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Executive Summary

Why was this study conducted? In 2015-16, a state legislative Task Force on School Leadership examined state needs related to K-12 school leadership in Maine and identified many challenges (2016). Following on the work and final report of the Task Force, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs requested the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) to conduct a study to learn more about how school districts in Maine support the development of teacher leaders and new principals. That study, conducted in fall 2016, collected data through statewide surveys of district and school administrators and compared their views about supervision practices and school leadership (Mette, Fairman, & Dagistan Terzi, 2017). In the following year, the legislature asked MEPRI to examine innovative models of school leadership through case studies of a few districts in Maine. This report presents the findings of that study, conducted over the 2017-18 school year. Two models were selected for investigation: one being a systems-based approach used by a larger school district to support leadership development and the other a model of teacher-led schools that operate within school district structures.

Part I. Case Study of a Systems-Based Approach to Leadership Development: One example of an innovative approach to developing and supporting school leadership and teacher leadership described in this report is a case study of the Bangor School Department (BSD). This district is the third largest school district in Maine and, as a larger district, uses a systems-based approach to coordinate school improvement and to encourage teachers to engage in leadership work. The district has also developed a partnership with the University of Maine, the Bangor Educational Leadership Academy (BELA), with the purpose of developing a school leadership pipeline. The combined strategies of this district help to address the workforce development need for school leaders.

Nine interviews with district administrators, principals, and teachers were conducted in fall 2017. Interviews were recorded, transcribed and analyzed qualitatively to identify themes. Three broad research questions guided the inquiry for this case study:

1. How and in what ways does a systems-based approach support leadership development?
2. How and in what ways does teacher leadership help innovate practices in a large school district in Maine?
3. How and in what ways might school-university partnerships support the development of leadership pipeline programs?

What did we learn from the BSD Case Study? The BSD supports and develops school leadership in a variety of ways. These strategies are described within three broad categories in the next section.

Using a Systems-Based Approach to Leadership Development. The BSD pursues different strategies through a systems-based approach to develop the human capital and leadership capacity across schools in the district. One strategy is the intentional balancing of the workforce. Broadly speaking, the district aims to have approximately 1/3 of teaching personnel (and personnel in other job roles) in each of the three career stages (veteran, mid-career, and novice). Sometimes the district will reassign teachers to different schools in the district to ensure that grad-level teams have a balance in teaching experience. The more veteran teachers and personnel provide the historical and organizational knowledge that more recent hires may lack. Further, mid-career and veteran teachers may be more ready to take on informal and formal leadership opportunities than novice teachers. The capacity for leadership is supported with adequate balancing of personnel to ensure there are sufficient numbers of teachers with the necessary experience and expertise to lead school improvement efforts.

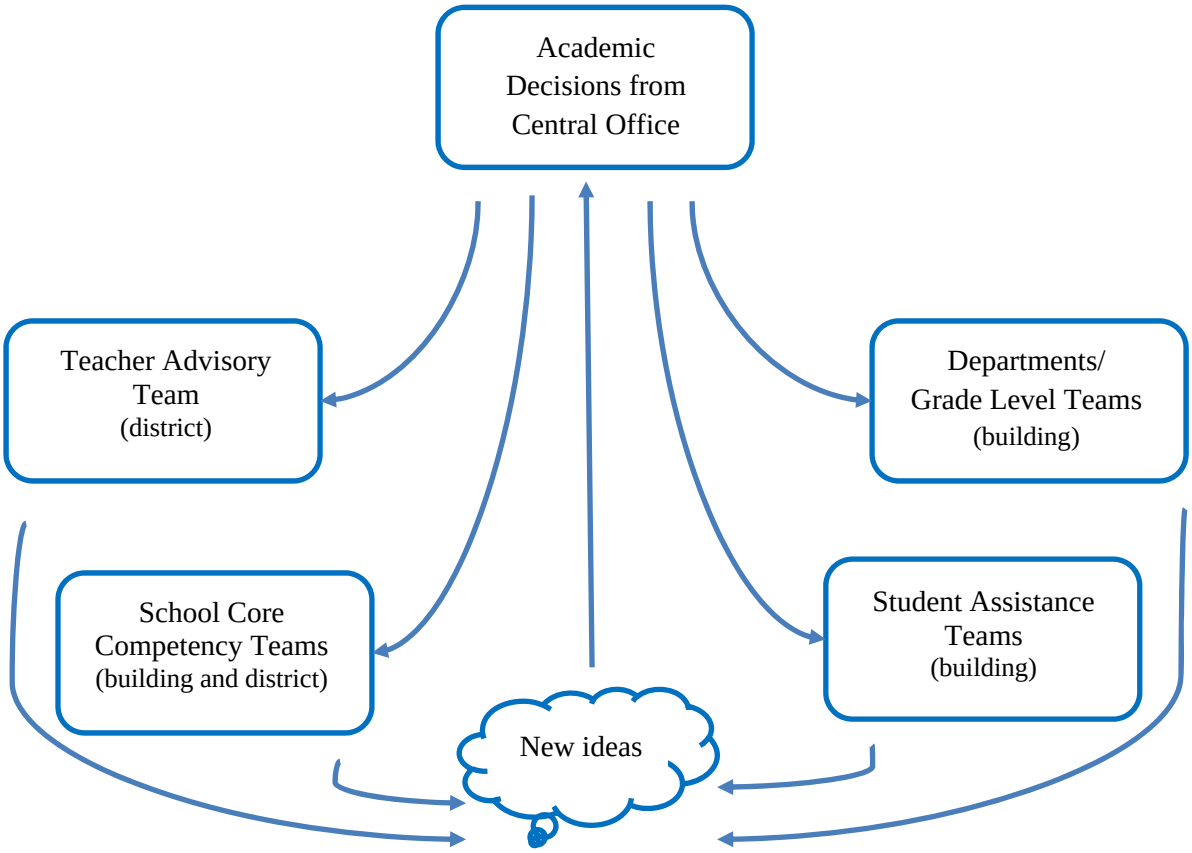
Another strategy to support leadership development is the coordinated process of mentoring novice teachers by mid-career and veteran teachers, which is another way the mentoring teachers provide important leadership. The BSD has a district-wide certification committee and implemented peer-to-peer supervision of instruction as one way that mentoring teachers offer formative feedback to more novice teachers. Mentors across the district also share ideas about lesson planning, pacing, and classroom management that they share with their mentees.

A third strategy that supports leadership development is the district practice of communicating goals for improving specific areas of student achievement, and encouraging teachers to share their ideas for ways to address the gaps. This happens through many different types of teacher and school-level teams that provide ideas and feedback to district administrators. In this way, teachers can step forward to help lead and work on teams that examine student data, select goals and professional development, or other initiatives to improve student learning.

At the high school level, BSD utilizes teacher leaders to serve as teacher evaluators, something that occurs in only 12% of schools across Maine (Fairman & Mette, 2017). Due to more departmentalized structures within secondary grades, teacher leaders in BSD who serve in department head roles are trained to serve as evaluators of other teachers. This serves as an opportunity to not only to reduce a huge time commitment for principals or assistant principals, but it also allows aspiring leaders to serve in quasi-administrative roles and “try on leadership”.

The systems-based approach to leadership reflected in the BSD case study is captured in Figure 1 below. This figure shows how the district uses a mix of both “top-down” and “bottom-up” approaches to communication and initiation of ideas to broaden the scope of engagement in development of initiatives to address district-wide needs.

Figure 1: *Systems-Based Approach to Leadership*



Relying on Instructional Leadership from the Trenches. The BSD has created innovative models of school leadership by providing instructional leadership opportunities for teachers throughout the district. These opportunities value the instructional expertise of teachers to help drive improvement efforts and lead to changes in instructional practices throughout the district. Instructional leadership occurs through the district-wide use of literacy coaches who work with classroom teachers in K-3 and grade 4-5 school buildings. Some teachers are also engaged in training to serve as math coaches.

Further, the district encourages "action research" efforts at the classroom level. Individual teachers and teams of teachers often identify effective practices that they pilot and share more broadly in their school or district-wide, helping to lead professional development to support new practices. For example, one teacher's action research to pilot the running records in math led to a broader dissemination of this practice, to help students struggling to meet district-wide instructional goals.

The BSD also supports teachers' work on curriculum development and instructional innovations through stipends for summer work. Teachers submit proposals describing what they would like to do. Approved proposals allow teachers time and financial support to lead improvement efforts with their colleagues and gain valuable leadership experience at the same time.

A final example of how BSD has created innovative models of teacher leadership, particularly capitalizing on instructional leadership, is the Teacher Academy the district holds each August. Teachers examine improvement goals identified through the Administrative Academy, and begin to plan strategies to adjust practices to better meet district-wide benchmarks. This planning helps to guide work during the school year, and provides a system-wide approach to address gaps in achievement.

Developing Leadership Pipeline Programs through a School-University Partnership. Another innovative aspect of leadership development in BSD is the creation of a school-university partnership called the Bangor Educational Leadership Academy (BELA). The goal of this collaborative effort was to develop the first leadership development pipeline in the State of Maine. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) provides the framework for the partnership, and outlines how collaboration will happen. Some of the key features of the agreement are the priority to communicate and coordinate graduate coursework and other professional development to meet the unique needs of the district, and to offer some professional development on site in schools. The district provides guest lecturers and both parties evaluate how the partnership is working at the end of the year. One of the most innovative aspects of BELA was the ability for a school-university partnership to model how workforce development issues could be addressed through a collaborative partnership. In Maine, there is a pressing need for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to work together to address an aging education workforce, as well as a lack of qualified applicants for administrative positions.

Part II: Case Studies of Two Teacher-Led Schools: Another example of innovative practice to support and develop school leadership and teacher leadership was found with two Maine schools that have implemented a teacher-led school model. Howard Reiche Elementary School, a high-poverty K-5 school within the largest school district in Maine (Portland Public Schools), serves a highly diverse and mobile student body. Athens Community School, a PreK-grade 8 school is a very small, rural school that is part of AOS 94 but retains its own local school board. Both schools are the only two schools in Maine to be entirely led by teachers, some of whom teach part time and some of whom teach full time in the classroom. A total of 22 interviews were conducted during site visits throughout the 2017-18 school year with district administrators, lead teachers, classroom teachers, and other staff members. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes. Teacher-led committee meetings were observed and documents were collected. The following broad research questions framed this inquiry:

- What factors motivated each school to reorganize with a teacher-led model?
- What changes did each school make in their organizational and governance structure and how are decisions made?
- What efforts have teachers initiated in these schools to address the needs of their students and families?
- What benefits and positive impacts do teachers, staff, and district administrators perceive with a teacher-led school model?
- What challenges and less positive consequences do these schools perceive with this model?
- What advice do these schools have for other schools considering a teacher-led model?

What did we learn from the Reiche and Athens Case Studies? While there were some differences in how the two schools implemented a teacher-led model and the challenges they face, overall, the findings were highly consistent for the two schools. Findings described for these two cases capture the "story" of how and why the schools implemented a teacher-led model, the type of efforts teachers initiated, and perceptions of positive impacts and challenges.

Factors Leading to Development. Reiche and Athens teachers were motivated to investigate alternative school leadership models out of frustration with prior principal leadership styles and a high turnover with principals that created upheaval for teachers. Both schools sought more stability and the ability to continue with efforts they felt were working. Teachers and other staff investigated the teacher-led school model and felt that approach would increase teacher voice into school decisions. Reiche piloted this model in 2011-12 and Athens followed in 2015-16.

Governance Structure of Teacher-Led Schools. Both schools took a year of exploration to investigate the teacher-led school leadership model and develop a new vision for their schools. Reiche teachers reorganized their school after the teacher-led Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, which also serves low-income minority students. Athens visited Reiche and borrowed from Reiche's governance structure. In both schools, teachers apply to be a "lead" teacher, with the idea that different teachers will rotate in as leads on a staggered basis. Three lead teachers receive stipends and divide the administrative workload based on interest and areas of expertise. All lead teachers continue to teach at least half time; at Athens, all three lead teachers are full-time classroom teachers.

Both schools instituted governance committees for decision-making related to instruction and curriculum, professional development, school climate, and a steering committee to evaluate how the model is working through staff surveys. In addition, Reiche also implemented a committee for student enrichment and a leadership committee composed of representatives of the other governance committees and stakeholders. All committees are led by teachers or other staff. Ideas to address needs in the school percolate up from committees to the leadership committee

and also move from the leadership committee back down to the appropriate committee at Reiche. Teachers have multiple opportunities to share input into decisions, take the lead in new initiatives, and vote to approve school-wide actions. Teachers at Reiche help to lead professional development and also observe colleagues for professional feedback. Overall, the leadership structure became more distributed and the decision-making process had broader involvement of all members of the school after the shift to a teacher-led model.

Teacher-Initiated School Improvement Efforts. Teachers at Reiche and Athens described many ways they initiated important changes to address the social, emotional, physical health, safety and school climate, and academic needs of their students. Some examples of these initiatives at Athens included:

- Connecting with a local agency to bring in a school counselor part time;
- Rewriting the health curriculum to address gaps in health education;
- Writing a grant to obtain funding to support student health and exercise initiatives
- Collaborating with the community and PTO to raise funds for a new preschool playground;
- Writing a grant to obtain funding for enrichment in the arts;
- Developing gifted and talented programming within classrooms and obtaining school board approval; and
- Developing multiple events and interventions to improve student behavior and safety on school buses.

Some of the teacher-led initiatives at Reiche included:

- Revising the K-3 science curriculum and incorporating community gardens in collaboration with the PTO;
- Implementing the practice of morning meetings with students as part of a responsive classroom approach and offering professional development to staff on that practice;
- Strengthening the practice of formative feedback in literacy and math within the classroom through professional development and setting individual, professional improvement goals around that practice;
- Asking each governance committee to implement an action research project where data are examined to inform decisions and providing professional development on data use;
- Implementing grade-level teams and providing professional development on collaboration;
- Involving all governance committees in developing the school's Title 1 plan; and
- Implementing the "Second Step" curriculum to address social/ emotional needs of students, and helping students learn to manage their emotions.

Perceptions of Positive Impacts. In the interviews, all participants unanimously agreed that implementing a teacher-led school leadership model requires more commitment and time on the part of all teachers in the school. However, they perceived many important positive

outcomes from the model which they believed outweighed the challenges. The positive outcomes included:

- Having more voice or input into decisions, feeling empowered
- Increased transparency in decision-making
- Having more ownership or collective responsibility for the school
- Ability to take initiative or having agency to address gaps for students
- More opportunities for teachers and staff to engage in leadership
- More continuity in school improvement
- Value of having a principal who is also teaching
- Improved school culture or climate

Perceptions of Challenges. Participants also described some continuing challenges with the implementation of a teacher-led model of school leadership:

- Longer days, more work required
- Staff may need to handle more on their own
- Learning curve for all
- Needing full commitment from staff and a good fit
- Establishing an effective communications strategy
- Need to slow things down for shared decision making
- Increased workload for district administrators
- Traditional policies and structures don't fit

What did we conclude overall from this study? This report describes two approaches to developing and supporting school leadership that are innovative. There are some similarities between the two approaches, but also some differences. The BSD case represents a systems-based approach which relies on coordinated leadership and communication from the district's central office, but also encourages "bottom up" input, feedback and innovation from the school and classroom level. The two cases describing teacher-led schools represent more of a site-based approach to school leadership through the collective work of all teachers in the school. Another difference in the two approaches are the underlying goals or purpose of the innovations. In the BSD case, a more centralized approach allows a larger school district to establish common goals, practices, and coherent policies and initiatives for greater consistency across the many schools within the district system. In the teacher-led schools, two driving goals of leadership innovation were to give teachers within the schools greater "voice" and control over school-level decisions and improvement efforts through a distributed leadership model, and to avoid the instability caused by high turnover in principals.

