REL Pacific Ask A REL Response

Educator Effectiveness, Teacher Preparation
August 2021

Question:

What research has been conducted on Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) to support growth in teacher effectiveness?

Response:

Following an established REL Pacific research protocol, we conducted a web-based search for resources related to Instructional Leadership Teams (see Methods section for search terms and resource selection criteria). We first prioritized studies in the Pacific and other Indigenous contexts for greater relevancy to our partners in the Pacific region; however, we included studies with more generalizable findings due to the limited amount of research available in these contexts.

References are listed in alphabetical order, not necessarily in order of relevance. Descriptions of the resources are quoted directly from the publication abstracts. We have not evaluated the quality of references and the resources provided in this response. We offer them only for your reference. Also, our search included the most commonly used research resources, but they are not comprehensive and other relevant references and resources may exist.

Research References

Chen, Y. G., Cheng, J. N., & Sato, M. (2017). Effects of school principals' leadership behaviors: A comparison between Taiwan and Japan. *Educational Sciences: Theory and Practice*, *17*(1), 145–173. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1130883

> *From the abstract*: "This study is a cross-national research in school leadership behaviors. Research subjects in this study include primary and secondary school teachers in Taiwan and northeastern Japan. By referring to 'School leadership of the future,' this study summarized that school leadership is working toward a team approach to instruction leadership, compound leadership, and diverse leadership. By referring to relevant literature, the researcher also determined pertinent criterion variables, including school effectiveness, teachers' job performance, and teachers' organizational commitment. The results obtained through collecting questionnaire copies and performing statistical analyses are as shown below. Firstly, in terms of the same leadership behavior's contribution to school effectiveness, the two countries revealed some differences. A team approach to instructional leadership is conducive to students' performance in Taiwan and teachers' professionalism in Japan. The two countries also showed differences in different leadership styles' effects in facilitating teachers' commitment. School principals in Taiwan should employ structure

and symbol-oriented leadership; whereas, school principals in Japan should employ a team approach to instructional leadership. As indicated by these results, Japan has a stronger team approach to leadership characteristic in comparison to Taiwan. As Japanese culture values team honor, employing a team approach to leadership could facilitate teachers' professionalism and commitment. Due to Taiwanese society's diverse cultures and difficulty in reaching a consensus, setting a clear goal and employing structure and symbol-oriented leadership with an established paradigm or a heroic story may better facilitate teachers' commitment."

Dexter, S., & Barton, E. A. (2021). The development and impact of team-based school technology leadership. *Journal of Educational Administration, 59*(3), 367–384. https://eric.ed.gov/?&id=EJ1297173

From the abstract: "Purpose: The authors tested the efficacy of a team-based instructional leadership intervention designed to increase middle school mathematics and science teachers' use of educational technologies for multiple representations of content to foster students' conceptual understandings. Each school's leadership team comprised an administrator, a technology instructional specialist role, and a mathematics and a science teacher leader. Design/methodology/approach: The authors tested the intervention in a quasi-experimental design with five treatment and five matched comparison schools. Participants included 48 leadership team members and 100 grade 6-8 teachers and their students. The authors analyzed data using two-level, nested multiple regressions to determine the effect of treatment on leaders' practices; leaders' practices on teachers' learning and integration; and teachers' learning and integration on students' learning. Leaders and teachers completed monthly self-reports of practices; students completed pre- and post-tests of knowledge in science and math. Findings: Significant treatment effects at the leader, teacher and student levels establish the efficacy of this team-based approach to school leadership of an educational technology integration innovation. Leaders at treatment schools participated in a significantly higher total frequency and a wider variety of leadership activities, with large effect sizes. Teachers participated in a significantly wider variety of learning modes focused on technology integration and integrated technology significantly more frequently, with a wider variety of technologies, all with moderate effect sizes. Students in treatment schools significantly outperformed students in comparison schools in terms of science achievement but not in mathematics. Research limitations/implications: The overall sample size is small and the approach to participant recruitment did not allow for randomized assignment to the treatment condition. The authors tested the influence of treatment on leader practices, on teacher practices, and on student achievement. Future work is needed to identify the core components of treatment that influence practice and investigate the causal relationships between specific leaders' practices, teacher practices and student achievement. Originality/value: This study establishes the efficacy of a replicable approach to developing team-based instructional leaders addressing educational technology. It contributes to the knowledge base about how district leaders and leadership educators might foster school leaders' instructional leadership, and more specifically technology leadership capacity."

