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Conditions for Change: Implementing Principal Talent Management

Policies and Practices in Three Districts

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Acknowledgements

This paper shouldn’t exist. It was largely written during a time in our country’s (and my own) history that was riddled with sadness: a pandemic, economic uncertainty, continuing racial inequality, and the death of a beloved aunt. It exists only because of a vast support network that I am fortunate enough to have, and its existence makes me believe in the social capital theories referenced in this paper more than ever before.

Bob Chiang put as much (maybe more?) blood, sweat, and tears into this dissertation than I did. He entertained our boys, cooked dinner, went grocery shopping, made sure animals and plants stayed alive, etc. etc. so that I had time to write it. He also offered moral support and taught me how to use Excel in ways I’ve already forgotten. Like our favorite song says, “You bring me sunshine/I bring you rain. You bring me smiles/I drive you outta your brain.”

My children are the only ones sad that this paper is done. They now know I’ll start paying attention to things like bedtime, how much video games they are playing, and how many vegetables they’ve eaten. But, they never once complained when I couldn’t play with them because of this thing, and I hope they’ve been able to learn a little about grit and persistence from it.

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always ready to “nerd out” over SNA data. Dr. Sevak taught me how to teach education leaders, and Dr. Richards taught me about policy, methods, and then, even more policy.

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Finally, there is a reason I studied these districts when I could have studied anything. What really motivated me through this program and this paper were the thousands of students who I have had the privilege of educating or supervising the education of since 2004. I never felt (and still don’t) like I knew enough or was good enough for the privilege, and I always wanted to know more for them. While I observed the district project teams described in this study, I knew they felt the same way. These district teams are the hardest working, most caring, most selfless people I’ve ever had the privilege to work alongside. Students are lucky to have you all.

“How do you create a safe place? How do you create urgency and high expectations, with a safe place, with feeling like a safe place to grow? Because we have to have high expectations. We have to have urgency. We’re talking about children’s lives. But how do we do that? If we’re going to recruit and retain, and support and grow, do we have a
culture where we have high expectations, and we have systems, but also a safe place to grow and feel like you can grow?"

--District Project Team Leader
Abstract

This mixed methods case study examines how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining interview, focus group, survey, and artifact data from three districts actively working to implement and improve principal talent management (PTM) practices and policies, this study sought to identify what conditions best explained variation and progress on implementation. Using Honig’s (2006) implementation framework that examines how policy, people, and places situate implementation effectiveness, I sought to understand how policy reform information flows among people, particularly between the central office staff and school principals. Findings suggest that districts varied in their implementation progress; they were all challenged by their own capacity gaps, gaining buy-in to the work, and communication flow. Across all districts, the conditions that best explained variation included: having ownership, autonomy, and accountability for the work; a willingness to learn and build capacity; and strategies to improve information flow. Principal supervisors acted as the mediator between principals and the central office, and their support role relates to principal’s job embeddedness.

*Keywords*: education leadership, school principals, talent management, implementation, social network theory.
Chapter 1: Introduction

Recruiting, supporting, and retaining effective principals has received attention in the literature (Hargreaves & Fink, 2006; Roza, 2003) because principals have an important role in school quality (Leithwood, et al., 2004; Grissom, 2011). Principals do the following that makes them critical to a school’s success: they lead instruction, they are talent managers of teachers, they lead parents and the community, and handle the overall morale, culture, and operations of the school building (e.g, Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Goldring et al., 2014; Grissom, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). Research has linked quality principals to improvements in areas like teacher retention and satisfaction, climate, improved student attendance, and student achievement improvements (Bartanen, 2020; Boyd et al., 2011; Branch, Hanushek, & Rivkin, 2012; Grissom, 2011; Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Practices and policies for recruiting, supporting, and retaining effective principals fall to the leaders in the school district, referred to as central office administrators. Traditionally, central office structures have been hierarchical (Ballenger, et al., 2013). But more recent research has shown the benefits of “central office transformation”, where central office members work and learn together with a common goal of supporting teachers to help students (Brudney, et al., 2000; Honig, 2008, Knapp, 2008). The purpose of this chapter is to give an overview of this dissertation study and to introduce the remaining sections of the paper, which include:

- Chapter Two: An in-dept literature review and description of the theoretical framework;
- Chapter Three: The detailed methods structure for analyzing the data collected to answer the study’s research questions;
• Chapter Four: A review of the findings; and
• Chapter Five: A discussion of interpretations and implications of the study.