Both approaches also have striking similarities. Both the systems-based and site-based approaches created new opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles and work, and to initiate innovative practices. In the BSD case, teachers work on grade-level teams, school-wide teams, and represent their schools on district-wide teams and academies. In the teacher-led

schools, new governance committees composed and led by teachers and other staff provide a structure for teachers to initiate ideas, plan improvement action, vet and approve proposals. In both the BSD and the teacher-led schools, teachers pilot and refine new instructional practices and revise curricula for the purpose of improving student learning and achievement. And in both the systems-based case and the teacher-led schools, teachers are involved in peer observation and/or evaluation work, which had formerly been the responsibility of the school principal. Further, teachers are stepping up to help lead professional development for their colleagues in both the BSD and the teacher-led schools. Beyond the opportunity to take on leadership roles, teachers also have supports and opportunities to develop new leadership skills through their collaborative work with other teachers and administrators on teams and committees, and through leading professional development. The district-university partnership established by BELA in the BSD case provides an important framework of graduate coursework to provide the foundation aspiring school leaders will need.

It should also be pointed out that there were some important differences in the approach to school improvement and leadership between the two teacher-led schools. Reiche used a leadership team and pursued a more coordinated approach to align all initiatives with the school mission and vision and the identified needs of students and teachers from data, and the school strategically provided on-going professional development to support the kinds of instructional improvements or other changes needed. In this way, Reiche's approach bore some resemblance to the well-coordinated and aligned strategies found in the BSD case.

Clearly, the systems-based approach to innovation and the teacher-led school model both support the development of and capacity for school leadership through the many ways teachers are learning about and engaging in leading important work in their schools. Some teachers may decide to step into more traditional administrative roles, while others will be content to lead from the classroom. What is important is that in both approaches, teachers have substantive opportunities for teachers to initiate ideas and gain school-wide and district support for innovative practices that will improve their schools and support their students.

What are some potential implications for education policy and practice?

The case studies presented in this report have potential implications for both policy and for practice. We highlight some of these here:

Implications for Policy:

- Districts that seek to encourage innovation from the classroom level may need to develop policies that encourage and allow some risk-taking and piloting of new practices, as well as policies that reward educators' efforts to engage in such efforts;
- Local school districts may find it beneficial to establish contractual agreements that allow teachers to move from teaching positions to administrative positions and back to teaching positions again, without losing their seniority, to encourage more teachers to "try on" administrative leadership roles;

- School districts and universities may find mutual benefits in establishing closer collaborations to plan professional development and graduate degree programs that better serve the particular needs of districts, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is an instrument that can provide a framework for such partnerships;
- Some local, state and federal policies and reporting forms may need revision to recognize alternative school leadership models, such as the teacher-led model where teachers, instead of principals, act as the chief administrators for their schools and sign forms on behalf of their schools;
- Districts with teacher-led schools may need to establish policies or contractual agreements that allow teachers to move to other schools in the district if they do not wish to teach in a teacher-led school; and
- Districts may need to identify additional funding to create sufficient release time from teaching for the lead teachers to manage the administrative workload while still teaching part-time, and funding may be needed for teacher stipends for both lead teachers and other staff who engage in committee work.

Implications for Practice:

- Districts and schools seeking to encourage more teachers to engage in leadership work, such as curriculum development, leading professional development, or chairing data teams to identify student achievement gaps, may need to budget for stipends to support this work, particularly work during the summer;
- Districts that seek to encourage innovation from the classroom level may need to develop structures or practices, such as school-wide teams, district-wide meetings or administrative walkthroughs that purposefully seek to identify new ideas that work and ways to disseminate effective practices more broadly;
- Schools that implement teacher-led school models need to work in close partnership with their district leadership, teachers' association, school boards, and parents to obtain strong support from all levels and maintain open communication at every step
- Districts may need to find ways to remove barriers to allow lead teachers to more fully participate in district-wide meetings, and to smooth the way for their acceptance among other school heads in the district;
- Districts with lead teachers could establish a broader system of mentoring to help lead teachers connect with experienced principals to tap their expertise and guidance with questions;
- Teacher-led schools may benefit by partnering with more established teacher-led schools to learn what works; and
- Teachers who are contemplating the idea of moving into a lead teacher position may need active encouragement to begin coursework ahead of time to prepare for that role.

Exploring Innovative Models for School Leadership in Maine

Introduction

In 2015-16, a state legislative Task Force on School Leadership examined state needs related to K-12 school leadership in Maine and identified many challenges (2016). Following on the work and final report of the Task Force, the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs requested the Maine Education Policy Research Institute (MEPRI) to conduct a study to learn more about how school districts in Maine support the development of teacher leaders and new principals. That study, conducted in fall 2016, collected data through statewide surveys of district and school administrators and compared their views about supervision practices and school leadership (Mette, Fairman, & Dagistan Terzi, 2017). In the following year, the legislature asked MEPRI to examine innovative models of school leadership through case studies of a few districts in Maine. This report presents the findings of that study, conducted over the 2017-18 school year. Two models were selected for investigation: one being a systems-based approach used by a larger school district to support leadership development and the other a model of teacher-led schools that operate within school district structures.

Because the two models are distinctly different, we present each separately in this report, preceded by a brief overview of relevant research literature and a description of the research methods used. Part I of the findings section presents a systems-based approach that considers how a large school district in Maine things about recruiting, developing, and retaining school leadership. The Bangor School Department (BSD) has implemented a variety of formal and informal teacher leadership structures within their district, but also utilizes a leadership pipeline development model supported by a school-university partnership with the University of Maine. Part II focuses on the teacher-led school model and describes how this school governance model was implemented in two very different public schools and community settings. While this report provides a closer look at two models of developing and supporting school leadership capacity, and opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership, other innovative models may exist or may be in the early stages of development elsewhere in Maine.

Part I. Case Study of a Systems-Based Approach to Leadership Development

The Bangor School Department (BSD) is the third largest school district in the State of Maine, and the largest school district in Maine north of the Portland Metro area (MDOE, 2017a). During the 2016-2017 school year, BSD had a total student enrollment of just over 3,700 PK-12 students. Compared to national statistics, BSD would be considered a medium-sized school district with a relatively low percentage of minority students (USDOE, 2014). That said, BSD had 54% students who qualified for free or reduced lunch and had 14% minority students, both higher than the averages for the State of Maine (MDOE, 2017b). Bangor also scored higher than 84% of all other school districts in the state in language arts as well as 87% of all other school

districts in the state in math (MDOE, 2017b). Being one of the largest school districts in the state, as well as a district that focuses on producing high levels of student achievement, requires what the superintendent, Dr. Betsy Webb, has called a systems-based approach to leadership development.

A systems-based approach to leadership is based on the notion of centralized leadership to help address various organizational components of complex challenges (Shaked & Schechter, 2017), which in public school systems often includes the ability to maintain a high level of organizational quality (including but not limited to developing future leaders, maintaining high levels of student achievement, and encouraging teacher leadership throughout a large school district). This type of strategic planning often focuses on setting measurable goals which in turn influence outcomes (Grammatikopoulos, 2012), however systems-based approaches to organizational development have typically existed in business settings and have been relatively ignored by education systems (Arndt, 2006). As such, school districts can benefit greatly from a centralized approach to communicate performance expectations, areas of vulnerability, the current state of a school system, and possible risks to an educational organization (Haimes, 2009). In a school system like BSD, these include messages from the central office about expectations around the continual focus on academic achievement (and the teacher leader opportunities as a result of the communicated focus), as well as formal leadership development through a leadership pipeline approach.

As detailed, in a large school district like BSD, centralized messages about district development is important. However, there is also a need to empower employees to drive organizational learning, question practices and ways of thinking, and work collectively to improve the school system (Senge, 1990). These types of school systems require both teachers and administrators to work together to analyze and improve upon instructional practices to best meet the needs of students that are served (Fullan, 2007). In BSD, these types of informal teacher leadership focus on providing student assistance in social, emotional, and personal development in a systematic fashion, where input from teacher leaders flows from the bottom up to the district level, information is processed and decisions are made, and then information flows back down throughout the entire district in a systematic fashion.

This part of the report describes how BSD uses a systems-based approach to developing an innovative school leadership model. Larger, more departmentalized school districts, like BSD, often require a systematic approach to organizational development to ensure leadership is continually developed, retained, and promoted. As seen with BSD, this is accomplished through internal structures as well as through a relatively new school-university partnership with the University of Maine called the Bangor Educational Leadership Academy (BELA). Not only does this allow for aspiring school leaders to “try on” various leadership roles, but it also allows practitioners and academics to work together to close the theory-practice gap through consistent planning between district and university personal to ensure quality leadership development (Mette & Webb, forthcoming).

Research Methods

This inquiry employed a single case study methodology. The goal was to examine how one of the largest school districts in Maine approaches leadership development, both internally and through a school-university collaboration. Additionally, the intent was to describe how large school districts in Maine might need to think systematically about leadership development in innovate ways that help transform educational leadership preparation throughout the state. As such, the following research questions guided the analysis of the BSD case study:

4. How and in what ways does a systems-based approach support leadership development?
5. How and in what ways does teacher leadership help innovate practices in a large school district in Maine?
6. How and in what ways might school-university partnerships support the development of leadership pipeline programs?

Participants were selected at the district, building, and classroom level in order to better understand innovative approaches to leadership development in BSD. Two central office administrators (superintendent and assistant superintendent), three building principals, and four teacher leaders from various buildings were selected, for a total of nine participants interviewed for the case study. These interviews allowed participants to share their perspectives and experiences (Creswell & Poth, 2017), specifically about leadership development in BSD.

Interviews took place either during or after the school day, depending on the availability of the participants. All interviews were voice recorded and transcribed verbatim. Additionally, field notes and observational data were detailed by the researcher. Data analysis occurred using an axial coding process to identify themes that emerged from the study (Saldana, 2016). Through this analysis, a detailed picture of BSD highlights how a systems-based approach to leadership development can be applied in a larger school district in Maine, as well as the possibility of developing leadership pipeline programs in other large school districts or regional groups.

Findings

This study provides three main findings that inform how a large school district in Maine can serve as an innovative model for school leadership development. First, school districts in Maine can use a systems-based approach to think strategically about leadership development, particularly the need to provide opportunities for teachers to “try on leadership” throughout a school district. Second, school districts can capitalize on the instructional leadership of teachers in the trenches, and use this expertise to make instructional shifts and implementation efforts in real time. Third, districts can work closely with leadership development programs to develop school-university partnerships in order to create leadership pipeline programs that better serve the pressing needs of school districts to help recruit, train, and retain teacher leadership. The following pages support these findings and detail the innovative approaches to leadership development in BSD.

Using a Systems-Based Approach to Leadership Development

School districts, particularly larger school districts like BSD, benefit from considering how the school system not only approaches leadership development, but staff development in

general. Dr. Betsy Webb, the superintendent in Bangor, tries to take a balanced approach to human resource development where the district aims to employ roughly 1/3 veteran educators, 1/3 mid-career educators, and 1/3 novice educators for each job role. Dr. Webb reflected that upon arriving in BSD she "had to think about what businesses do to maintain craft knowledge in order to have a high performing district." This approach ensures that new teachers bring new knowledge to BSD and that more veteran staff are able to pass along historical, organizational knowledge. The Assistant Superintendent offered an example, saying,

> We want to make sure the capacity of the staff is as balanced as possible. For example, if there are five teachers on a fourth-grade team, and we have two newer teachers, we will try to either higher more experienced teachers to fill a position if it becomes open or move teachers from across the district to bring a balance of experience.

This foundational consideration to human resource development influences informal and cultural aspects of leadership development in Bangor, particularly when considering how more experienced teachers can serve in informal leadership roles. Dr. Webb commented,

> What I talk to the teachers about is that we need the veterans and the mid-career people to help by wrapping our arms around people figuratively, as teachers come to us, we want to make sure that they're in an environment that they can ask any question. And we have multiple people who jump in and help.

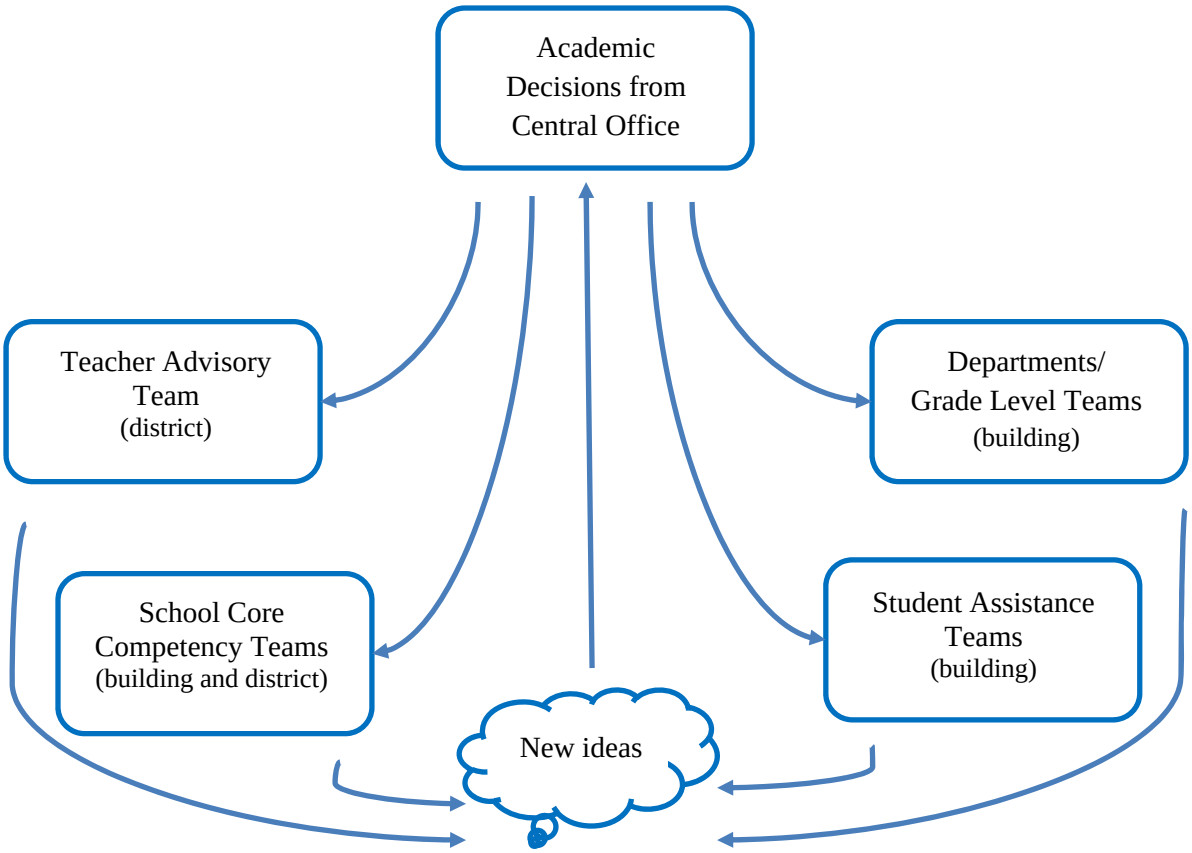
While mentoring is not a unique approach to leadership development, it is innovative for BSD to consider the composition of staff experience, ensure it remains balanced, and to consider the different stages of educator development when thinking about leadership opportunities for staff with various levels of experience. In BSD, there is a district-wide certification committee that ensure mentoring certification requirements are met. On a more practical and hands-on level, mentors in BSD also plan lessons together, review pacing of instruction, and make sure behavior management techniques are shared, particularly with new teachers. Additionally, the district has started offering peer-to-peer supervision of instruction between mentors and mentees as a way to offer formative feedback to improve reflection of instruction. Mentor teachers also help new BSD teachers see students beyond the classroom by the types of afterschool activities that teachers are able to offer.

