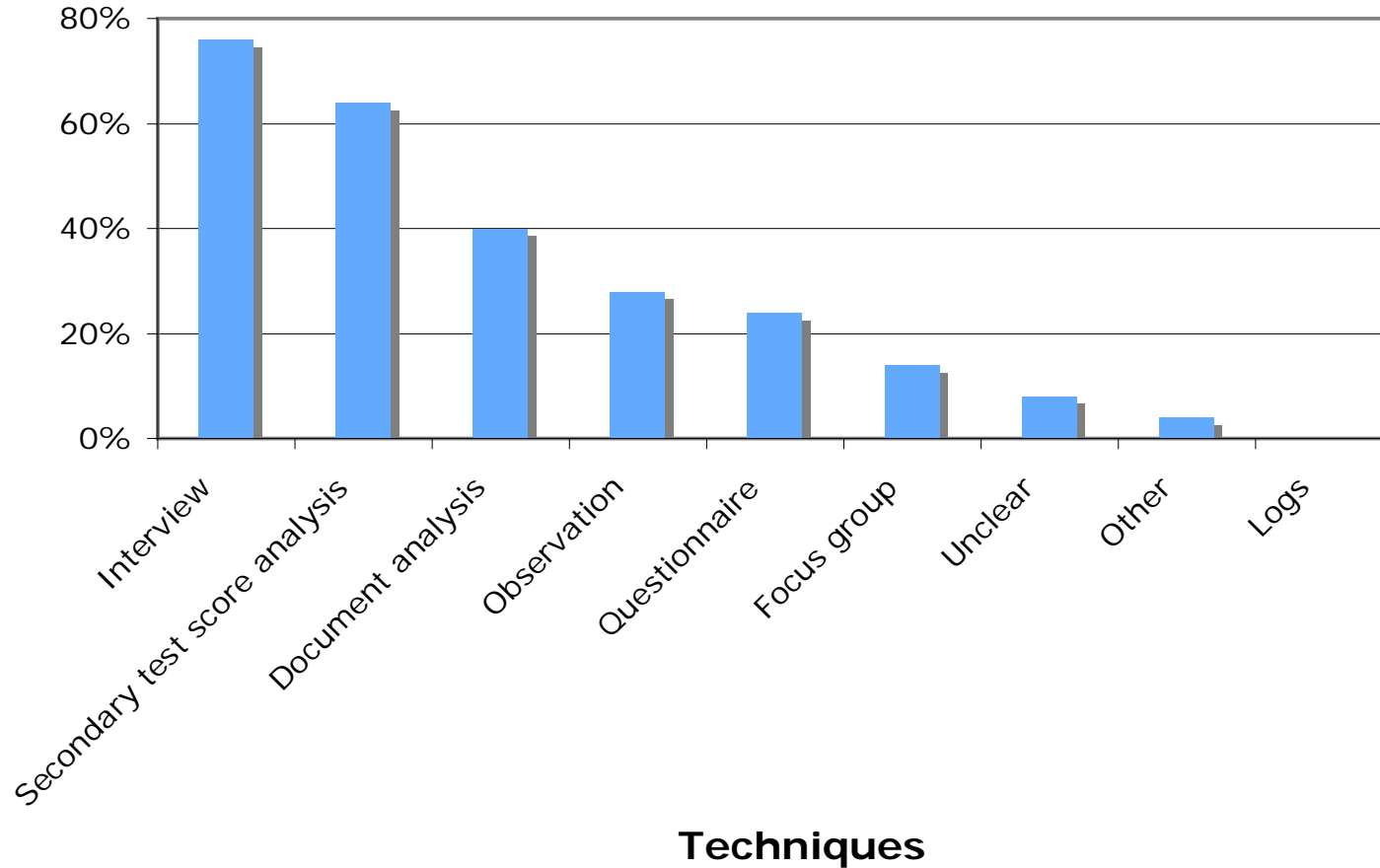
- 40%: anecdotal evidence, reputation, convenience
- 56%: outlier status (unusually high effectiveness)
- 58%: snapshot data
- 16%: size
- Comparisons
 - 63% high to high performers
 - 22% high to low performers
 - 15% high to average performers or a cross-section