**Problem Statement**

Central office staff play a critical role in implementing and overseeing principal talent management (PTM) policies and practices, and successful widespread implementation of new practices and policies does not happen without deep engagement of the central office (Honig, et al., 2010). These leaders make personnel decisions regarding recruiting, hiring, training, evaluating, and disciplining all employees (Clifford, 2010; Fullan & Mascall, 2000; Opfer, 2011; Seyfarth, 2002). But, practices at the central office around human resources and talent management are not always strategic, and instead the work is approached in a more transactional nature (Clifford, 2010; Thompson & Kleiner, 2005; Tran, 2015).

Like other complex organizations, change in school districts can be difficult (Honig, 2006; O’Day, 2002). Some efforts to shift organizational structure or create major organizational changes have been successful (Bryk & Schnieder, 2002; Gates, et al., 2019a; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003) while others have not (Papa, 2002; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Sometimes, districts work to solve this by restructuring management positions, but this alone is not enough (Honig, et al., 2010). Tran (2015) observed that personnel management is emphasized rather than strategic talent management strategy in school districts, even after attempts to restructure. To have real central office transformation, the professional practice of both central office leaders and building leaders need to be strengthened while increasing teaching and learning outcomes (Honig, et al., 2009).
Also, practices and policies having to do with recruiting, supporting, and retaining effective principals are complex (Mitani, 2018). For example, one such policy/practice change might include changing a recruitment and selection policy for principals in an attempt to attract more and better candidates while also reducing bias. To do this effectively, at least two departments in the central office (e.g., human resources and chief of schools) must work closely with the superintendent’s office to develop or refine the policy and practice. It is imperative that they follow the law, while also creating a process that is manageable and cost effective. These departments must have a clear understanding of what competencies and skills they are looking for in a candidate, as well an understanding of interview questions and tasks needed to evaluate candidates on those skills. Once the process is in place, they must communicate it internally and externally, and they may have to work with the school board to make official changes in the policy. Then, all staff must be trained on the policy and ensure it is followed for fairness. Each of these steps is complex, and all of them require the kind of work that occurs in a “transformed” central office (Honig, 2008).

As a field, there is a common understanding on how to prepare, support, and retain our school principals. PTM includes school district practices and policies that recruit, select, support, and retain the most effective school principals (Bush Institute, 2016). For example, we know that when principals perceive that their professional learning is high quality, they are more satisfied in their roles (Fuller, et al., 2018). We also know that effective principal preparation programs give future principals authentic residency experiences during their training, so they are better prepared for the job (Gates et al., 2019b). But there are still gaps in our knowledge on PTM. For
example, effective non-monetary incentives are overlooked in most fields, and this is certainly true of school leadership (Cassar & Meier, 2018).

In an effort to support districts’ central office staff in improving their PTM policies and practices, a national non-profit created a Professional Learning Community (PLC) for districts. This PLC supports four mid-to-large size urban districts that commit a team of 10-15 staff to work on improving PTM in their district. Only three participating districts were included in this study. This three-year program worked with districts in three ways: 1) each district was assigned an experienced advisor to provide ongoing support in the district, 2) each district attends three convenings per year where they learn from experts and each other in order to advance the work, and 3) each district receives an annual diagnostic report that measures progress in order to inform them in planning. In addition to supporting districts in this work, the PLC was set up to learn from these four districts to better understand the barriers and challenges central office leaders are faced with as they work to implement new PTM practices and policies. Understanding the specific conditions that need to be in place in order to have successful implementation of complex practices and policies in a district could provide insight to other districts and the field.

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining three districts actively working to implement and improve PTM practices and policies, this study sought to identify what conditions best explained variation and
progress on implementation. This research used a subset of data collected in the fall of 2019 from a larger evaluation study.

**Research Questions**

The value of changing central office practices and policies in support of principals is supported in the literature (Bardett & McCormick, 2004; Honig, 2012; Johnson, 2010; Knapp, 2008). Given that, the research questions considered for this study included:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?
- Research Question 2 (RQ2): Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation?