Another aspect of the BSD systematic approach to leadership development focuses on a balance of top-down and bottom-up approaches to leadership development that support innovative solutions to best address student achievement and other issues important to a school district. Using this approach, BSD sends out messages from the central office about academic decisions and particular foci of student achievement efforts. Then, teams of teachers take part in various teacher-led groups that provide feedback to the system in a variety of manners, from looking at student data (departments and grade level teams), to helping students struggling in school (Student Assistance Teams) to selecting goals and professional development for the school year (School Core Competency Teams), and even providing feedback to the school

system through a representative system about what is working and what needs to be improved upon (see Figure 1). Dr. Webb calls this a “Bottom up, top down, bottom up” approach. She continued,

> Lots of people from afar say, “Oh, they're just top down.” That is so not true. What we do, when we look at curriculum or things that we want to institute, we pull together teacher leaders and we say, “How are we going to do this?”

Figure 1: *Systems-Based Approach to Leadership*



It is the work within these various teacher-led groups that makes BSD innovative in terms of their teacher leadership, and specifically the ability for these teacher-led groups to work collaboratively with administrators throughout the district to accomplish district goals. At the elementary and middle school levels, teacher leadership is disseminated among grade levels and targets the instructional improvement efforts that are occurring throughout the district. Often these teams are led by a teacher leader, but also can be led by a literacy coach or occasionally a principal until a teacher leader is available. One BSD principal commented,

> At the building level we have our school conferencing teams. Those are the leaders . . . every grade level is represented. We spend a lot of time with those teams looking at data, looking at [our] strategic plan, and aligning our school goals.

It is through these team meetings that teachers are empowered to give feedback about what is working within BSD and what can be improved upon. One BSD teacher commented that these grade level and department teams act as "the go-between," stating that they "help to disseminate information in both directions." Another teacher commented that their leadership requires them to be more than just communicators, but to understand "what's applicable to our specific

department and what kind of information, not just that we need to disseminate but also what we need to work on as a department."

At the high school level, BSD utilizes teacher leaders to serve as teacher evaluators, something that occurs in only 12% of schools across Maine (Fairman & Mette, 2017). Due to more departmentalized structures within secondary grades, teacher leaders in BSD who serve in department head roles are trained to serve as evaluators of other teachers. This serves as an opportunity to not only to reduce a huge time commitment for principals or assistant principals, but it also allows aspiring leaders to serve in quasi-administrative roles and "try on leadership" in a manner that does not happen in many districts across the State of Maine. As one principal stated,

> They have a formal position of leadership . . . at the high school, [the] department chairs. They are teachers, they do have a teaching load, but they also have a supervision role. They have an evaluation role. They have a direction-setting role. And they're our most seasoned teachers. So their practice is good. And their thinking is good. They have the discrete positional leadership that is, I say is critical to making this place go.

Supporting this comment is the reflection of one of the BSD teacher leaders,

> I feel like my teachers really appreciate that I am doing the evaluation, because I teach their subject matter. . . . And so when I'm in there, I know exactly where this is going, usually. But if not, and they explain it to me, I understand how it fits into the greater scheme for the grade level or the department. And when I say, when I give them advice, I feel like they see it coming from another teacher's perspective rather than from a principal's perspective, who might not even understand French, for example.

As a result of using teacher leaders in this capacity, BSD is able to provide more teacher-to-teacher feedback about instruction, which is particularly useful way to capitalize on a teacher's perspective that has expertise in a given subject area. This also provides new and important leadership opportunities for teachers to either springboard into an administrative position or to remain as a leader within the classroom.

Relying on Instructional Leadership from the Trenches

Another way in which BSD has created innovative models of school leadership is through providing instructional leadership opportunities for teachers throughout the district. These opportunities value the instructional expertise of teachers to help drive improvement efforts and lead to changes in instructional practices throughout the district. In BSD this is a balance of the "bottom up, top down, bottom up" approach supported by central office administrators, but requires teacher leaders to provide feedback to the school system about what is working and what should be improved upon. Again, this is connected to the systematic approach to organizational development that is a focal point for BSD.

An example of instructional leadership comes from the literacy coaches throughout BSD. These coaches are at the K-3 and 4-5 school buildings throughout the district, and the amount of

time they spend in one building is dependent upon the size of the school. Currently, BSD literacy coaches are only at the elementary level, but there are plans to have a shared middle school and high school literacy coach to expand the reach of this type of instructional leadership. Additionally, literacy coaches increasingly help with math content, particularly around data analysis which target opportunities for improvement. BSD also has several teachers who are enrolled in the University of Maine Farmington (UMF) math coaching program, and there could be possible future coaching positions throughout the state based on this type of training.

Another example of how BSD has created innovative models of teacher leadership, particularly capitalizing on instructional leadership, is through the use of the Teacher Academy the district holds each August. Prior to the start of the Teacher Academy, the Administrative Academy reviews the data from the prior year, which in turn prompts reflection on pacing guides, instructional practices, and professional development that might be needed to address instructional concerns for the upcoming year. Then, the Teacher Academy processes a mix of input from "the top" (central office and building principals) and the "the bottom" (teachers) that determines how to best set academic goals for the upcoming school year and monitor achievement as objectives are taught and assessed.

Based on the data, teacher leaders begin to lead a feedback cycle that determines how to alter practices to help meet benchmarks and determine professional development that is needed to make sure goals are met. These teacher-led teams, formed within each school building throughout the district, meet with faculty throughout the school year and drive the process using the instructional expertise of teachers implementing curriculum in the classroom. As Dr. Webb, the BSD superintendent, states about the Teacher Academy process,

> Usually it's the end of October before we finalize our goals for the year. So it takes a while. Faculty are right there saying, "All right, if we have to get to 85% of our students meeting the Fountas and Pennell benchmark [a literacy assessment], let's look at our data. Where were we off? Where are we weak? What does this cohort look like?' What do we know?" And they're right there, having ownership of the data. That's huge. We talk a lot about how do you talk about data, because some people shut down with numbers. And some people if they know the students, then they have a much greater interest. So, you have to know that your team has different types of styles and we work on it together.

One of the BSD principals commented on the value of the Teacher's Academy as well, stating that teacher leaders

> Spend a lot of time with those teams looking at data, looking at the Bangor strategic plan, and aligning our school goals, [starting with] the district and then . . . high school, West Side, and East Side. Then from the West Side would come . . . the individual schools. So that's one of our big leadership teams.

As seen from this principal's comment, Bangor has traditionally been split into an East and West Side, each with their own unique neighborhoods, histories, and traditions. The East and West

Sides are each comprised of a network of feeder schools that create a system where students are served, monitored, and supported. The schools within this system establish individualized goals, which are aligned to the overall district goals, and as such helps to better serve each neighborhood.

Another innovative approach to school leadership for teachers in BSD is through various curriculum development offered throughout the summer. Some examples include (but are not limited to) revising curriculum, focusing on particular units (e.g. more time for fifth graders to explore fractions), classroom management techniques, safety procedures, and reading and writing pedagogies that inform best practice. Within this structure, teachers submit proposals that they would like to pilot within a building or to lead professional development district-wide. Once the proposals are approved, teachers are paid to lead the improvement effort and provide feedback on upcoming curriculum development. The ability to lead an instructional improvement effort is something that the school system values, based on the systematic approach to maintaining high levels of academic achievement. As one teacher leader reflected,

> One thing that's offered to us is, when school is out, we can, as a department, meet and develop curriculum. It's been the way that we've been able to implement standards-based instruction into our department and it's been several summers in a row of working really hard. Long days. And rewriting all our curriculum. But it's really been extremely beneficial.

Again, this is an example of thinking differently about how to use teacher expertise to provide leadership opportunities that give feedback on what a school district is doing for instructional practices, and to give feedback in a systematic manner. One of the BSD principals reflected,

> We really do a lot with teachers from the ground up. We have teams that work on curriculum . . . [on] these summer projects that I think are unique to Bangor. We really want to think about how we could bring this to the district.

It is through these structures, specifically the focus on incorporating the action research of teachers, that BSD believes is important to not only develop instructional leaders, but also to improve instructional practice and maintain high levels of student achievement. One recent teacher-led instructional improvement effort focused around the action research of one teacher who began a math running records program in response to students who were struggling to meet the instructional goals set by the school district. It was the action research of the teacher that influenced the decision of the district, as a system, to think differently about instructional practices in order to better meet the pedagogical needs of students but also maintain high levels of achievement. One principal reflected,

> Running records, that is I think a great example, and probably the premier example at our level now, of where teachers kind of looked and said, “Wow, we see an issue. How can we fix it?” They did the research, they took [an action research] class, they came back to

> [the principal] with a proposal. That has now gone district wide, but that was completely teacher led.

Another principal commented,

> I would say that it starts way back with all of these structured places embedded into the culture of the school district. But, I mean, you first start at the building level, as you build the capacity that they're the classroom leader. We've established the belief in the capacity that you're in the leadership role of your classroom, [and] I think that's the strength of Bangor.

Developing Leadership Pipeline Programs through a School-University Partnership

Another innovative aspect of leadership development in BSD is the creation of a school-university partnership called the Bangor Educational Leadership Academy (BELA). The goal of this collaborative effort was to develop the first leadership development pipeline in the State of Maine, based on leadership development ideas from the Wallace Foundation and the Task Force on School Leadership supported by the Maine Legislative Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs. From this work, a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU, see Appendix A) was developed between BSD and the University of Maine (UMaine) to pursue leadership development that would address the lack of school administrators throughout the State of Maine, and create a model that values building collaborative and trusting relationships in order to better merge the best practices and theories that inform educational leadership development that is specific to the needs of BSD.

One of the most innovative aspects of BELA was the ability for a school-university partnership to model how workforce development issues could be addressed through a collaborative partnership. In Maine, there is a pressing need for practitioners, researchers, and policymakers to work together to address an aging education workforce, as well as a lack of qualified applicants for administrative positions. Dr. Webb commented,

> We're in trouble. I mean, it's crazy, the percentage of teachers that are going to retire, principals that are going to retire, and superintendents. . . . We know the impact of longevity of quality leadership. There's a direct impact on student outcomes. We have to make sure that we have highly qualified leaders to continue the great work that Maine has done, but also to take it to new levels. I worry that as our state ages and we have less children, if we don't have the strong support, it's going to be detrimental to our schools and directly to our economy as well. . . . I mean, we (educational leaders) have to be thinkers and be part of the solution, not part of the problem. And so, just for a sense of efficacy and a sense of self, of purpose, we want people to be leaders. If we have such a dire need for leaders in the future, then we have to grow our own.

In a separate interview, a teacher leader seemed to echo the comments of her superintendent,

> I think that [BELA] is pretty innovative, because having been around and looking at different, at the university and different schools, there is a lack of candidates for principalships and superintendencies. And if you aren't going to build the capacity within, where are you going to get them?

As such, there is a need for partnerships to develop, emerge, and exist that will better support workforce development issues that impact the State of Maine, particularly in Northern and Eastern Maine, that do not benefit from the Portland metro population hub.

In order to accomplish these workforce development goals, partnerships must be based on trusting relationships between researchers and practitioners. With BELA, BSD and UMaine worked collaboratively to develop an MOU that takes into account the individual needs of BSD. Through this collaborative effort, the BELA program allowed the partnership to focus on how to best recruit, prepare, and retain aspiring administrators through mentorship plans. Specifically, the UMaine and BSD agreed upon structures to support BSD teacher leaders include but are not limited to the following:

1. Offering coursework instruction at Bangor High School;
2. Meeting once per semester with the BSD superintendent to review curriculum covered by UMaine faculty and incorporate professional development and school improvement efforts being implemented in BSD;
3. Incorporating 1-2 guest lecturers from BSD each semester to help with instructional and leadership development alignment; and,
4. Conducting yearly evaluations to reflect upon the program and present findings locally or nationally about the collaborative leadership development effort (see Appendix B for BELA MOU).

Additionally, BELA members have been able to attend Administrative Team meetings of district and school administrators, School Committee (typically known as the Board of Education in other school districts) meetings, and other structures that allow students to learn first-hand and through real world experiences what it means to be a principal in a specific school-district. While the idea is to provide training to these aspiring leaders to move into formal leadership roles, the exposure to these types of leadership activities also provide a more informed teacher-leader population for those who choose to stay in the classroom. As the assistant superintendent commented, “I think that BELA is very unique to Bangor. That's a program that is, I mean it's all internal, so I don’t think you see a lot of districts having stuff like that.” One of the teacher leaders stated a similar insight on the BELA program,

> I think it often does take that with some, maybe all people, to have just a touch of an experience and then say “Oh, well maybe this is a different way to look at it. Maybe I can do this.” And that really, certainly the BELA program provides that.

In addition to the BELA program, BSD has made an effort to help teacher leaders transition into an administrative position for one year on a temporary basis, which allows the

aspiring administrator to see if the change is a good professional decision and provides a clause in the contract that permits the educator to move back into a teaching position with a "no harm" clause if the transition to administrator proves not to be a good fit. This unique effort, which was negotiated with the BSD teacher's union, is another example of how school districts might think differently about "trying on" formal school leadership, and possibly could encourage other teacher leaders to make the transition to formal leadership positions who might not make the jump otherwise if they had to give up their tenure status.

Assessing the Systems-Based Approach to Leadership Development

The interviews for this case study of a systems-based approach to leadership development can offer several important reflections for school districts in Maine. For those familiar with the challenges facing school districts in Maine, one consideration for leadership development is that systems-based development is likely easier in larger school districts that can capitalize on economies of scale. However, school districts, regardless of size, should be more proactive in their leadership development and create structures that support more shared leadership opportunities for teachers.

Throughout the state, Maine school districts can also target greater instructional leadership opportunities for teachers to lead improvement efforts. Instructional leadership, particularly leadership provided by teachers, offers instructional and curricular expertise to help lead processes that will contribute to greater student achievement. As seen in BSD, certified teacher evaluators can help lessen the administrative load of principals who are struggling to keep up with PE/PG efforts recently required by the State of Maine, but they also provide expertise in instructional areas that are difficult for administrators to master. This balance of "bottom up, top down, bottom up" allows central office leadership to set goals and priorities while also valuing input, feedback, and leadership from teachers.

Finally, school districts can and should explore school-university partnerships where leadership pipelines can be developed, which is a practice that is occurring throughout the US. These types of leadership pipelines are possible in larger school districts where there is a greater teacher base to focus on developing. Smaller school districts, which don't have the capacity to develop leadership on the same scale, might consider consolidating into larger groups to develop regional leadership development pipeline programs that would better serve less-populated portions of the state.

Part II. Case Studies of Two Teacher-Led Schools

Background on the Teacher-Led School Model

The concept of teacher-led schools is not a new one. Experiments with teacher-led schools, experimental or alternative schools go back to the 1960s in the US (Bailey, 2012, Myers, 2013, Meier, 2002). Several European countries, including Norway and Switzerland, also established schools without principals prior to the US experimentation (Myers, 2013). Although

teacher-led schools have emerged in different settings, they are predominantly found in urban neighborhoods serving underprivileged students (Hawkins, 2009; Myers, 2013; Nazareno, 2014).