Methods



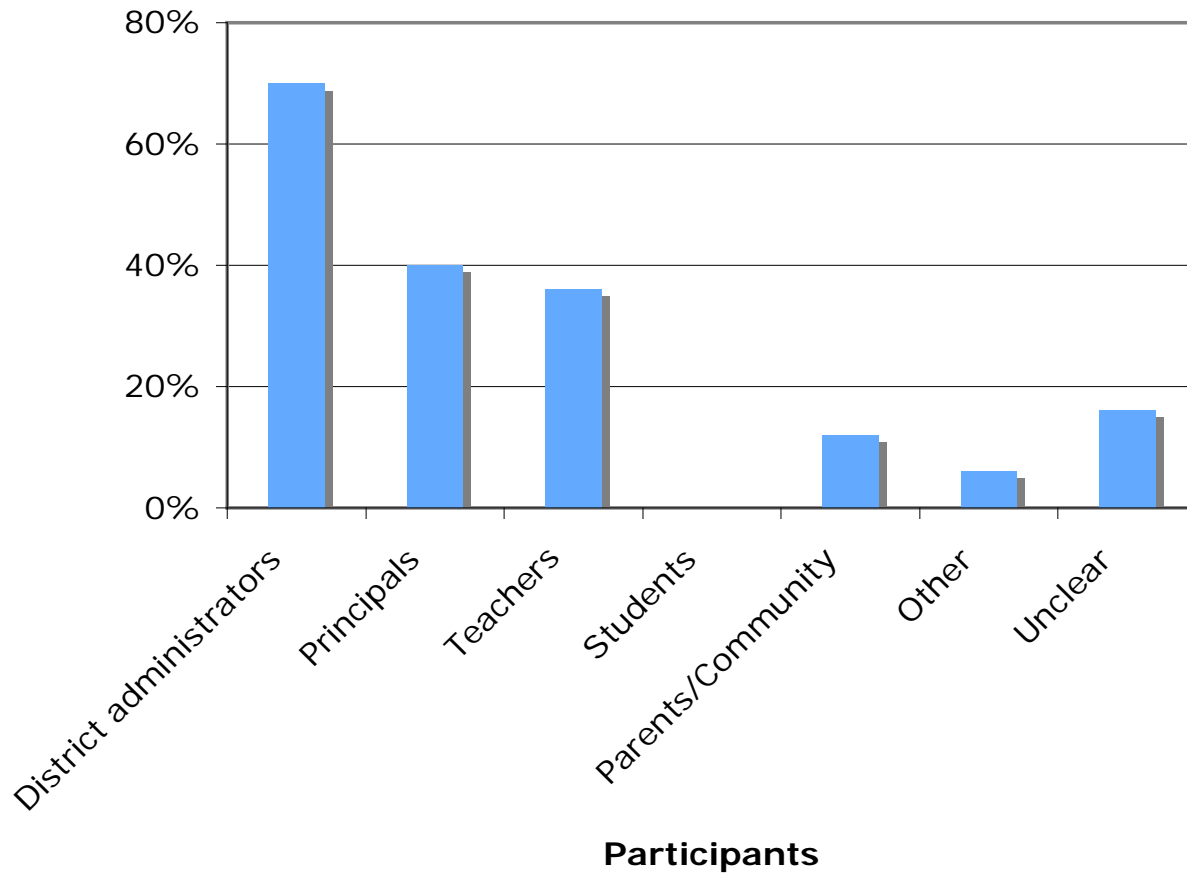
* Percentages do not add up to 100% because multiple codes could apply to each study.

