

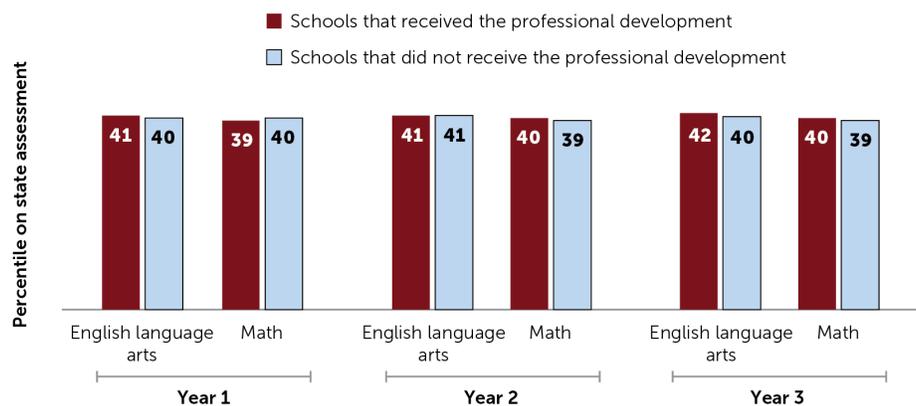
# The Effects of a Principal Professional Development Program Focused on Instructional Leadership

Helping principals improve their leadership practices is a common use of federal funds and one way to improve instruction and student achievement.<sup>1</sup> This study sought to better understand the effectiveness of an intensive principal professional development program focused primarily on helping principals conduct structured observations of teachers' classroom instruction and provide targeted feedback based on those observations. One hundred elementary schools participated in the study, with half randomly assigned to receive the program. The study compared student achievement and teachers' perceptions of principals' practices in schools that received the professional development program with those that did not. The results provide evidence about the program's effectiveness and which principal practices are associated with student achievement.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Principals' practices did not change in ways intended by the program.** Although the program was implemented as planned, principals did not increase the number of times they observed teachers. In fact, teachers whose principals received the professional development reported receiving less frequent instructional support and feedback than teachers whose principals did not receive the professional development. In addition, teachers whose principals received the program were no more likely to report positive perceptions of the usefulness of the feedback provided.
- **The program did not improve students' achievement.** On average, students had similar achievement in English language arts and math whether they were in schools that received the principal professional development or not (Exhibit 1). Students in each group scored near the 40th percentile on their state assessments in each subject.

Exhibit 1. Effect of the study's principal professional development program on student achievement



Although the program as a whole was not effective on average, the program's effects on certain principal practices were positively associated with its

effects on student achievement. This suggests potential avenues for improving the program tested in this study and developing others. The program's effects on principals' competence in providing instructional support, the frequency of feedback and support, and the usefulness of teachers' interactions with principals about instruction were positively associated with its effects on student achievement in math. Effects on the first two practices were also positively associated with effects on English language arts achievement. These findings provide suggestive evidence that helping principals increase the quality and use of these leadership practices may provide new ways to support classroom teachers and improve outcomes for students.

<sup>1</sup> U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Findings from the 2014–2015 Survey on the Use of Funds Under Title II, Part A*. Retrieved from <https://www2.ed.gov/programs/teacherqual/learport.pdf>