In recent decades, the charter school movement is the predominant example of the teacher-led school model. The charter school era first took off in the early 1990s, with Minnesota as the first state to adopt legislation to allow charter schools in 1991. Other states followed and public charter schools proliferated in many different forms throughout the 1990s and, again, were often located in major urban centers. The first charter schools were mostly public charter schools at first, with teachers and parents designing and establishing the schools, which often emphasized a specific curricular focus or pedagogical approach. Some charter schools succeeded, while others struggled to perform and closed. Evidence of mixed performance for student outcomes, and the direct competition with existing public-school systems, served to reduce the proliferation and popularity of the charter school model. However, a resurgence of charter schools occurred again during the Obama administration and continues with support under the Trump administration. In this era, charter schools were more often established as franchises run by private networks or businesses, focusing more on the goal of increasing free-market competition rather than teacher and parent empowerment to run schools.

Teacher-cooperatives followed, first in rural Minnesota and then in other Midwestern states, but in slightly different forms. In Minnesota, the teacher cooperatives exist outside of the public-school district and union structures, where teachers work through a professional teacher cooperative (predominantly EdVisions) as owners/entrepreneurs and collectively contract with particular schools to run the academic program. Site teams determine their budgetary priorities, compensation, hire and fire teachers, observe and evaluate peers, determine their school governance structure, and develop the academic focus and curriculum. EdVisions manages the business side including payroll, benefits, marketing and some administrative work. Teachers work under one-year contracts. With funding from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, EdVisions expanded the teacher-cooperative model into Wisconsin and other midwestern states.

This model was implemented differently in the Midwest. Milwaukee already had a history of charter schools, and created a new model where the public school district charters a teacher cooperative. These collaboratives operate with a memo-of-understanding with their union, and teachers running a school are still part of the public school district and have the same salary structure. Teams of teachers have the autonomy to determine work assignments within the school, hire teachers who apply from within the district, set budget priorities, determine the school governance structure, and develop the learning program. The district provides business and administrative support. Teacher-led schools have also been established in other states, and predominantly in urban cities serving minority and underprivileged students, where these schools are often operated by a union. Some of these schools can be found in: Minneapolis, Denver, Los Angeles, Chicago, Detroit, Nashville, Newark, Boston, New York, and Portland, Maine (Myers, 2013, Williams, 2007).

One national network of teacher-led schools and organizations lists 105 known teacher-led schools nationally from 19 states on their website, along with the policy mechanisms that

provide for teachers to govern their schools. This network describes "teacher-powered" schools as: 1) "collaboratively designed and implemented by teachers", and 2) schools where teachers have "collective autonomy to make decisions to influence the success of a school" (https://www.teacherpowered.org/). Another organization which advocates for teacher-led and student-centered schools, Education Evolving, describes a theory of change for this movement, where policies allow for innovation and teachers, who work most directly with students, have larger roles in designing schools with the goal of fostering more student-centered learning in schools (https://www.educationevolving.org/).

While the teacher-led school model appears to be an emerging trend, with growing interest around the country and advocates including policymakers and unions, there has been little empirical research on teacher-led schools (Myers, 2013; Williams, 2007). There is some evidence that the performance of schools in Minnesota and Milwaukee, and charter schools in general, has been mixed with regard to student academic achievement (Hawkins, 2009). More research is needed to understand how well this model is working, how school structures and decision-making may differ from traditional schools led by principals, and what the potential impacts are for teachers and students. Most of the literature continues to be in the realm of news articles or articles in professional educator journals that advocate for the model and describe a particular school's experience from an insider perspective. Some of the perceived benefits for teachers who work in teacher-led schools described in the literature available include:

- an increased sense of "ownership" and a culture of collective responsibility/ accountability for the successes and failures of the school;
- more involvement or teacher "voice" in decisions through shared decision-making and a more democratic or horizontal school governance structure;
- more autonomy and flexibility to develop solutions to address the needs of teachers and students more quickly, and to design schools to fit the particular needs of students; and
- more opportunity to try innovative approaches and take risks to improve practice.

Some of the perceived challenges for teachers described in the literature include:

- deciding how to structure school governance and the process for making decisions;
- learning to engage in the difficult discussions and decisions, and navigate diverse views;
- balancing autonomy and collective responsibility, making sure decisions align with a shared vision for the school;
- selecting teachers who will be a good "fit" with this model, who are willing to take on the collective work of leading the school and shared decision making;
- the extra work and time involved in managing administrative work and shared decision-making on top of teaching duties;
- figuring out how the school and the lead teachers will interact with and be part of a larger school district or system; and
- adjusting some local and state policies and documents to recognize that not all schools are headed by "principals" but may be "teachers".

(Hawkins, 2009; Herbert, 2010; Nazareno 2013, 2014; Williams, 2007).

Considerably less is known about the impact of teacher-led schools for students than for the teachers. One teacher, who helped found and lead the Mathematics Science Leadership Academy within the Denver public school system starting in 2009, a school which serves high poverty and predominantly Latino elementary students, asserted that student learning may benefit when teachers model a commitment to their own learning, take responsibility for student learning, and engage in collective problem-solving and decision-making (Nazareno, 2014). She wrote,

> Each day, these teachers practice and model the skills that they're charged with instilling in students. Teachers have ample opportunities to solve problems, collaborate, think creatively, take risks, persevere through challenges, and learn and lead with one another. (Nazareno, 2014).

Research Methods

This MEPRI study helps to address the gap in research on the teacher-led school model. While many small, rural elementary schools in Maine have a history of being led by a teaching principal or part-time principal, only two elementary schools in Maine currently are entirely teacher led. These two schools were identified through media news reports and were invited to participate in the study and both agreed.

The first author used a qualitative case study and ethnographic research design to investigate the experiences of both schools with the teacher-led model. Each school was visited three or four times over the school year from October 2017 through May 2018. Several interviews were conducted and audio-recorded with lead teachers, and additional interviews were conducted with classroom teachers, educational technicians, and district administrators. Additional information was obtained through email communications.

A total of 22 interviews were conducted for this inquiry. In the smaller rural district, the researcher conducted a total of nine interviews: six of the ten classroom or Title 1 teachers (not counting the part-time allied arts teachers and other support staff), two educational technicians, and one district administrator. In the larger urban district, the researcher conducted a total of 13 interviews: nine of the 31 teachers (which includes Title 1 teachers, the literacy/ data coach and the math coach, but not allied arts teachers or other support staff), one educational technician, a social worker, a former union official, and a district administrator.

In addition to the interviews, observations of leadership team meetings, school-wide staff meetings, governance committee meetings, school assemblies, and other events were documented through written field notes. During one site visit in May, the researcher shadowed two lead teachers who are half-time administrators at the urban school. Documents were collected from the schools and their websites, including: initial proposals for the teacher-led

model, statements of vision, mission or core beliefs, organizational charts, staffing information, professional development calendars, meeting agendas and minutes, historical documentation related to the transition to a teacher-led model, and results from a recent school climate teacher survey for one school. Data on enrollment, teacher and student demographics, and school-level testing results were obtained from the Maine Department of Education.

The two schools profiled in this study offer a contrast in school size, setting, student demographics, school-district relationships and administrative context. The Howard Reiche Elementary School was formally recognized as the first teacher-led public school in Maine, under legislation (LD 1106, 2013) as an Innovative Public School. It was an existing school that reorganized as a teacher-led school in 2011-12, contrasting with the predominant pattern of new, start-up teacher-led schools in other parts of the country. The school is located in the West End of the largest urban district in Maine (Portland), and serves a student population that is ethnically, socio-economically, and language diverse and highly mobile. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) categorizes Portland as a "small city". The population was slightly over 67,000 in 2017. Athens Community School was inspired by Reiche's experiment with the teacher-led model and reorganized with a similar governance structure in 2015-16. The school is located in the small, rural community of Athens in central Maine, and serves predominantly white students who have English as a first language. Athens joined with AOS 94, but maintains its own school board and is a municipal school administrative unit. NCES categorizes the village of Athens as "rural, distant" and 2010 census data indicated a population of just over 1,000.

The following broad research questions framed this inquiry:

- What factors motivated each school to reorganize with a teacher-led model?
- What changes did each school make in their organizational and governance structure and how are decisions made?
- What efforts have teachers initiated in these schools to address the needs of their students and families?
- What benefits and positive impacts do teachers, staff, and district administrators perceive with a teacher-led school model?
- What challenges and less positive consequences do these schools perceive with this model?
- What advice do these schools have for other schools considering a teacher-led model?

A narrative description of how and why each school transformed their governance structure is presented in the next sections, followed by some common themes across both schools related to the impacts of their experiment with a teacher-led model. Finally, some reflections are provided to sum up the perceptions about what conditions are needed to implement this innovative model successfully.

Reiche Elementary School

Reiche Elementary School is a medium-sized, urban elementary school with 401 Kindergarten through fifth-grade students. Enrollment has increased by 22% since 2011-12 when

the school first implemented the teacher-led model, but tends to fluctuate given the high level of student mobility. The school is located in Portland's West End neighborhood and serves a demographically mixed student body. Higher and middle-income families elect to send their children to the school, attracted to the student diversity in the school. Low-income families attend in higher numbers. Reiche is a Title 1 school, with 73.9% students eligible for free or reduced school lunch in 2016-17, and the school offers a breakfast program to help address this need. The school reports that approximately 10% of the students' families are homeless or live in shelters, and nearly 40% of students move in or out of the school during the school year. The school is located near a refugee intake center, and students enroll throughout the year at the school. The international and diverse composition of the school is apparent in the many languages (over 40) that students and their families speak. In 2016-17, 39.3% of students were categorized as English Language Learners. Unlike the vast majority of schools in Maine, Reiche students are predominantly non-white. However, like other schools in Maine, the teaching staff is almost entirely white. One indicator of racial diversity was obtained from the MARRS Reporting System data, which reported that 38.7% of students tested in grades 3-8 for 2016-17 were white, compared to 90.1% of students statewide for the same year. Lead teachers and other staff view the district's current focus on equity and the whole student, as well as academic achievement, as supporting their school-wide focus and efforts to support the needs of their diverse students.

The school is sufficiently large to have three classrooms per grade level, and sometimes has multi-age classrooms with looping for grades 4-5. The school includes a large library/ media center, and there are separate spaces for a computer lab and resource rooms. A non-profit agency runs the PreK program at another facility in the neighborhood, and afterschool programs are run by a nonprofit and the municipal recreation department. Students have a regular schedule for allied arts, band, and Spanish. An active Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) raises funding for students to have swimming lessons in the community pool adjacent to the school building, yoga, and other enrichment experiences. The school also includes a health clinic with a full time nurse and visiting dentist as part of a "community school" model. The school partners with a variety of agencies and non-profit organizations to provide various services to students, including mental health services. The urban location of the school facilitates access to these resources, and helps to address the high needs of many students in the school. This year Reiche has 31 teachers, of whom 22 are "on contract" as regular education teachers, and the remaining teachers work as special education or Title 1 teachers. Staffing also includes two instructional coaches, one for literacy/ data use and another for mathematics. Classroom teachers are veteran educators with an average of 16.5 years of experience (based on state data from 2014-15).

In the interviews, teachers described that prior to implementing the teacher-led model, a principal encouraged teachers to form committees to develop solutions to perceived problems, and to use data and research as a basis for adopting new practices. Teachers also credited that principal for focusing more on the social and emotional needs of students, and helping to steer some changes that improved the school climate for students and teachers. However, the veteran staff felt frustrated by the principal's tight control over decisions and sought more of a shared

decision-making model. When the principal was reassigned to another struggling school just before the end of the school year, teachers felt prepared to take on more responsibility. The district superintendent at the time encouraged the school's veteran teachers to take a year to explore different school leadership options, rather than moving forward to hire a new principal. Both the superintendent and teachers did not want to lose momentum on the progress they had made in their school. One lead teacher explained,

> . . . we liked the way this school was going, the direction it was heading, that we had made significant changes to how we did the beginning of the day and . . . the middle of the day. . . . and a lot of that had been calming [for students] . . .

During the *No Child Left Behind* (NCLB) era of adequate yearly progress goals, Reiche was listed as a "failing school", and the school lost funding for an assistant principal position and struggled to keep dedicated principals. As a result, the staff had seen high turnover in school administrators and experienced different school leadership styles. Further, the superintendent and teachers viewed the job as being too complex or too big for one person and felt a more distributed leadership model would better meet the needs of the school. A lead teacher shared, "We were able to split the work up into more manageable pieces and go a little deeper." The president of the local teachers' association/ union had been researching teacher-led schools and other school leadership models, and the association supported Reiche's exploration year with information, resources, and guidance. After seeing another elementary school in the district fail to successfully implement a teacher-led model, the association president was somewhat wary but committed to using the lessons learned to help Reiche succeed.

Reiche organized for the effort by developing an exploration committee that included representation of the school, district, union and parents. The superintendent allowed the committee to use some of the weekly early release days to conduct their work, and the team also hired the assistant president of the teachers' association to help guide their work. They travelled to or investigated five other teacher-led schools in Boston, Denver, Milwaukee, and Detroit. They shared readings and held numerous forums to gather input from staff and parents. Through these discussions, the team collectively developed a new vision for their school, a set of core values and beliefs, and outlined essential school leadership responsibilities. The team identified the teacher-led Mathematics and Science Leadership Academy in Denver, which opened in 2009-10, as sharing similar student demographics and school vision and borrowed from that model to create a new governance structure. Staff and parents had opportunities to weigh in on the design as it evolved and voted to indicate their overwhelming approval. Teachers who did not wish to work in a teacher-led model were allowed to move to other schools in the district. School board approval provided the opportunity to pilot the new model beginning in 2011-12. Teachers formally applied to a search committee for the position of lead teacher.

One classroom teacher from within the school was hired as a part-time lead teacher during the year of exploration, and the school had a new interim principal that year as well. Two additional teachers were hired from within the school to serve as lead teachers for a total of three leads, two of whom worked half-time as leads and half-time as teachers, while the third lead

worked full-time as a teacher. School funding for one principal position allows for the release time for two leads to work half-time as administrators. Funding for a half-time assistant principal helps to cover a part-time school counselor who helps to handle student behavior conflicts. Two social workers provide support to the lead teachers and families as well. With significant growth in enrollment since implementing the teacher-led model, the lead teachers have requested an additional 0.5 FTE to provide more release time for the lead teachers.

Currently, all three leads have a stipend of $10,000 for their administrative responsibilities, while they remain classroom teachers either half-time or full-time. The first lead teacher was a classroom teacher while the additional two leads were both Title 1 and literacy teachers. Two of the leads had some administrative experience: one lead had served twice as an assistant principal in the school, and another lead had formerly been an assistant director of a preschool and had assisted a former principal when funding for the assistant principal position was eliminated. All three leads have taken graduate courses in administration. One lead has principal certification, another will have the same certification soon, and the third will have certification as assistant principal within the year. Two of the leads became interested in taking additional courses for school leadership as part of a leadership cohort their district supported. When one lead rolled off the team, another teacher was hired as the third lead teacher in 2015-16. This teacher also continued to work half-time as a Title 1 teacher and half-time as a lead teacher/ administrator. All three lead teachers are veteran teachers with 10-25 years of experience as educators. One lead has worked almost entirely in this school. All three leads have a master's degree and one lead also holds National Board Certification. All three have worked as educators in other schools and states, and two taught briefly in other countries. Two leads have been special education teachers in the past, which they find very helpful in their roles as school administrators. While the initial plan called for the lead teachers to serve only three years before rotating off, two of the current lead teachers have served seven years in this position. They are now preparing for one lead to retire and another teacher to step up into this position. A formal interviewing process will be used each time a lead position opens up. They hope to stagger new appointments to ensure that there is continuity and leadership experience on the team.