Data collection

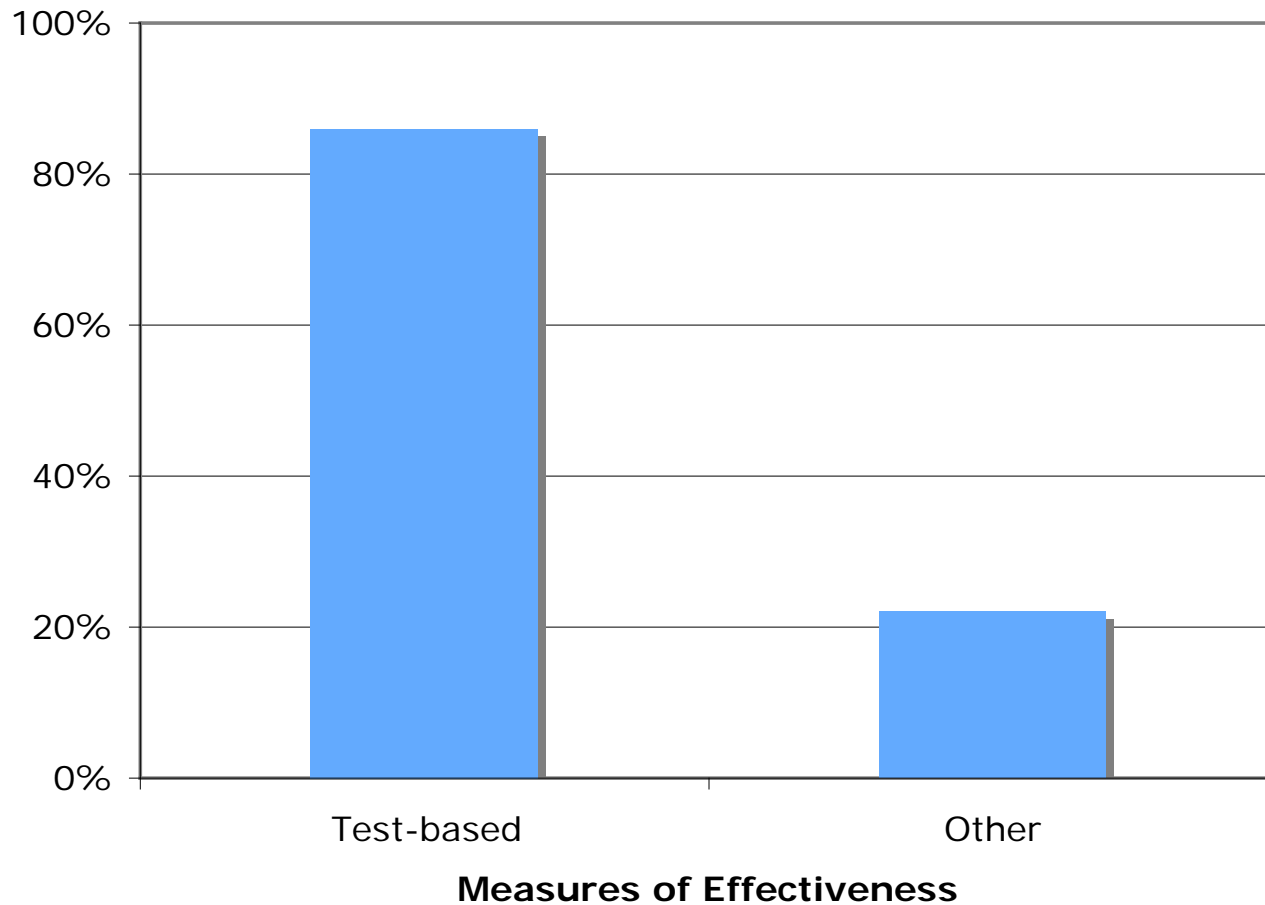


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