**Introduction to the Study’s Proposed Theoretical Framework**

This mixed methods case study utilized a pragmatic perspective to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes in order to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining three districts actively working to implement and improve PTM practices and policies, this study sought to identify the necessary conditions that best explained variation on implementation progress. This study fits within the broader context of implementation studies looking to understand more fully the conditions necessary for successful implementation in organizations working to implement complex policies and practices. To interpret and understand the data derived from the study, I utilized a pragmatic interpretive framework using the lens of using Honig’s (2006)
implementation framework that examines how policy, people, and places situate implementation effectiveness. This framework aids in understanding how policy reform information flows among people, particularly between the central office staff, who in this study develop the policies, and school sites who many times must implement or at least work within those policies. This will be explored in more detail in Chapter 2.

**Overview of Research Design**

The data from this study were pulled from a larger evaluation study of four districts participating in a PLC to improve their district policies and practices with respect to PTM. I was unable to get final approval to use data in one district, and because of COVID-19, I chose to limit my follow-up to that district out of respect for the complexity of what district leaders are dealing with during this crisis. The larger evaluation study is ongoing, but this research study covers data from the first two years of the project. The data set for this study included: surveys of principals and central office staff, interviews, focus groups, artifact review, and review of diagnostic scores assigned annually by the evaluation team as part of the larger evaluation study.

For this study, I used a mixed methods design, which uses both quantitative and qualitative research to understand the implementation work happening in the three districts more fully (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The rationale for using this method is that neither quantitative nor qualitative data collection and analysis alone were enough to answer the proposed research questions. Therefore, using a combination of both methods allowed for a more complete analysis. A heavier emphasis was placed on the qualitative data because of the stage of the intervention being studied and the theory of change behind it. It is theorized that it may take
years for this intervention to impact quantitative outcomes such as talent retention and student achievement, but much can be learned by analyzing observation of practice, perceptions, and other qualitative data in the interim to help understand the conditions necessary for change at this scale.

Quantitative data used in the study was limited and included descriptive statistics and some limited analysis on survey data. This combination of data helped to further understand the interactions between people, policies, and places explored in the theoretical framework. The data and analysis procedure and a more in-depth look at the data collected is explored further in Chapter 3.

**School District Context**

The three participating districts are located around the United States, including two in the Southwest and one in the West. The districts range between 70,000 and 90,000 students. They have between 60 and 150 principals. All districts have student populations where at least 50% of students qualify for free or reduced lunch, and least 30% are classified as English Language Learners (ELL). All district superintendents have been in their roles for at least three years, and principal average turnover is five to ten years. All three districts participated fully in the first two years of the program (Year 1=2018; Year 2=2019).

**Data Analysis**

To answer the research questions for this study, I used a mixed methods approach that was heavily qualitative. I analyzed each district as its own case first, and then looked across the three cases, or districts. Using both qualitative and quantitative allowed me to get a broader
picture of each case I looked at (Creswell & Plano, 2018). I then used a convergent mixed methods design described by Creswell and Plano where I cleaned, organized, and reviewed the quantitative data separately from the qualitative data. Once I reviewed the quantitative data, I then merged both data sets into an organization scheme that matched my coding framework. This is described in more detail in Chapter 3.

**Importance of the Study**

This study adds to the existing literature on PTM practices and implementation. This study also adds to the literature by elaborating on Honig’s (2006) implementation framework specifically pointing out how certain enabling conditions play out in interactions between the policy being implemented, the people implementing and benefiting from the policy, and the context of where the policy is being implemented.

**Definition of Terms**

*Principal Talent Management (PTM)* – All those components that make up a cohesive system for preparing, recruiting, selecting, training, and retaining high quality principals for schools.

*Professional Learning Community (PLC)* – A group of stakeholders that meet regularly around a common problem a practice, using their shared expertise, as well as others, as a way to learn, grow, and find solutions to problems.

*District Project Team (Project Team)* – Each district assigned a team of 10-15 staff members, including principals, principal supervisors, and other central office staff, who lead the work and attended the convenings throughout the project.
**PLC Program Team (Program Team)** – The team of people at the non-profit organization who created and implemented the PLC activities, including the content at the in-person PLC meetings.

**Principal Supervisor** – The person responsible for evaluating, training, and managing principals. These people are given different titles in different districts throughout the United States. Some example titles include: Executive Director, Chief of Schools, Director of Education, Director of Schools, etc.