Teachers and staff have continued to re-examine the administrative needs and roles for their school every few years, particularly when the lead teachers change. This has provided an opportunity for the leadership model to evolve as school needs change, but also allows the school to adapt to the professional strengths and expertise of the lead teachers. One lead commented,

> We've already evolved as an organization in the last seven years. And I would hope we will continue to evolve in the next seven years, so just because we did it that way back then doesn't mean we should do it that way right now. I think also, the lead teacher role really, it's kind of dependent on who's doing the job.

Administrative tasks are both shared and distributed across the three lead teachers. Two leads split the day as administrative heads of school, providing critical coverage as needed in the front office and building, while they work with students the other half of the day. These two leads

handle most of the personnel work, and share student discipline and communications with parents. They also share day-to-day responsibility for ensuring staffing needs by scheduling substitutes or arranging for coverage of lunch and recess duties. A third lead works full time as the literacy/ data coach but attends formal and informal meetings before and after school and assists with administrative work. This lead handles the Title 1 paperwork, coordinates student testing, and serves as an instructional leader in the school, working closely with the instructional committee. All three leads continually confer face-to-face with each other throughout the day to share information as it develops with students or other situations, and all three are involved in hiring decisions. Leads carry a cell phone so staff and others can easily reach them throughout the day as they move between student support and administrative roles. They find text messaging less intrusive than phone calls or school-wide intercom announcements.

Reiche adopted a governance structure designed around teacher and staff-led committees. As with the division of leadership responsibilities, the committee structure has also changed slightly since initial implementation. The school currently has four governance committees that include: Instructional Leadership, Professional Development, Climate, and Enrichment. A fifth and over-arching governance committee is the Leadership Team, which consists of chairs from each governance committee, a representative of the teachers' association, a member of the PTO, and the three lead teachers. A sixth committee, the Steering Committee, conducts an anonymous staff survey each year to provide feedback and reflection on how well the teacher-led model is working, but is not a decision-making or governance committee. Additional subcommittees are formed as needed, and are used regularly for the instructional and climate work. Subcommittees help to distribute the work more equitably so that all committee members are engaged. One lead teacher said, "It truly is distributed leadership. . . .The power does live with the governance committees, but [there are] checks and balances with the Leadership Team . . . " Committee chairs and co-chairs rotate off every two years. Staff do not receive stipends for committee work. Teachers at Reiche consistently reported the view that during the seven years as a teacher-led school, the staff has had many opportunities to gain a deeper understanding of leadership and opportunities to build leadership skills through their rotation on committees and co-chairing committees. One lead teacher commented, "The staff is getting deeper and deeper, in terms of their experience, because people have sat on the leadership team, more people have run committees. The skill set for running committees has just continued to [increase] . . ."

The lead teachers participate in the governance committee meetings which meet monthly, but these committees are chaired and co-chaired by teachers or other staff, rather than the lead teachers. All teachers are expected to serve on at least one governance committee, and they are also part of grade-level teams that were implemented in 2012-13. Staff select committees according to their interest or expertise. All three lead teachers attend the monthly Leadership Team meetings and help to facilitate those meetings, where committee chairs or co-chairs report on their activities and discussion is shared among all participants. Ideas for initiatives begin with individual teachers or committees that make initial proposals to the Leadership Team. Ideas also

come from the Leadership Team and are referred to the appropriate committees for consideration and development. Decisions are generally made by consensus. The Leadership Team utilizes the "fist of five" approach to gauge levels of support for ideas being considered. Proposals are also presented at full staff meetings when staff have the opportunity to weigh in and formally vote. The staff agreed to vote every two years on whether or not to continue the teacher-led model. One teacher commented, "As a lead teacher, it's more like a republic. You're a representative of the staff, as opposed to a lead administrator. You're a lead teacher."

While Reiche adopted a teacher-led school leadership model, they remained fully part of the Portland school district and are held to the same requirements as other schools in terms of implementing district-wide policies, curricula, and other initiatives. The primary difference is the structural opportunity for all teachers and staff to engage in new leadership opportunities and to help shape decisions within the school. Teachers have initiated efforts on school climate, social/ emotional development of students, academic supports, and both decide on and deliver much of the professional development that occurs during the school's weekly early release days. The school decided to implement grade-level teams during the first year as a teacher-led school and has continued to support that with professional development on collaboration and examination of student work. Teachers also have input into grade-level configurations and how teachers and students are assigned to classrooms each year, through discussion in full staff meetings and the Leadership Team.

The three lead teachers take turns attending administrative meetings within their district and monthly school board meetings. While some principals were initially skeptical about the teacher-led model and did not fully accept the lead teachers as school heads, the lead teachers feel they have earned the respect and acceptance of their administrative peers during the past seven years. Leads meet monthly with the district assistant superintendent, share ideas and seek advice as needed. The assistant superintendent evaluates the lead teachers as principals, and the lead teachers evaluate each other as teachers. Lead teachers share responsibility for evaluating the teaching staff, and some other teachers are also trained and do peer observations.

Athens Community School

Athens Community School is a small, rural Pre-K to grade 8 elementary school with 132 students in grades K-8 in 2017-18. School enrollment has fluctuated widely, ranging from a high of 150 in 2010-11 to a low of 101 in 2015-16. The school saw a significant increase of 36% in enrollment in fall 2016, the year after becoming a teacher-led school. The increase was largely attributed to parents from a neighboring community requesting permission for their children to attend Athens under superintendents' agreements. The AOS superintendent and teachers explained that many families like the welcoming feel of a small, rural, public school where staff all know the students and that the school is also academically high performing. The superintendent noted, "The school is very well supported in the community and people are very, very proud of it." The enrollment growth had an immediate impact of increasing the average class size from 11 to 15 students, with some classrooms having as many as 19 students. The

school serves predominantly all white students, and eligibility for the free or reduced school lunch program was 54.7% in 2016-17. The school offers a breakfast program for students.

The school maintains one classroom per grade level, including a room which is shared for kindergarten and PreK students. The PreK program is offered for a half day, three days per week, while the Kindergarten program runs for two full days and three half days weekly. Allied arts instruction is generally provided by part-time teachers shared with other schools. A library/ media room is staffed. Classroom teachers are veteran educators with an average of 17.5 years of experience (based on state data from 2014-15). Teachers and educational technicians indicated in the interviews that they have taught primarily or entirely in this school, and at least one junior teacher attended the school as a student.

When faced with a proposal to shift some middle-grade students to another school, the community of Athens overwhelmingly voted to withdraw from the RSU 59 (Madison) in spring 2013. There was a broader concern that their school could be vulnerable to school closure by the RSU school board. A lead teacher explained the predominant view that "the heart of the community is the school!" The AOS superintendent shared, "The community was ready to run a school on their own, as a municipal system. Not be under the threat of a larger system that could close their school." For the next two years, Athens was an independent, municipal school administrative unit (SAU) with its own school board. Technically, the district office is the school office as well. The district contracted with AOS 94 to serve as the fiscal agent for the district. In 2015, Athens voted to join AOS 94 and shares a superintendent with that unit. The AOS provides business and administrative support to the school. As a Pre-K to grade 8 district, Athens has school choice for secondary students who are tuitioned out to other schools in the region.

Athens Community School has always had a teaching principal and never had a full-time principal due to the small enrollment of the school. One teaching principal spent nearly 20 years in the school. Teachers and staff reported they had a good rapport with that principal, who also encouraged teachers to collaborate together as a team to address students' needs. They felt their ideas were heard and they had input into decisions, despite the absence of a formal committee structure during that time. Several teachers indicated they may have been content to continue as a principal-led school if subsequent principals had shared decision-making with teachers in the same manner. None of the teachers were actively pursuing or considering an administrative leadership role as part of their career development.

After withdrawing from the RSU, the school had a teacher who worked half-time as principal and half-time as a special education teacher. Shortly thereafter, they had a part-time principal shared with another school, who was generally in the building one day per week. Teachers and staff indicated in the interviews that it was difficult not having someone in the building during the school day. Teachers had to wait longer to get answers to questions or a decision about handling situations with students. However, in the absence of a full-time principal, teachers were forced to make decisions and learned they could run the school. One teacher described the situation with part-time principals this way: "They were not here very often. . . . so we kind of were left to ourselves quite a bit, and I think that probably led us to

[think] maybe we could do it." Teachers and staff also saw quick turnover in their part-time principals, and felt they were not as committed to staying in the community for their careers. They said it was difficult to adjust to new leadership styles and agendas each year, and was disruptive to teachers' work. One staff member explained,

> . . . being a small school, I think we saw that it was a stepping stone. A lot of principals would start here and then they'd look for something better. So, you never knew how long the principal was going to stay.

Teachers felt some part-time principals did not understand their community very well and teachers felt less involved in decisions. They knew they wanted to return to a more stable and inclusive leadership model. One teacher commented, "We had principals in and out that came for a couple of years. . . . And we just, we know our school, we know our town, and we were at a point where we wanted more say."

The departure of a part-time shared principal in the middle of the 2014-15 school year presented both a challenge to the teaching staff as well as an opportunity, similar to what occurred with the departure of a principal at Reiche Elementary School. Teachers said they simply pulled together to take up the work that needed to be handled to complete the year. One veteran teacher stepped up without stipend to help with paperwork for the remainder of the year. One lead teacher remarked, "We were pretty much running the school at that point anyway, you know, without a principal. And they allowed us to do that. And then in that period of time, some people started researching the teacher-led model."

In spring 2015, Athens staff formed an "exploration committee" and visited Reiche to investigate the teacher-led model that had been in place there for five years. A group also attended a conference sponsored by the NEA and MEA and used that opportunity to work on a new school vision and plan. Discussions occurred in committee and with the whole staff to develop a governance structure that would meet the needs of this small school. Throughout the process of exploration, teachers kept the AOS superintendent and the Athens school board fully informed and had strong support from both. That spring, the idea of becoming a teacher-led school was proposed and overwhelmingly approved by a vote of all school staff. Staff saw strength in the fact that they had a veteran staff with complementary areas of expertise who were highly committed to the community. A teacher said, "This staff is very, cohesive. It's more like a family. . . . it's kind of like everybody has everybody's back." A teacher presented a proposal to the Athens school board and it was also handily approved. The AOS superintendent reflected, "Ultimately, it came down to the school board really trusting the plan that was put together and trusting the staff that was in place." In the fall 2015, Athens became a teacher-led school at the same time that the Athens district became part of AOS 94. They contract with the AOS to share the superintendent, business staff, transportation and special education staff.

The Athens staff who visited Reiche adopted much of the same governance structure they had seen in that school, but did make some modifications to fit the smaller size and goals of their own school. As with Reiche, the Athens staff elected to have three teachers serve as "lead teachers". However, where Reiche has some funding for a principal position which provides

release time for two lead teachers, the lead teachers at Athens all teach or work full time with students. Two leads are classroom teachers and one is a Title 1 teacher. All three teachers are veteran teachers with 23 to 43 years of teaching experience. Two have only taught at this school, while one taught primarily elsewhere. The lead teachers receive a small stipend of $7,000 per year for the additional time and work to handle various aspects of school administration and management. Most of the extra time is spent before school or after school, or in their own time. They estimated they spend roughly 15-20 additional hours per week doing administrative work. All three lead teachers have taken one or two graduate courses required for certification as "teaching principal" and feel that has been useful for informing the decisions they must tackle. None of the lead teachers had prior administrative roles or experience. Two leads have a master's degree.

The three lead teachers agreed to divide up their work according to their individual expertise, with one classroom teacher handling communications with parents and student discipline for middle-grade students, another classroom teacher managing student discipline for lower elementary grade students as well as guidance and personnel, and a third teacher (Title 1) who prepares the school budget, handles purchasing, and manages Title 1 paperwork and other reporting required by the state. The plan is for lead teachers to serve two to three years, and then rotate off sequentially. Currently, there are other teachers in this small school who are taking courses and preparing to take their turn as lead teachers. One lead will step down next year and make way for another teacher to step up. The same process will follow the next year, to allow for some continuity as well as new leadership opportunities. As at Reiche, the lead teachers at Athens continually check in with each other during the school day to make sure each is aware of different issues that may be in process, so they can fill in as needed, but also so they are on the same page.

Athens also borrowed from Reiche the idea of instituting teacher-led committees as a governance structure, but decided not to have an over-arching leadership team like Reiche. Instead, they preferred to have committees propose initiatives to the full staff for discussion and a vote. Athens has three governance committees that include: Instructional, Professional Development, and School Climate. A fourth committee, the Steering Committee, collects feedback from staff through anonymous surveys each year to assess how the teacher-led model is working. Other committees are formed as needed or required by the state. All teachers are expected to serve on at least one governance committee and most of the other school staff get involved in committee work too. Either teachers or staff can chair a committee. The lead teachers do not serve on these committees. Committee chairs will receive a small stipend beginning next year, and committee members are paid by the hour for time spent on committee work. Prior to becoming a teacher-led school, Athens did not have teacher committees or a school-wide leadership team. Teachers and staff feel that having a direct role in decision making is a positive change.

Ideas generally percolate up from committees, then chairs confer with the lead teachers. Committees report out at the regular staff meetings. Ideas may also originate with the lead

teachers or staff meetings, which refer them to the appropriate committee for consideration. Committees generally meet monthly before or after school and discuss and approve ideas more informally through conversation and a free flow of ideas. Ten minute staff meetings happen every other week just prior to the start of the school day when staff huddle for a quick exchange of information or decision in the front hallway of the school, and staff have longer meetings during monthly release days where lead teachers facilitate the meeting and committees report out activity. Discussions within committees or staff meetings engage all participants in finding solutions to address perceived needs. Decisions are made by consensus or a formal vote. A staff member described staff meetings this way:

> We all make a decision. We all sit in the staff [meeting] and say, "Okay, this is what's going on. Any ideas? What can we do?" Or the lead teacher might say, "This is what we're thinking. Do you think that will work?" And there's give and take and discussion around it. Even as ed techs, we feel part of that process.

Because the school has little district bureaucracy governing the school, there is greater flexibility for teachers and staff to propose changes in budgetary priorities, adopt curricular or extra-curricular changes or events, and determine professional development. If new textbooks or curricula are to be selected, then additional school board members would be included on a committee to assist teachers in making a selection. Committees and lead teachers share their proposals with the AOS superintendent and the Athens school board for approval. The three lead teachers meet with the superintendent twice a month, and report to the school board monthly. Committees take turns reporting on their work to the school board.

As required by the state's PE/ PG initiative, all teachers in the school are observed and evaluated. Since the lead teachers are also union members, they conduct the formative observations of other teachers during the year while the AOS superintendent conducts the summative evaluations for teachers at the end of the year. The AOS superintendent evaluates the leads, both as principals and as teachers. The school has an evaluation committee to guide the process of peer observation and evaluation.

Perceptions of Positive Impacts

There were many similar perceptions about both positive impacts and challenges associated with a teacher-led school leadership model in the interviews with both schools. In general, these perceptions were consistent with the scant literature available to date on teacher-led schools, described earlier in this report. These themes are described in the following sections, beginning with positive impacts and then moving to challenges.