Research Subjects



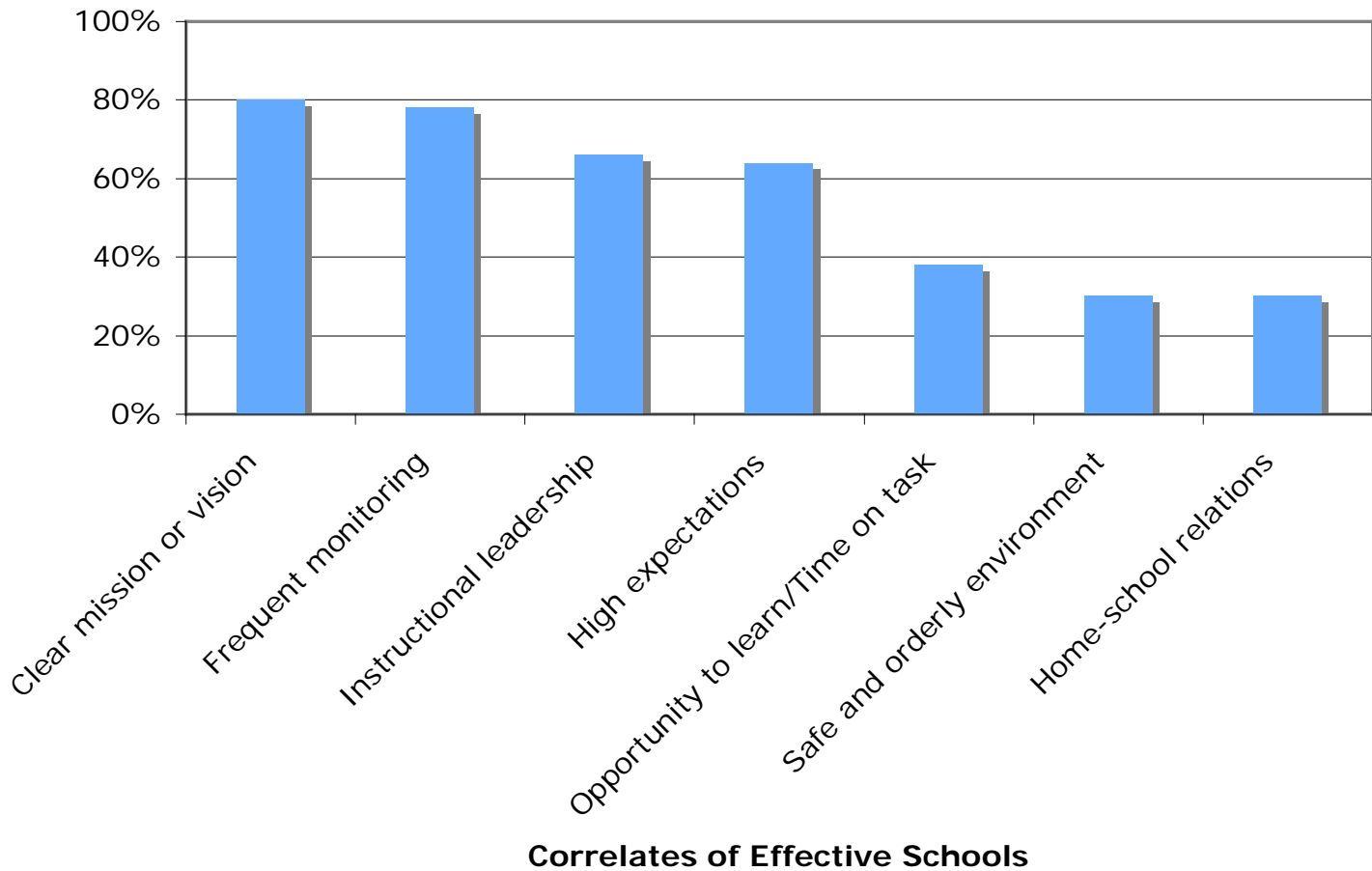