Portin, B. S., Russell, F. A., Samuelson, C., & Knapp, M. S. (2013). Leading learning-focused teacher leadership in urban high schools. *Journal of School Leadership*, *23*(2), 220–252. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1045166; text available here: https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/105268461302300202

> *From the abstract*: "Drawing on findings from a national study of learning-focused leadership in challenging urban settings, this article examines the work of teacher leadership in urban high schools. In this context, a recently emerging cadre of nonsupervisory teacher leaders, working in collaboration with supervisory leaders, exercises a form of 'distributed instructional leadership,' creating new channels for instructional renewal. Extensive qualitative data from four high schools in different urban districts across the United States illuminate the nature of these teacher leaders' work in support of teaching and learning, the ways they and their supervisory counterparts worked as instructional leadership teams, and the role that they played in supporting teachers in classrooms within schools that face significant challenges. Study findings highlight the unique expertise necessary for these teacher leaders--including content expertise, pedagogical coaching skill, ability to build relational trust, and capacity to link the classroom with district- and school-determined learning improvement efforts. In conclusion, the article sketches the implications for reconfiguring supervisory leaders' work so that the efforts of all remain productively and persistently focused on learning improvement."

Saunders, W. M., Goldenberg, C. N., & Gallimore, R. (2009). Increasing achievement by focusing grade-level teams on improving classroom learning: A prospective, quasi-experimental study of Title I schools. *American Educational Research Journal, 46*(4), 1006–1033. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ883290

> *From the abstract*: "The authors conducted a quasi-experimental investigation of effects on achievement by grade-level teams focused on improving learning. For 2 years (Phase 1), principals-only training was provided. During the final 3 years (Phase 2), school-based training was provided for principals and teacher leaders on stabilizing team settings and using explicit protocols for grade-level meetings. Phase 1 produced no differences in achievement between experimental and comparable schools. During Phase 2, experimental group scores improved at a faster rate than at comparable schools and exhibited greater achievement growth over 3 years on state-mandated tests and an achievement index. Stable school-based settings, distributed leadership, and explicit protocols are key to effective teacher teams. The long-term sustainability of teacher teams depends on coherent and aligned district policies and practices."

Stosich, E. L., Bocala, C., & Forman, M. (2018). Building coherence for instructional improvement through professional development: A design-based implementation research study. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, *46*(5), 864–880. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1187312

> *From the abstract*: "This study explores how six school leadership teams in a rural district in California responded to professional development (PD) designed to strengthen leadership practices and organizational conditions in schools for improving teaching and learning. Specifically, the PD was intended to address the problem of practice identified by the schools: teachers needed to learn

to work in new ways to support students in meeting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Researchers used design-based implementation research (DBIR) to understand the connection between the design and implementation of the PD model and the impact on participating schools. Findings suggest that in developing PD programs, three challenges need to be addressed in designing experiences for educators that strengthen their capabilities to lead instructional improvement: maintaining the connection between organizational processes and instructional practice; approaching school leadership team collaboration as joint work; and utilizing a developmental approach to improvement. The article concludes by exploring the potential of DBIR for designing and refining models for school leaders' professional learning."

Stosich, E. L. (2020). Central office leadership for instructional improvement: Developing collaborative leadership among principals and instructional leadership team members. *Teachers College Record*, *122*(9). https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1275763

From the abstract: "Background: This study addresses the nexus of two significant yet under-researched areas of instructional leadership: the role of central office administrators in developing principals as instructional leaders and the potential for the instructional leadership team (ILT) to serve as a structure for supporting administrators and teachers in working collaboratively to improve instruction and student learning in their schools. Purpose: Specifically, this study examines the efforts of principal supervisors--central office administrators responsible for supporting and evaluating principals--who aimed to develop instructional leadership broadly in high-poverty high schools by leading professional learning opportunities for principals and members of their ILTs. Participants: Participants included principals and ILT members (e.g., assistant principals, teachers) in three high-poverty high schools in the same urban district and the three principal supervisors responsible for supporting them. Research Design: Drawing on 36 interviews and approximately 80 hours of observation of ILT meetings and professional learning opportunities, the present study uses in-depth case studies of three focus schools to identify the specific practices principal supervisors use to influence the work of principals and ILTs. Findings: The findings suggest that principal supervisors contributed to ILTs' increased focus on instruction and encouraged principals to share leadership with teachers. Principals and ILT members viewed the support of principal supervisors as most helpful when they engaged in explicit teaching about the purpose and practices of ILTs, approached their work with principals and ILTs as joint work, and shared specific models that could be integrated into ILT meetings. Conclusions: The practices used by principal supervisors represented a significant shift in the role of central office administrators toward a focus on teaching as opposed to a more traditional focus on supervision."