Having more voice or input into decisions, feeling empowered. Consistently across both schools, teachers and other staff said in the interviews that they felt the teacher-led model allowed for more teacher "voice" and input into decision-making in the school, and a feeling of being more "empowered" to take initiative to address perceived problems or needs in the school. Teachers and other staff had opportunities to initiate or weigh in on decisions through the new teacher-led committees and full staff meetings and votes. At Reiche, a leadership team provided another level of input from staff and other stakeholders. For both schools, having a committee

structure was a new development, and fully implementing shared-decision making with the school heads was another welcome outcome of the teacher-led model. One teacher at Athens described the change this way: "I think people are feeling that they are truly heard and that our school is our family, and . . . I don't think anyone here would say that their voice isn't heard." Another teacher noted, "And like, professional development, that was kind of like a thing the principal would set up before." Another teacher at Athens said, "I think it has made everybody feel a little bit empowered. That they have a role. You know, it's for the positive. Everybody is a part of the leadership team". A teacher at Reiche commented, "I think every teacher feels like they have a voice. Now they have control in voicing concerns, questions, ideas. It puts a lot of ownership on your own productivity, and your professional responsibilities." Another teacher at Reiche shared, "When you are empowered as a teacher to make decisions that will directly impact the success of the student and the school, so much more gets accomplished, and you put the child at the center of everything you do."

Some teachers at Reiche also observed that the shift to a teacher-led model has re-engaged veteran teachers who had not had opportunities previously to help shape school-wide decisions. One teacher said, "I feel like this model has engaged them and instead of kind of going into a shell and just riding out the last few years, they have all this experience that they can share . . ."

Increased transparency in decision-making. Due to the implementation of a governance structure that included multiple teacher-led committees, and the intentional implementation of a decision-making process that requires multiple passes back and forth through committees and with the whole staff to gather ideas, vet and approve proposals, teachers and other staff at Reiche and Athens shared the view that decisions were more "transparent" than they had been under a principal-led school model in the past. This view and the word "transparency" was more often shared explicitly by teachers at Reiche, who had felt dissatisfied with the level of transparency under previous principals and attributed the lack of transparency in decision-making to a "tense" school climate in the past. Teachers at Reiche reported a reduced level of anxiety among staff as a result of increasing the transparency, flow of information, and shared decision-making in their school. One Reiche lead explained, ". . . this was designed on the belief in transparency, and that collaborative decision-making yields better results." Another lead shared,

> It was so critical, those first couple of years, that we were super clear, super transparent, and honestly listening and honestly letting other people do some of the problem-solving and thinking. But we had to do that. We had to model that intensely.

Teachers at Reiche confirmed that the efforts of lead teachers to foster a culture of transparency had positive results. Two comments included the following:

> . . . if there's a decision made at the Leadership [Team], you know the process that it went through. That it wasn't just an arbitrary decision. I think that builds a level of trust

> that you've been at the table, and you've heard how thoughtful people are, and you know that when a decision has been made, that there was consensus.
>
> There's lots of communication. Way more than I've ever experienced in any other school. There's lots of communication about how processes are made, how choices are finalized, who makes decisions. That whole concept of a teacher-led school infers that the teachers have a huge say, and they do.

Having more ownership or collective responsibility for the school. Moving to a teacher-led model increased teachers' opportunity to share in decisions, through a more distributed leadership and governance model. At the same time, teachers and staff at Athens and Reiche fully acknowledged that the opportunity to run a school also carries with it a responsibility or accountability for the successes or failures that result. They described feeling more collectively responsible for their schools, rather than seeing this as the sole responsibility of a school principal. They sometimes referred to this collective responsibility for the school as "being in the same boat", "rowing together", or jumping into the water together. One staff member from Athens explained,

> I think they're trying to bring back that whole child-focused, staff-focused, teamwork piece that [existed] when I first started. . . . We all had to agree that we were all going to jump in together. It wasn't going to be three people swim and the rest of us are in the boat. It was going to be we're all going to spend some time in the water.

The AOS superintendent commented, "The ownership is a huge piece. When every teacher feels like they have an ownership role in the day-to-day activities that go on in the building, I think that permeates through everything you do." The superintendent also described how the sense of ownership went beyond a collective responsibility for student academics to more broadly being engaged in the life of the school and turning out for any type of afterschool event. He noted, "If you have an activity at the building, every staff member is there. There's not a question. . . . the lead teachers and their committees have really developed the ownership of the building." At Reiche, one teacher said, "We're all in this together. And so, we have to establish that culture of trust and collaboration. So, we're holding each other accountable . . ." Another teacher shared,

> . . . when [kids] come in the door, they're greeted by multiple adults. There's a sense of ownership of the entire school. If another teacher sees my kids running in the hall, he's going to say something. And if I see one of his kids doing something great, I'm going to compliment them. There really is a sense of community.

The assistant superintendent for Reiche said, "They know they made the decision. They can change the decision. They can do it differently. . . so they have greater ownership and a greater level of responsibility.

Lead teachers appreciated having their colleagues' share in the work and responsibility, but they still felt an additional weight of responsibility on their shoulders as the administrative heads of their schools and they felt they had greater insight into the impact of accountability for principals. One Reiche lead teacher commented,

> The other thing is, you still have the issue of who's on the line if things go wrong. The reality is you're, those lead teachers, in that respect, are the same as a traditional administrator. And they're the ones who feel the weight of bad scores or something, a situation happens, some dangerous situation happening with a student, or an unhappy parent. They still have that part, that teachers are not used to dealing with.

An assistant superintendent for Reiche shared,

> I feel that I can sometimes feel the weight of that burden when I'm there . . . it seems they are very tough on themselves. . . . They're not just responsible for the things in the class. They're also responsible for running the school. . . . I mean, they just care so much about the kids that it's hard not to say, "Okay, we did well enough".

Ability to take initiative or having agency to address gaps for students. Teachers and staff at both schools frequently described how the teacher-led governance model allowed them to act more quickly to address perceived problems or needs in their schools. Partly this was due to having a committee structure that provided a vehicle for ideas to percolate up from the classroom or from the leadership team as in the case of Reiche, and the practice of forming ad hoc committees to research different ideas. While ideas still needed to go to the whole staff or leadership team (at Reiche) for discussion and approval, there was a feeling that teachers had more agency and did not have to wait for administrative approval to begin working on their ideas. Lead teachers in both schools do in fact meet regularly with district leaders and their school boards to keep them informed as they consider new initiatives and to obtain final approval if needed. One teacher Athens teacher said, "It's easier to get stuff done, because we can do it. We don't have to wait for the principal to say it's okay." Another teacher commented, "We can take initiative on a problem. If we have an idea, we can take it to our committee, write grants, et. We don't have to wait for the district [to approve]." A Reiche teacher shared, ". . . now it's not just one person making those decisions. It's everyone making those decisions, sitting on different committees, trying to make sure we are doing what's best and providing as many enriching activities that are supporting the culture [of the school]." Another teacher said, "If they want to loop, they get together, they talk about the benefits of looping, they look at the data, and then they decide to loop or not. Whereas in other schools, you might be told that you're going to loop."

Some examples of teacher-led initiatives at Athens to address the needs of students and their families were in the areas of health and nutrition, enrichment, and student safety:

- Connecting with a local agency to bring in a school counselor part time;

- Rewriting the health curriculum to address gaps in health education;
- Writing a grant to obtain funding to support student health and exercise initiatives (e.g., New Balance “100 Mile Walking Club”);
- Collaborating with the community and PTO to raise funds for a new preschool playground;
- Improving student nutrition by introducing new foods in the school lunch program and recipes for families, and utilizing the school garden and greenhouse for the school lunch program and learning;
- Obtaining school board approval to increase the number of days for the visiting art and music teachers
- Writing a grant to obtain funding for enrichment in the arts (e.g., busing students to the local university to attend a symphony concert);
- Developing gifted and talented programming within classrooms and obtaining school board approval; and
- Developing multiple events and interventions to improve student behavior and safety on school buses.

Teacher-led initiatives at Reiche included academics as well as social/ emotional supports for students, school climate, and teacher professional development:

- Revising the K-3 science curriculum and incorporating community gardens in collaboration with the PTO;
- Implementing the practice of morning meetings with students as part of a responsive classroom approach and offering professional development to staff on that practice;
- Strengthening the practice of formative feedback in literacy and math within the classroom through professional development and setting individual, professional improvement goals around that practice;
- Asking each governance committee to implement an action research project where data are examined to inform decisions and providing professional development on data use;
- Implementing grade-level teams and providing professional development on collaboration;
- Involving all governance committees in developing the school’s Title 1 plan; and
- Implementing the “Second Step” curriculum to address social/ emotional needs of students, and helping students learn to manage their emotions.

More opportunities for teachers and staff to engage in leadership. The decision to shift responsibility for running their schools to teachers and staff, and the creation of a committee structure to divide up the work, significantly increased the opportunities for teachers and other staff to engage in leading important initiatives at Athens and Reiche. In the past, a few teachers would have been hand selected by a principal to serve on a committee where the principal directed and facilitated committee work. As a teacher-led school, all teachers and most staff in

the schools are involved in committee work. Teachers serve on at least one governance committee and many serve on two committees and possibly the Leadership Team (at Reiche), but they also take on other kinds of leadership roles. Some formal roles include stepping up to a lead teacher position, serving as a chair or co-chair of a committee, or chairing subcommittees. Informal leadership happens when teachers notice other colleagues' strengths and encourage them to try on a leadership role, for example, helping to lead one of the weekly professional development events, or organizing a school-wide event to engage families and the community. A teacher from Reiche said, "We try to, during PD, have different people . . . different voices being heard and leading, because that's part of our shared leadership model." Other teachers may take a lead in working on curriculum revision or investigating a program, intervention, or enrichment activity that could address academic, social, or emotional needs of their students. A Reiche teacher shared, ". . . there are leaders all throughout [the school] who have been co-chairs and now other people are getting those leadership opportunities. So, we have lots of leadership in the building, within the organization, that's just kind of natural." A teacher at Athens explained:

> . . . . [Before] you kind of waited for things to happen, whereas now you know if you want things to happen, you make it happen. You pick a committee that you would be interested in making things happen and you work on that committee. As you see needs, you can bring them up in committee. . . . I think it's working very well, because I think teachers are looking for what they would like to see done and doing it, instead of waiting for someone to come in with their agenda.

Lead teachers and others in the school expressed the view that staff are more likely and more willing to volunteer to lead work in the school because they all understand it is a shared responsibility to shape the decisions and the culture of the school. A lead teacher reflected,

> I think people do a lot more work and step up a lot more when it's truly their option to do that. . . . You've got all these teachers with their master's degrees. They might as well be using them, right? . . . . They know how to implement action research. They need the time and the permission and the room for conversations about it.

More continuity in school improvement. As indicated in the two school profiles earlier in this report, one important reason that Athens and Reiche pursued a teacher-led model was to ensure that the valued initiatives they had implemented in their schools and the vision for their schools were not lost each time a new administrator came in. With high turnover in principal leadership (and district leadership in Portland), teachers were exhausted and frustrated by the constant upheaval resulting from changes in administrative leadership. As seasoned educators who had spent decades working in their schools and communities, they understood the needs of their students. Adopting a teacher-led model was viewed as a way to ensure continuity in effective school improvement efforts. A lead teacher at Reiche explained, that one idea motivating the shift to a new leadership model was: "how can we keep what we've already put in

place and not have an administrator come in and just wipe it out and start again? We'd worked too hard to get to where we were!" A lead teacher at Athens commented,

> . . . these kinds of small schools become stepping stones for administrators. They come in, they administrate for one year, and then they move on. And then we get a new administrator who says, "Now you're going to do it my way this time". And then you get another administrator who says, "Now you're going to do it this way", and then you get no continuity, and you don't get the kind of atmosphere that fosters real collegiality that we can get with a teacher led school.

Value of having a principal who is also teaching. While this view did not surface in every interview, several teachers and all the lead teachers at both schools shared the view that it is helpful when principals or other school heads maintain some teaching responsibilities, so they can better understand the reality of teaching and classrooms and how they may be impacted by different kinds of administrative decisions. They indicated they preferred working under a school head who also continued to be a teacher. For example, a teacher at Athens shared, "I would love to see every principal has to be a teaching principal. Because I think sometimes when you're a principal you lose sight of what it's like to be a teacher." A lead teacher at Reiche commented,

> I had the experience of being a classroom teacher. So, when we were talking about initiatives or curriculum or things like that, it wasn't theoretical . . . Whereas I think sometimes a principal or vice principal, they've been at it for ten years, they don't know what it's like to have 22 kids looking at you . . . And so, I think that feedback loop, between what's happening in the classroom and what's happening in the front office, gets a lot smaller and tighter.

Teachers in both schools acknowledged that other types of school leadership models might also work well if the school leader(s) were truly collaborative and shared decision-making with teachers. A teacher at Athens commented,

> I just want a voice and I want our staff to feel like they have a voice. And whether that means saying you have a lead teacher, or saying that you're a teacher–led school, or saying you have a half-time principal, as long as we're heard.

A lead teacher at Reiche reflected,

> Well, don't you think in a perfect world you could run a school, you could have a teacher-led model that's basically similar, in terms of the committee work, as long as you had an administrative team that genuinely was collaborative and that you weren't just, it was a transparent process. I mean, that could happen. It's just people aren't used to it

Improved school culture or climate. Teachers, other staff, and district administrators described positive improvements in the school culture when their schools adopted a teacher-led model. They attributed this change to the fact that teachers felt more empowered to help direct

the work of their schools and to the improved level of transparency in the process by which decisions were made. They observed that teachers want to stay in these schools and don't often leave. Other teachers who visit or new hires frequently comment on how different the school climate feels from others where they have worked. Eliminating teachers' anxiety about the potential for frequent administrative turnover allowed staff to focus instead on seeing through the initiatives they had started. A lead teacher at Reiche explained,

> . . . you see the difference in just how the school feels. Previously . . . there was a tension in the building that existed, that either you were with the administration or you were against the administration. There was that tension. I think that that has been released. I think it's because the teachers are taking more ownership, they do feel they have more of a say. And also more of a stake in it.

The committee structure required teachers and staff to collaborate more, and they felt this modeled positive behavior for both staff and for students, creating a better school culture for all. A teacher at Athens commented, "Well, the dynamic, like among the staff, is better. And I think the kids kind of feed off that vibe too. They get that we're all working together". A Reiche teacher shared a similar observation,

> Because people feel respected. They feel like they are empowered to make decisions. Now that trickles down to the student body. . . . kids want to come to school every day. They want to be here because teachers are collaborating and they're seeing that level of collaboration, and they want to collaborate in their learning too.

District administrators, school boards, and parents have also noticed an improved school climate with the shift to a teacher-led model. Teachers in both schools noted an increased interest from parents to be involved in the PTOs after the schools became teacher-led, and they described numerous fundraising efforts of their PTOs to support student enrichment, playground equipment, or other needs in the schools. One lead teacher at Athens shared, "Many of the school board members commented to the three of us that they could see and feel the difference in the atmosphere at the school." A Reiche teacher commented,

> People who have come and visited have often commented how the school just feels different. Which is hard to prove or quantify. But they just say the kids seem, and I think it's important for students to see teachers interacting and getting along and working together.