Measures of effectiveness



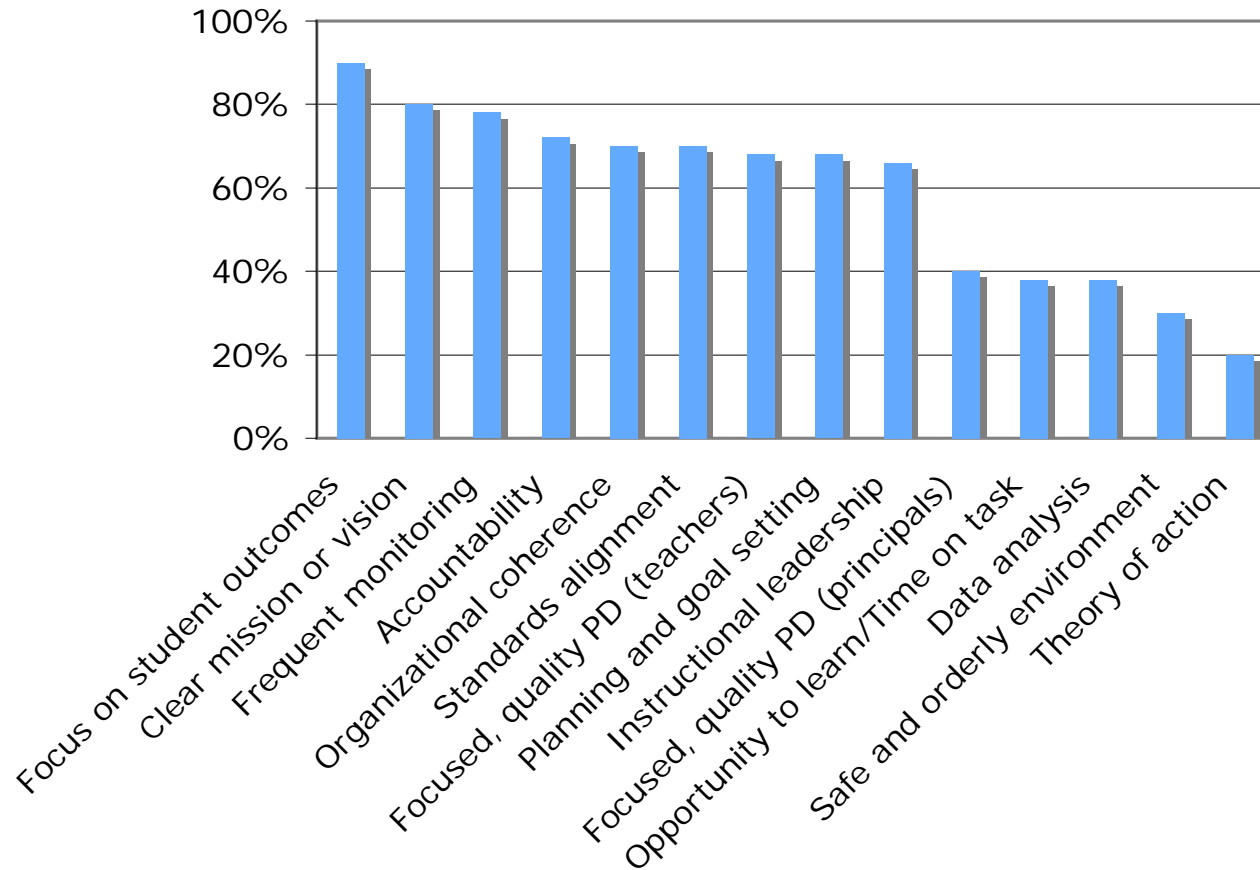
District Effectiveness Research:

Conceptual characteristics

Common correlates of effective districts and schools

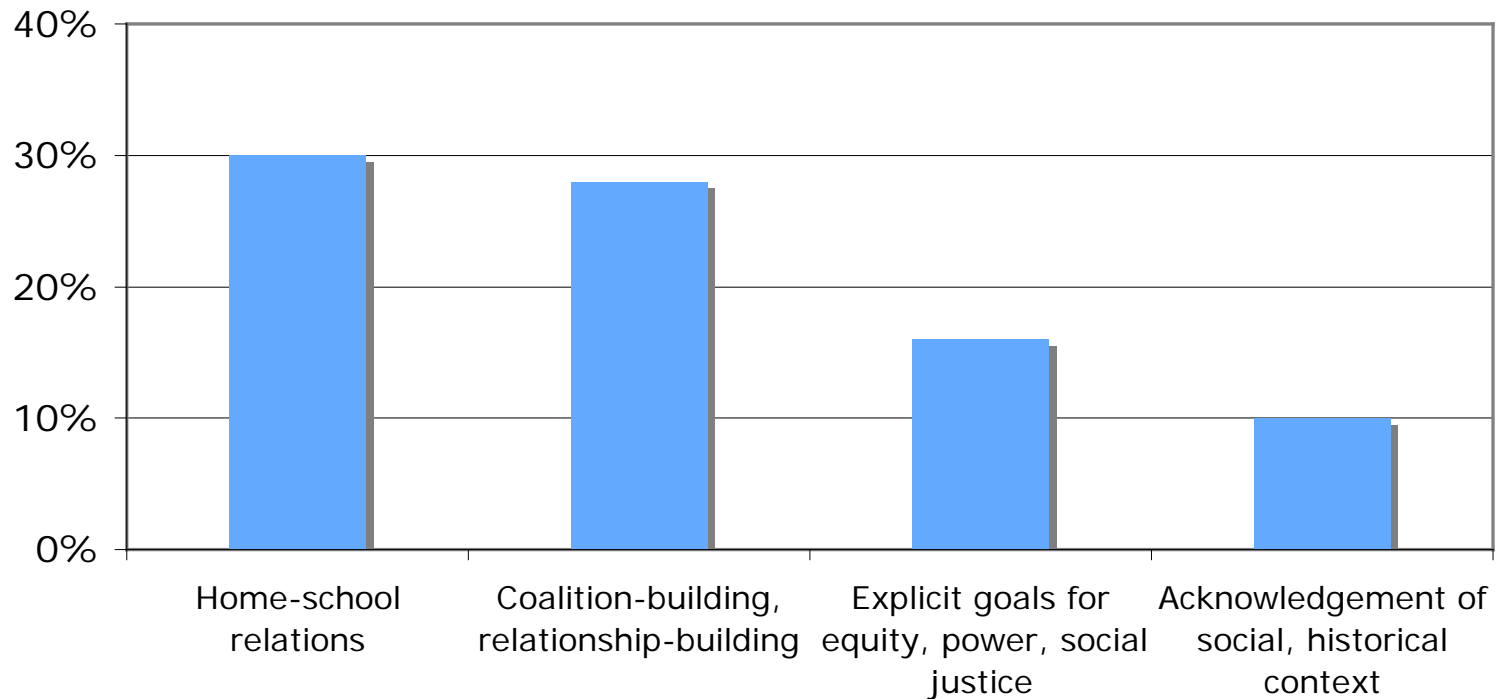


Technical correlates



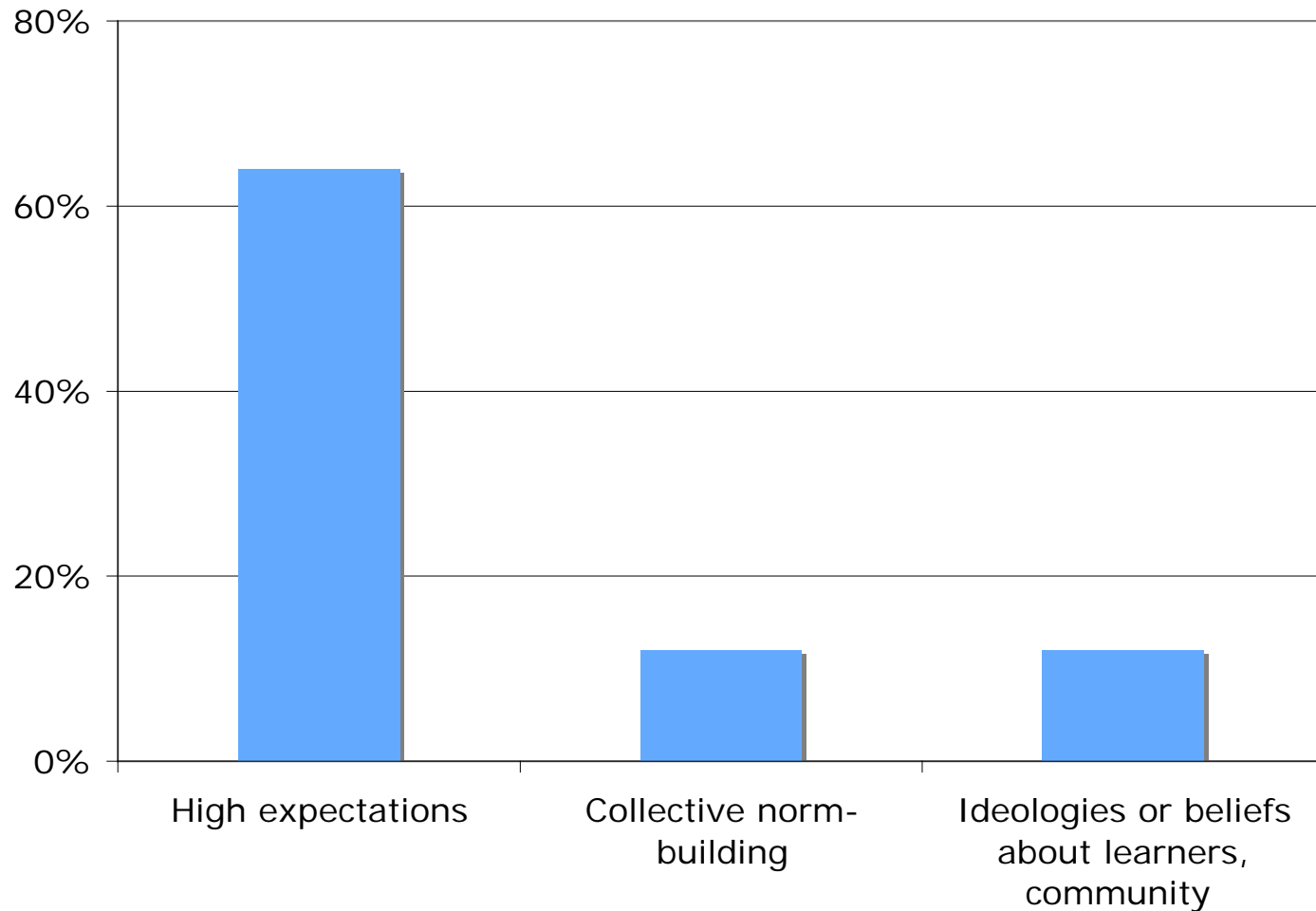
Most Common Correlates

Socio-political correlates



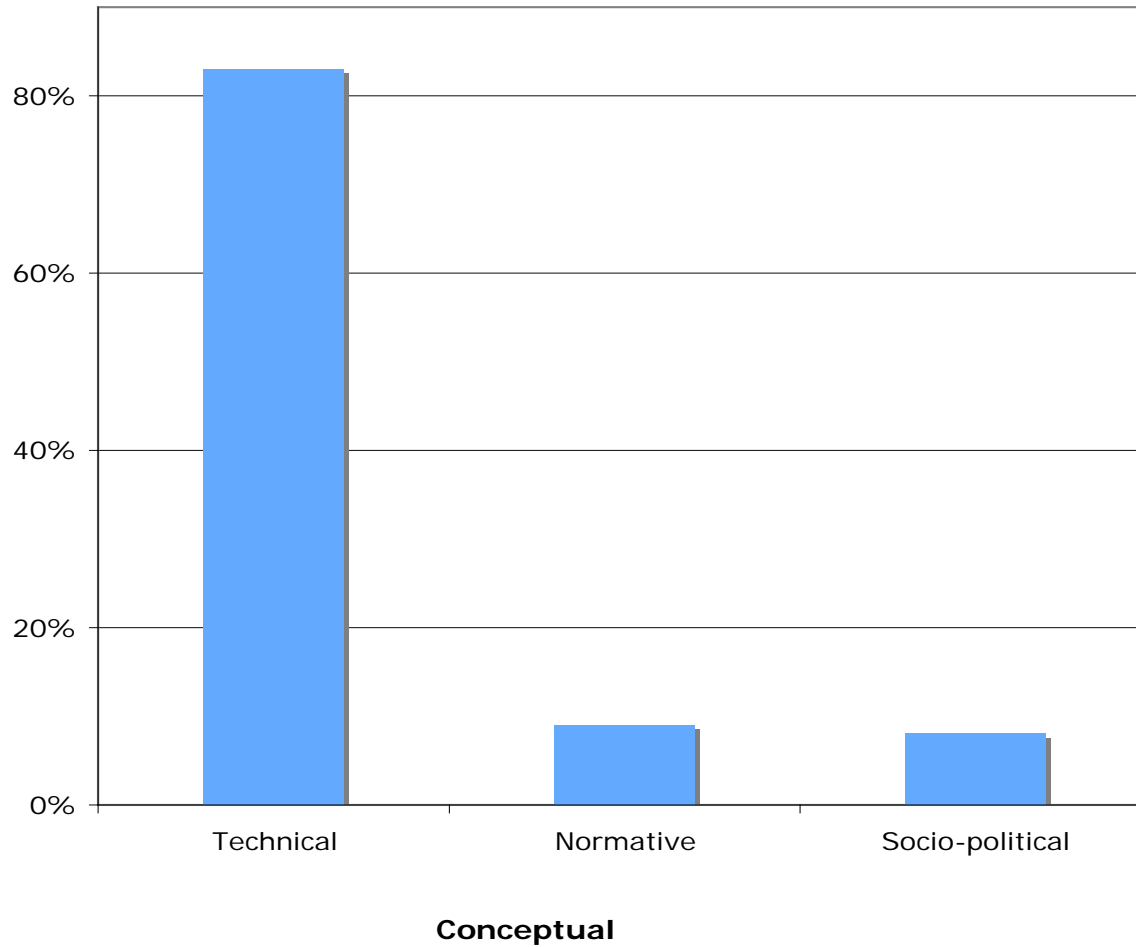
Most Common Correlates

Normative correlates



Most Common Correlates

Conceptual dimensions of DER



Under-theorized studies

- 26%: explicit theoretical frameworks or grounded theories
- Widespread use of “lists”
- Conventional conception of “school district”

Implications

- Hyper-rationalized models of district leadership
- Simplified notions about district improvement
- Decontextualized understandings of district capacity (poverty, race, systemic inequities)