Thessin, R. A., Shirrell, M., & Richardson, T. (2020). Principal supervisors interact with leadership teams in high needs schools? *Planning and Changing*, *49*(3/4), 173–201. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1284181

From the abstract: "Instructional leadership teams (ILTs) advance school improvement by building the capacity of school-based leaders to lead improvement work. The role of central office administrators, and particularly of principal supervisors, supporting the learning and development of ILTs, however, is relatively unknown. This mixed methods study explored the degree and focus of

principal supervisors' interactions with ILTs in high needs schools and considered whether these interactions are related to the ILT members' perceptions of the leadership and organizational conditions for school improvement. Findings revealed that a greater degree of interaction between the principal supervisor and the ILT was related to more positive perceptions of the school's leadership and organizational conditions for improvement. Further, principal supervisors' interactions with ILTs largely fell within the constructs of leadership for learning, professional development, and support for teams. These findings have implications for principal supervisor preparation and expectations for how supervisors enact and fulfill their roles."

Weiner, J. M. (2014). Disabling conditions: Investigating instructional leadership teams in action. *Journal of Educational Change*, *15*(3), 253–280. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1038156

From the abstract: "This study investigated why and how principals selected members for their instructional leadership team (ILT) and how this selection criteria and process may have impacted team members' understandings of, and behaviors on, the team. Qualitative methods, specifically interviews and observations, were used to explore team members' perceptions regarding the team's purpose, function, and selection criteria as well as how these perceptions seemed to impact team members' behaviors. Data were collected for a period of 8 months during the 2011–2012 school year from ILT in four, in-district charter schools. Results suggest that principals had difficulty articulating their teams' purposes and functions, with the latter remaining primarily informational or consultative; members were not given decision-making authority. Additionally, when selecting team members, principals prioritized broad representation of teacher groups over other criteria. This focus on role representation above expertise, coupled with teachers' tendencies to embrace traditional professional norms, limited ILT members' abilities to effectively work together to lead instructional reform."

Weiner, J. M. (2016). Under my thumb: Principals' difficulty releasing decision-making to their instructional leadership team. *Journal of School Leadership*, *26*(2), 334–364. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=EJ1277611

From the abstract: "This study investigates whether and how principals implementing Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) were able to share decision-making authority with team members and how team members perceived this authority. Having interviewed and observed ILT members in four, in-district charter schools in a large northeastern city I find that principals had great difficultly releasing authority to team members and deployed a variety of 'moves' to keep control over decision-making. Team members also appeared to perceive their authority as subordinate to the principal and embraced a hierarchical model of school leadership with an emphasis on formal authority and autocratic decision-making."

Additional Resources to Consult

Austin, S., Anderson-Davis, D., Graham, J., & White, M. (2018). Developing a shared vision is key to success. *Principal Leadership Issue, 19.* National Association of Secondary School Principals. https://www.nassp.org/publication/principal-leadership/volume-19-2018-2019/principal-leadership-september-2018/instructional-leadership-teams-to-the-rescue/

Stricker, J. (2019). *Bringing intentionality to instructional leadership teams*. ASCD. https://www.ascd.org/el/articles/bringing-intentionality-to-instructional-leadership-teams

Methods

Keywords and Search Strings

The following keywords and search strings were used to search the reference databases and other sources:

- "Instructional Leadership Team" NOT "Dissertations & Theses"

Databases and Resources

We searched ERIC, a free online library of more than 1.6 million citations of education research sponsored by the Institute of Education Sciences, for relevant resources. Additionally, we searched the What Works Clearinghouse (WWC) database.

Reference Search and Selection Criteria

REL Pacific searched ERIC and the WWC database for studies that were published in English-language peer-reviewed research journals within the last 15 years. Sources included in this document were last accessed in August 2021.

REL Pacific prioritized documents that are accessible online and publicly available, and prioritized references that provide practical information based on peer-reviewed research for the education consultants who requested this Ask A REL.[1] For questions with small or nonexistent research bases, we may rely on, for example, white papers, guides, reviews in non-peer-reviewed journals, interviews with content specialists, and organization websites. Additional methodological priorities/considerations given in the review and selection of the references were:

- Study types—randomized control trials, quasi experiments, surveys, descriptive data analyses, literature reviews, etc.
- Target population, sample size, study duration, etc.
- Limitations, generalizability of the findings and conclusions, etc.

[1] This memorandum is one in a series of quick-turnaround responses to specific questions posed by education stakeholders in the Pacific Region (American Samoa, the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, Guam, Hawai'i, the Republic of the Marshall Islands, and the Republic of Palau), which is served by the Regional Educational Laboratory (REL Pacific) at McREL International. This memorandum was prepared by REL Pacific under a contract with the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES), Contract ED-IES-17-C-0010, administered by McREL International. Its content does not necessarily reflect the views or policies of IES or the U.S. Department of Education, nor does mention of trade names, commercial products, or organizations imply endorsement by the U.S. Government.