Work on school culture is not a one-time effort that is ever fully finished but rather needs constant attention. Lead teachers and other staff in both schools spend considerable time thinking about and discussing ways to improve and maintain a collaborative working culture for all staff and a positive school climate for staff and students. Lead teachers at Reiche described how the school strategically aligns new initiatives with the school's vision and core beliefs and professional development to improve successful change efforts. One example of this approach

was the intentional decision to implement grade-level teams during the first year of piloting the teacher-led model as a way to foster greater collaboration among teachers for the purpose of improved classroom practice and student learning. One lead teacher explained,

> I think what you're really trying to do with the grade levels [teams] is trying to lift our teaching through collaboration, planning. That's the main reason we really want to do that." Another said: And you can't be a passive member of that team.

Perceptions of Challenges

Longer days, more work required. The decision to adopt a teacher-led model, implies that all teachers will be engaged in some administrative work, instructional leadership or coordination, or other decision-making to steer and manage the school. This means more work on top of teaching and other school duties, longer work days, and more personal time spent on school-related work. When asked how much more time they spend on work since taking the role of lead teacher, most of the leads found it difficult to quantify the time they spend precisely. They all reported regularly arriving at school an hour or two before students arrive for the start of school and often leave two to three hours after the school day ends. Lead teachers and other staff hold committee meetings, plan work, and confer with each other before and after school. They take work home in the evenings to prepare for meetings the next day and to brainstorm solutions to problems, and often work through part of the school breaks or holiday time. Lead teachers and other teachers often work in the summer as well, focusing on hiring staff, curriculum and instructional work, and professional development. However, school leadership and governance committee work are not the only duties teachers have in their schools. They also help out with student and school-wide events and activities. In small, rural schools like Athens, most teachers and staff may coach a sports team afterschool, lead a student club, or help supervise student detention. Both schools create planning time for teachers during allied arts classes and use educational technicians to supervise lunch and recess. But the extra workload related to being teacher-led was the biggest challenge noted by all teachers and administrators who were interviewed. One teacher at Athens commented,

> This week I've already stayed after school one day late. There're two other days with activities. Monday and Wednesday there's our Hundred Mile Club. Which we stay after school and run and walk with the kids. I had detention duty. I have a committee meeting tomorrow. I mean, it requires a lot of extra time and work.

Another staff member at Athens shared,

> It's more time-consuming. It's a lot more thinking at home. Because when you go home, you know you have to come up with a solution to a problem that you have. . . . But it encourages you to think outside the box and take on that extra responsibility.

The AOS superintendent said, "It's a commitment. Everybody has to make that commitment. Everybody had to raise their hand, every staff member, and say 'yes, I'm willing to do more,

spend more time at school', to make this work". The assistant superintendent for Reiche observed, "The teachers work incredibly hard. I think they work harder because they're in a teacher led school. I think they each share an extra burden, even though they're not the teacher leader." A lead teacher at Reiche lead explained that teachers are willing to do more work because they value having more autonomy or agency in running their school,

> It means they're doing a lot more work than they'd really have to do if they were in a traditional model. But that's how important autonomy is to people. . . . I'd say everyone has at least two meetings a week that are outside of the school day. . . . And it's before school or it's after school, and it's at least an hour.

Despite teachers' acceptance of the trade-off between more work and more autonomy, it can still be a challenge for lead teachers to convince staff to keep stepping up to take on extra work. One lead teacher at Reiche described this as a challenging aspect of being a school leader:

> How do you present the hard work that needs to be done in a way that feels like an opportunity, because it should be an opportunity? How do you make it an opportunity so staff gets excited about learning and growing together? Because we have to do it. It's not a choice.

Staff may need to handle more on their own. Lead teachers and other staff at both schools described how classroom teachers needed to learn to handle more problems on their own, given that their lead teachers also have teaching duties. Teachers who were in the habit of relying on a school principal to handle every incident with student behavior, for example, are encouraged to first try to handle these issues on their own if possible. This is particularly true at Athens, where all three lead teachers are full time teachers. So classroom teachers may write up students for detention or call parents. A lead teacher explained,

> We had a long time training them [teachers], retraining them, to say, "If you have a problem with a student, you may discipline them. You may give them detention. You may call the parents". . . . . we felt it's good for teachers to have communications with parents. Even if it's not good communications. . . . A lot of time teachers feel that, "Oh, we'll have the principal call. It's more powerful if the principal calls." . . . They always wanted me to be the bad guy. I don't have to always be the bad guy. This is a teacher-led model, and I'm not the principal!

An Athens teacher said,

> We've always been told, "skin your own skunks" is the turn of the phrase. So, if you can take care of it yourself, in your classroom, without having to involve somebody else, then do it. . . . They're lead teachers, but they still have a full load of classes they need to deal with.

At Reiche, lead teachers and other staff described how new hires may need to adjust from the mindset of asking for permission to take action or expecting the lead teachers to solve perceived problems, to taking the initiative to develop ideas for solutions and working through the committee process to achieve positive outcomes. One lead described a new teacher in the school and observed that "It's taken her awhile to realize I'm not going to dictate. I'm going to trust your judgment. But that also gives you a different responsibility level." Another Reiche lead teacher agreed:

> The other thing is we get new staff on, who don't necessarily understand it. So, usually they start out by asking permission for things that they don't really have to ask permission for. And then they start to realize they do have a little bit more autonomy than most people do in a typical building.

Learning curve for all. Adopting a non-traditional school governance model meant that all members of the school, community, and district needed time to adjust to their new roles and relationships. Lead teachers without prior administrative experience needed to take courses in school law, finance, or evaluation to be prepared to handle complex issues and decisions. District administrators and other lead teachers were important mentors to lead teachers throughout this learning process. At Reiche, two of the three leads had some prior administrative experience and all three had completed coursework in school leadership. At Athens, the learning curve was steeper for the three leads who relied more heavily on their AOS superintendent for guidance. The Athens leads described the experience as truly "eye-opening" as they began to appreciate the many things principals do, and how many responsibilities may be more related to managing the school facility rather than influencing academics. One Athens lead teacher said, "The amount of daily needs and daily decisions that need to be made has been truly eye-opening for me." Another Athens lead teacher agreed,

> Administering a school is one of the hardest jobs that I have done in education. Prior to this, I never realized how difficult and how much time it takes to be a school administrator. That being said, sharing the responsibilities with two other educators has made the job bearable. I often wondered what my administrators were doing in their offices all day long. Now I know; they are dealing with one crisis after another—whether financial, operational, or psychological.

The AOS superintendent confirmed the learning curve for leads in this comment:

> The lead teachers will tell you, as they tell me, they had no idea what a building administrator did. . . . And how much of the day they have to spend dealing with things that have nothing to do with the education of kids. Whether it be a sink that's clogged. Whether it be the school cook is out sick. Can we find a sub?

At Reiche, a lead teacher shared that the task of guiding and nudging teacher learning and development was the most challenging aspect of school leadership.

> I find the most challenging part of my job, I think, is not the students, it's not the families, it's working with the teachers. And really being impactful with them. Challenging them without putting them off. . . . I think that is the craft of leadership. . . . They say it usually takes like five years before an administrator really gets to their feet. I total understand that.

For lead teachers in both schools, it also took time for teachers to gain confidence in their ability to make good decisions on their own, although they still value the practice of conferring with their co-leads. Over time, district administrators saw lead teachers relied on them less often.

Another learning curve for lead teachers was adjusting to the way their role as school administrators altered their relationships with fellow teachers and staff. Given their many years of teaching in their schools, and the solid working relationships they had with their colleagues, this was an easier shift to make than it might have been for a totally new school leader. Still, lead teachers, particularly at Reiche, commented on the subtle changes in the way other teachers regarded the leads. One Reiche lead realized that any statements as a lead or part-time administrator seemed to carry more weight with teachers, where casual remarks might be taken as a directive. This lead learned to reflect more before endorsing ideas or sharing views.

Lead teachers were not the only ones who had to adjust to the new governance model. As described earlier, other teachers and staff in the school also had to accept a new level of collective responsibility for running the school. Teachers could no longer assume that was the responsibility of the building administrator. As teachers school-wide engaged in leadership work through their committee structure, they gained a new understanding of the work involved in developing and researching ideas, gaining buy-in from peers, and implementing initiatives school-wide. Teachers also learn to trust that the decision-making process will be transparent. One lead teacher at Reiche said, "That's been a learning curve for everybody. . . . It's hard for people to make the transition, to trust the process. I do think they trust the process her, now. But it's also been seven years."

Teachers and staff also needed to understand which decisions could be made at the teacher or committee level, which decisions must be made by administrators due to confidentiality or pressing safety concerns, and which decisions are made by the district, state, or federal education agencies. Both Athens and Reiche lead teachers had to spend some time explaining the limits of teacher autonomy to their staff and reminding staff how decisions had been made in the past, and this continues to be a topic that is addressed as new hires have joined Reiche in the seven years they have been a teacher-led school. One Reiche lead teacher explained,

> It's not quite horizontal. I think we did a lot of work last year on decision-making, as a staff. Like, where do decisions lie. Some decisions are administrative decisions. Some decision are committee-based decisions. Some decisions are teacher-based. . . . we're trying to make the Leadership Team be the main decision-making body of the school. For the big, global decisions.

At a different level, the lead teachers, their peers and supervisors within the district needed to learn how to adjust to their new relationships. At both schools, the lead teachers felt highly supported by their district administrators and school boards, and did not describe any difficulties in adjusting in their relationship with superiors, nor in being accepted as school heads by their superiors. The challenge was more in gaining respect and acceptance from other principals, particularly for the Reiche lead teachers. At Athens, this has not been a big issue, as the local district includes only one school building, and the lead teachers aren't able to attend administrative meetings within the AOS because of their full time teaching duties during the day. At Reiche, the school leads take turns attending district meetings with other school principals, and found they were initially given the cold shoulder by a few principals who did not accept them as school heads, did not value their expertise and ideas, or did not feel it was appropriate to discuss contractual issues in front of teachers. One lead described this uncomfortable experience:

> I think we've had to prove who we are. They [other administrators in the district] know we get evaluated two ways. I think that made a difference, that we've agreed to be evaluated by the principal evaluation. We're treated the same . . . but, yeah, that was hard initially. . . . That really was. That was my big learning curve. Building relationships with other administrators. Getting some tough skin.

Needing full commitment from staff and a good fit. While most teachers elected to stay in the two teacher-led schools, not all found it a perfect fit. Teachers and administrators for Reiche said it was important to ensure that teachers are involved in the hiring of new staff and that those who don't want to stay can transfer to other schools. Working closely with the teachers' association and school district, the school is able to hire staff who will be a "good fit" for their unique model. Because Athens school district has only one elementary school, there are fewer options to accommodate teachers who may not be a good fit. As part of the larger AOS, there is a possibility for teachers to move to schools in other communities. Both schools view it as essential that all teachers be fully aware of their shared responsibility to help lead the school and fully committed to taking on the additional work necessary for that role. Because Athens is a small school, it would be hard for teachers or other staff to avoid doing their fair share on committees and with other efforts in the school. Given Reiche's larger size, teachers and staff can sometimes rely on others to carry more of the responsibility. Uneven effort or engagement in helping with the work or to bring solutions to the table can cause resentment. Some teachers at Reiche indicated there are always a few teachers who may be more negative or less willing to step up and share the workload. One teacher said,

> I know that teachers have had conversations with other teachers about, you know, "Maybe you would be happy somewhere else. You seem unhappy here. There's an opening at this school over there. Have you considered it?" In, a gentle, "Hey, why don't you try something new".

A staff member at Athens commented, "You have to have a very dedicated staff. I think you have to have people that are willing to step up and do things that they might not either think that they are ready for, or you know, it's a challenge." The AOS superintendent agreed with the need for a fully committed staff, saying:

> It's a huge commitment and it's all of the staff. It needs to be a 100% buy in. They have to go into this with their eyes wide open, that this is going to be three times the work they thought it was going to be. But I think it can work under the right circumstances. I don't think it's a model that works for everybody. But I think it certainly is one, you know, if I was running a small rural school district, I would certainly look at it.

Establishing an effective communications strategy. Teachers and staff at both schools talked about how they had to develop new ways to communicate within the school and to revisit and improve that process along the way as they implemented the teacher-led model. It was important in both schools for teachers to be informed as proposals moved through the committees. In both schools, the lead teachers help to disseminate information through full staff meetings. At Reiche, the Leadership Team provides a way to share information back to the committees but also allows committee ideas to obtain input from a broader representation of the school. Both schools bring important announcements and decisions to the whole staff to ensure everyone is informed about upcoming events and new initiatives. Athens school is much smaller, and they tend to rely on posting information on a calendar hung on a bulletin board in the teachers' break room and brief, ten minute staff meetings in the front hallway before school. One Athens teacher said,

> Communication is sometimes hard. . . . But it's also important that people know what's going on. So, that has been kind of an issue. . . . We have a big calendar and a big white board, so we can write what's going on.

A lead at Reiche shared a similar perspective,

> You heard us talking about the calendar. It's like the communication piece is really intense because, who's the point person on different issue that arise in the course of a year? Who's the go to person for that? Then when you're also governed by multiple committees, just how does all that get communicated to everybody? So, the communication piece continues to be, it's communication dense is what it is.

In the interviews, lead teachers and other staff talked about learning to facilitate staff discussion of the bigger or more contentious issues, and working hard to develop and maintain norms of collegiality and respect in all aspects of communication within the school. One Reiche teacher described this as "Being able to communicate in a professional way about how to solve different issues, move on. That's key." Other teachers talked about how it used to be the principal's job to have the "difficult conversations", but now they are in that role collectively and need to learn to accept that the less pleasant tasks are also part of school leadership.

As mentioned earlier, lead teachers at Reiche emphasized how important it was for them to model transparency in their own decision-making and communication with staff. Transparency was something teachers highly valued and a strong impetus to implement the teacher-led model, and it is something they have intentionally focused on from the beginning. Over time, staff have gained trust that their lead teachers truly will be transparent, and have learned to observe conduct their committee work in a similar way. Lead teachers also needed to establish and maintain trust in their relationships and consistency in communicating with staff. One lead reflected, "I think clear communication, trust, that we trust each other and we support each other. And also, support each other's decisions. And not undermine each other."

Need to slow things down for shared decision making. One aspect of lead teachers' learning curve was to understand that they needed to take more time to consider options and consequences before making a decision. Initially, they felt staff may expect them to make decisions in the spur of the moment, but realized that could result in poor decisions that they would later regret. Instead, lead teachers from both schools talked about how they intentionally slowed down their own decision-making process so that they could consider more points, confer with their co-leads, and ensure that they were observing the model of shared decision-making. One Reiche lead learned from a co-lead with more administrative experience to "slow it down" saying,

> Like you don't need to jump on something right now. You need to be thoughtful and slow it down. . . . I'm saying if there's a big decision, then we will meet, brainstorm, and are real intentional when we do something.

Another Reiche lead shared this advice for school leaders,

> The other key thing is saying, "I'll get ack to you'". Or, you don't have to give an answer right now to 99% of stuff. So don't! If you aren't sure, say "I'm not sure about that. Let me investigate that a little more". . . . [as a school leader] you want to make everybody happy all the time. You can't do that, because you're going to burn out so fast you can't see straight. And you're going to mess up. Because you can't make everybody happy. So, pacing yourself. I guess is what that is.

A lead teacher at Athens had learned a similar approach of taking time out to think through problems or requests before acting.

> At first, when a teacher would ask me a question, I may have been too quick to answer, and say, "Sure, I don't see why not." But I've learned to take more time to process questions, and think about who else might be affected. So, if a teacher asks me "Can we change the lunch schedule?", I'll say, "I need to go and think about it a bit", and I'll walk down to my room and think. Then I'll realize that if we change something, other people will be affected. So, I've learned I need time to process questions. Otherwise, there can be blowback!

Other teachers and staff noted that the committee structure and goal of shared governance meant that it may take longer for things to wind through the process and gain final approval. More time is needed for input, revisions, more input, and buy-in from the whole staff. One Reiche teacher shared, "We go through a process. And sometimes the process seems like we're over-processing, but I think ultimately that it's a good thing. That you'd rather over-process than under-process."

Increased workload for district administrators. When teachers moved into administrative roles in their schools they needed to rely on their district administrators for mentoring and guidance on questions related to budgeting, personnel, student discipline, and other issues. For both schools, their superintendent or assistant superintendent met regularly with the lead teachers, just as they would with principals in other schools. However, instead of having one new school head to mentor, the district administrators had three new school heads at the same time. One some days, the AOS superintendent for Athens could field phone calls or emails from all three lead teachers on different issues.

Another way that administrators' workload is impacted is with the requirement for formal evaluation of teachers and principals. The teachers at both Athens and Reiche have elected to be evaluated both as principals and as teachers. Their district administrator performs the principal evaluations which, again, is multiplied by three. At Athens, the district administrator also evaluates the three lead teachers as teachers, and also conducts all the summative evaluations of teachers at the end of the year. The decision to avoid having lead teachers do summative evaluations of other teachers was meant to avoid the conflict inherent in the fact that lead teachers are also members of their professional association. But it also means that the district administrator shoulders that extra workload. The AOS superintendent felt the additional work was manageable for a small school like Athens, but said it would become unmanageable for a district leader to assume that extra workload for a larger school. At Reiche, the three lead teachers evaluate each other as teachers, and they share responsibility with other trained teachers in the school to observe and evaluate teachers.

Traditional policies and structures don't fit. Lead teachers at both Athens and Reiche commented on the different ways that district, state, and federal policies and reporting forms may not yet anticipate that teachers could be school heads. For example, most forms still require a "principal" to sign, which can be problematic. While this was not a big challenge, it was somewhat annoying or inconvenient for the lead teachers to have to explain their unique job roles as teachers who have administrative responsibility for their schools. Policies at all levels have not yet caught up to the changing landscape of K-12 school leadership models that exist today.

Similarly, school districts are structured in a traditional way that anticipates principals will have flexibility in their schedules to attend district or state meetings. When school heads are also teachers, this expectation becomes more problematic. Teacher leaders at Athens were unable to attend meetings with other principals in the AOS, and this limited their opportunity to have a seat at the table and fully participate in discussions but also to establish themselves as school

heads among their peers. Despite the fact that the lead teachers have a good working relationship with their superintendent and attend evening school board meetings, they remained somewhat marginalized within their broader school system.

Assessing the Teacher-Led Model

The interviews for this study of a teacher-led school model revealed that there are pros and cons with this model, as with anything else, and that the model may not be appropriate for all schools and systems, particularly larger schools. Teachers and administrators strongly advised that any schools contemplating this model should first research it thoroughly with visits to existing teacher-led schools, and should go in "with their eyes open". Schools need to take time developing the school vision and structure, and engaging with all staff, parents, district leaders, and school boards to obtain their input and support, and to keep everyone fully informed at all stages.

One of the chief challenges for teacher-led schools is the extra workload for teachers and staff as they share the responsibility for decisions and running the school. Teachers and lead teachers especially have longer days and give up some of their personal time to accomplish their work. Given the extra work involved, and the responsibility lead teachers have for sometimes having "difficult discussions" with teachers or parents, not all teachers are interested or willing to step up to this role. Thus, the sustainability of the model was another concern or challenge for both schools. Lead teachers encouraged their colleagues to take courses and prepare in other ways to rotate into the lead role, but some teachers did not see themselves in this role or had family obligations that made it more difficult. The lead teachers in both schools were all veteran teachers with decades of experience. They either had children who were adults or did not have children. One would expect that the smaller school, Athens, would have more difficulty filling the lead teacher positions. However, teachers in that school seemed to be preparing for and anticipating that they would need to take a turn at the helm at some point in the near future. At Reiche, a substantially larger school, fewer teachers seemed to be actively planning for the role of lead teacher. One lead teacher reflected that perhaps by creating so many other ways to engage in leadership through committee work and leading professional development in the school, that teachers' found satisfaction through those roles and may be less likely to seek the position of lead teacher. Another lead said, "I'm hoping with the type of structures we've put in place, that people are doing more as leaders, they'll can envision themselves in the role of a lead teacher." Another major challenge, primarily for Reiche, was the negotiation of new working relationships as teachers moved into their administrative roles. They needed to be mindful of how they communicated with their teacher colleagues, and it took time to gain acceptance among other principals.

Despite the challenges inherent in implementing and sustaining this school leadership model, lead teachers and other staff all communicated their strong support for the concept of teacher-led schools and felt the additional workload was "worth it" to gain greater voice, autonomy, or empowerment in running their schools. To be sure, these schools were fully under the usual constraints of their district systems, but they felt they had ample room to initiate school

improvement efforts, both large and small, to create more a more healthy and collaborative school culture and to address gaps or needs of their students.

Both schools felt essential conditions for success included: having a very strong, experienced teaching staff; having trusting relationships among staff; having staff who are fully committed to their school and going beyond the duties of classroom teaching; and having strong support from parents, the community, schoolboard and district leadership. The AOS superintendent for Athens commented, "I think because of the longtime veteran teachers who earned the public's trust over the years, that has really made this work in a lot of ways. But it was eye-opening for the lead teachers." The assistant superintendent for Reiche shared the view, "Well, I think you need district support, for sure. And you need a school where they really want to do it. You have to really, really want to do it. It's so much extra work."

Concluding Thoughts About Innovative Practices

This report describes two approaches to developing and supporting school leadership that are innovative. There are some similarities between the two approaches, but also some differences. The BSD case represents a systems-based approach which relies on coordinated leadership and communication from the district's central office, but also encourages "bottom up" input, feedback and innovation from the school and classroom level. The two cases describing teacher-led schools represent more of a site-based approach to school leadership through the collective work of all teachers in the school. While both teacher-led schools still operate within the constraints of a district system, they have somewhat more flexibility, particularly in the case of Athens, to reorganize governance structures within the schools, and the process used to make decisions about school-wide efforts is more fluid with multiple efforts to vet ideas through teachers. Another difference in the two approaches are the underlying goals or purpose of the innovations. In the BSD case, a more centralized approach allows a larger school district to establish common goals, practices, and coherent policies and initiatives for greater consistency across the many schools within the district system. In the teacher-led schools, two driving goals of leadership innovation were to give teachers within the schools greater "voice" and control over school-level decisions and improvement efforts through a distributed leadership model, and to avoid the instability caused by high turnover in principals.

Both approaches also have striking similarities. Both the systems-based and site-based approaches created new opportunities for teachers to engage in leadership roles and work, and to initiate innovative practices. In the BSD case, teachers work on grade-level teams, school-wide teams, and represent their schools on district-wide teams and academies. In the teacher-led schools, new governance committees composed and led by teachers and other staff provide a structure for teachers to initiate ideas, plan improvement action, vet and approve proposals. In both the BSD and the teacher-led schools, teachers pilot and refine new instructional practices and revise curricula for the purpose of improving student learning and achievement. And in both the systems-based case and the teacher-led schools, teachers are involved in peer observation and/or evaluation work, which had formerly been the responsibility of the school principal. Further, teachers are stepping up to help lead professional development for their colleagues in

both the BSD and the teacher-led schools. Beyond the opportunity to take on leadership roles, teachers also have supports and opportunities to develop new leadership skills through their collaborative work with other teachers and administrators on teams and committees, and through leading professional development. The district-university partnership established by BELA in the BSD case provides an important framework of graduate coursework to provide the foundation aspiring school leaders will need.

It should also be pointed out that there were some important differences in the approach to school improvement and leadership between the two teacher-led schools. Reiche used a leadership team and pursued a more coordinated approach to align all initiatives with the school mission and vision and the identified needs of students and teachers from data, and the school strategically provided on-going professional development to support the kinds of instructional improvements or other changes needed. In this way, Reiche's approach bore some resemblance to the well-coordinated and aligned strategies found in the BSD case.

Clearly, the systems-based approach to innovation and the teacher-led school model both support the development of and capacity for school leadership through the many ways teachers are learning about and engaging in leading important work in their schools. Some teachers may decide to step into more traditional administrative roles, while others will be content to lead from the classroom. What is important is that in both approaches, teachers have substantive opportunities for teachers to initiate ideas and gain school-wide and district support for innovative practices that will improve their schools and support their students.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The case studies presented in this report have potential implications for both policy and for practice. We highlight some of these here:

Implications for Policy

- Districts that seek to encourage innovation from the classroom level may need to develop policies that encourage and allow some risk-taking and piloting of new practices, as well as policies that reward educators' efforts to engage in such efforts;
- Local school districts may find it beneficial to establish contractual agreements that allow teachers to move from teaching positions to administrative positions and back to teaching positions again, without losing their seniority, to encourage more teachers to "try on" administrative leadership roles;
- School districts and universities may find mutual benefits in establishing closer collaborations to plan professional development and graduate degree programs that better serve the particular needs of districts, and a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) is an instrument that can provide a framework for such partnerships;
- Some local, state and federal policies and reporting forms may need revision to recognize alternative school leadership models, such as the teacher-led model where teachers, instead of principals, act as the chief administrators for their schools and sign forms on behalf of their schools;

- Districts with teacher-led schools may need to establish policies or contractual agreements that allow teachers to move to other schools in the district if they do not wish to teach in a teacher-led school; and
- Districts may need to identify additional funding to create sufficient release time from teaching for the lead teachers to manage the administrative workload while still teaching part-time, and funding may be needed for teacher stipends for both lead teachers and other staff who engage in committee work.

Implications for Practice

- Districts and schools seeking to encourage more teachers to engage in leadership work, such as curriculum development, leading professional development, or chairing data teams to identify student achievement gaps, may need to budget for stipends to support this work, particularly work during the summer;
- Districts that seek to encourage innovation from the classroom level may need to develop structures or practices, such as school-wide teams, district-wide meetings or administrative walkthroughs that purposefully seek to identify new ideas that work and ways to disseminate effective practices more broadly;
- Schools that implement teacher-led school models need to work in close partnership with their district leadership, teachers' association, school boards, and parents to obtain strong support from all levels and maintain open communication at every step
- Districts may need to find ways to remove barriers to allow lead teachers to more fully participate in district-wide meetings, and to smooth the way for their acceptance among other school heads in the district;
- Districts with lead teachers could establish a broader system of mentoring to help lead teachers connect with experienced principals to tap their expertise and guidance with questions;
- Teacher-led schools may benefit by partnering with more established teacher-led schools to learn what works; and
- Teachers who are contemplating the idea of moving into a lead teacher position may need active encouragement to begin coursework ahead of time to prepare for that role.

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Author Information

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Appendix A: Memorandum of Understanding
Bangor School Department and University of Maine Educational Leadership Program Partnership to Develop an Educational Leadership Academy

April 7, 2016

The University of Maine Educational Leadership Program and the Bangor School Department are entering into a partnership, called the Bangor Educational Leadership Academy, to provide educators in Bangor with a regional group cohort experience to work towards a Master's of Educational Leadership from August 2016 through August 2020. The targeted enrollment is approximately 12-15 educational leadership students (current teachers seeking their M.Ed. and possibly current administrators seeking their CAS). This memorandum documents our mutual understandings about the program and the parties' responsibilities.

University of Maine Commitments:

- The University of Maine will operate its M.Ed. and CAS offerings in a four year cohort model from August 2016 through August 2020.
- The University of Maine will provide a separate regional group track that is specifically and exclusively established for Bangor School Department (BSD) educators to pursue their M.Ed. and CAS.
- The University of Maine will offer the regional group classes, which are held twice per month during a weekday from 5:00-7:00, at a Bangor School Department school building in Bangor, Maine, as coordinated with the Bangor School Department Superintendent.
- The University of Maine will offer the cohort wide classes, which are held once per month on Saturdays from 8:30-2:30, at the University of Maine campus in Orono, Maine.
- The University of Maine will provide the same structure and basic coursework as other M.Ed. and CAS cohort students, however, the faculty will hold meetings with the Bangor School Department Superintendent at least once per semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer) to discuss upcoming curriculum being covered by the University of Maine, as well as to incorporate professional development and school improvement efforts being implemented within the Bangor School Department.
- The University of Maine will provide the instructors of record; however, the University of Maine instructor will work to incorporate 1-2 guest lectures each semester from a current Bangor School Department administrator to help with instructional alignment.
- The University of Maine will work collaboratively with the Bangor School Department to conduct a yearly evaluation (once in each August of the four year collaboration) to reflect on the program. These evaluations will be intended to support future collaborations with the Bangor School Department as well as to be presented to the Maine Legislature, either through the Task Force on School Leadership or through the Maine Educational Policy Research Institute.
- The University of Maine will work collaboratively with the Bangor School Department to present these evaluations and findings at various research conferences, including but not limited to the New England Educational Research Organization (NEERO), the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), and the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

Bangor School Department Commitments:

- The Bangor School Department will provide 12-15 students to enroll as a regional group for the four year cohort model from August 2016 through August 2020.
- The Bangor School Department will support each of the 12-15 students by paying for their four yearly cohort classes according to the terms of the collective bargaining agreements between the employees and the Bangor School Committee. This support will be in the form of three graduate level courses, or nine graduate level credits, per year.
- If enrollment for the Administration and Leadership Academy drops below 10 students, the University of Maine will not be required to continue to offer courses.
- The Bangor School Department will pay for the four additional elective courses, according to the terms of the collective bargaining agreement between the employees and the Bangor School Committee, held outside of the cohort model that are needed for principal certification; this can be accomplished either working collaboratively with the University of Maine Educational Leadership faculty to establish these courses offered as additional coursework within the four year period, or after the four year period.
- The Bangor School Department will be responsible to recruit and select their own leaders in the Educational Leadership Academy pipeline program, however, all selected educators must submit a required University of Maine graduate school application as well as complete either the MAT or GRE (a University of Maine Graduate School requirement). Application and submission of test scores to the University of Maine Graduate School must be completed prior to 12 credits being completed by students.
- The Bangor School Department will support the selected Educational Leadership Academy educators by providing them with administrative mentors within their school building or district level mentorship, depending on if a student is pursuing a M.Ed. or a CAS.
- The Bangor School Department will work collaboratively with the University of Maine faculty by participating in meetings held at least once per semester (Fall, Spring, and Summer), to discuss upcoming curriculum being covered by the University of Maine, as well as to incorporate professional development and school improvement efforts being implemented within the Bangor School Department.
- The Bangor School Department will work collaboratively with the University of Maine faculty to provide 1-2 guest lectures each semester from a current Bangor School Department administrator to help with instructional alignment.
- The Bangor School Department will work collaboratively with the University of Maine to conduct a yearly evaluation (once in each August of the four year collaboration) to reflect on the program. These evaluations will be intended to support future collaborations with the University of Maine as well as to be presented to the Maine Legislature, either through the Task Force on School Leadership or through the Maine Educational Policy Research Institute.
- The Bangor School Department will work collaboratively with the University of Maine to present these evaluations and findings at various research conferences, including but not limited to the New England Educational Research Organization (NEERO), the University Council for Educational Administration (UCEA), and the American Educational Research Association (AERA).

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