**Social Network Analysis (SNA)** – A technique used to systematically investigate social structures, which can be qualitative or quantitative.

**Organization of the Study**

This study is reported in five chapters. Chapter one introduces the study, including background, research problem and questions, and the purpose of the study, as well as assumptions of the study. Chapter two is a review of the literature related to the study, and provides the theoretical framework used to make the analyses provided in later chapters. Chapter three includes the methodology, including detailed information about the setting, participants, methods of gathering information, how the analysis was conducted, and reviews the limitations and delimitations of the work. Chapter four provides an analysis of the data collected with respect to the findings. Chapter five relates the findings to the research questions, provides conclusions, and relays implications of the study.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

The purpose of this study was to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining three districts actively working to implement and improve PTM practices and policies, this study sought to identify what conditions best explained variation and progress on implementation. A review of the current literature in three areas was conducted in order to frame the study: 1) research on PTM policies and practices and their link to improved schools, 2) job embeddedness literature, and 3) the role of central office in policy reform implementation in districts. First, this review of literature provides an overview of the research and expert advice on PTM policies and practices, as well as their link to outcomes in school districts. The review will then focus on presenting an overview of job embeddedness as potential evidence of progress for districts. If districts do improve their PTM policies and practices, it is hypothesized that principals will become more embedded in their organizations, and therefore, will stay in their roles longer. Finally, the review focuses on the potential role of the central office in improving PTM, including examining research on the link between the central office and school sites.

To conduct this selected literature review, I used multiple information sources, including books, dissertations, Internet resources, professional journals, and periodicals. These sources were accessed through ERIC, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and the SMU library database search. No specific delimiting time frame was specified for the review, but I did attempt to locate the most recent literature, focusing in on the past ten years.
After the literature review was conducted, a theoretical framework through which the study data could be analyzed was created. A theoretical framework is a powerful tool that researchers can use to offer a deeper explanation on data analysis and can provide structure throughout the study (Collins & Stockton, 2018). The foundation of the theoretical framework was taken from Honig’s (2006) work describing the importance of viewing policy change/implementation by carefully observing the interaction between people, places, and policies. While I will use all strands of literature to inform my data analysis, Table 1 describes how each strand of the literature review most closely ties to the research questions proposed for this study.

**Table 1**

*Ties Between Literature Strands and Research Questions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Question</th>
<th>Literature Strand Reviewed</th>
<th>Additional Notes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Contextual background on the polices/practices being implemented</td>
<td>Current research on PTM policies and practices</td>
<td>Literature on PTM serves as a background to develop a coding framework in order to assess district areas of focus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RQ1: What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?</td>
<td>Central office role in implementation</td>
<td>Honig’s (2006) framework and social network theory make up the theoretical framework from which I will analyze all data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Honig’s (2006) policy implementation framework</td>
<td>Job embeddedness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
RQ 2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation? Honig’s (2006) policy implementation framework This question will also look at the literature described above but will have a heavy focus on the implementation framework

Principal Talent Management as a Key Lever for Improving School Districts

Principals play several important roles that make them critical to a school’s success: they lead instruction, they are talent managers of teachers, they lead parents and the community, and handle the overall morale, culture, and operations of the school building (e.g., Cohen-Vogel, 2011; Grissom, 2011; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood et al., 2004). Research has linked quality principals to improvements in areas like teacher retention and satisfaction, climate, improved student attendance, and student achievement improvements (Bartanen, 2020; Boyd et al., 2011; Branch, et al., 2012; Grissom, 2011; Grissom & Bartanen, 2019; Grissom & Loeb, 2011).

Studies have shown that teachers are the most important in-school factor in improving student achievement, and that these effects can also improve students’ long-term outcomes, such as college attendance going rates (Bacher-Hicks, et al., 2016; Chetty et al., 2014a & 2014b; Rothstein, 2017). Retaining those highly effective teachers is critical to improving schools (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). Grissom and Bartanen (2018) recently found that effective principals can retain highly effective teachers, as well as increase turnover of those
teachers who are not as effective. However, between 18-20% of principals leave their schools annually, and turnover is highest in high-poverty schools (Goldring & Taie, 2018). Because of this turnover, the principal workforce is changing. Principals today are younger, have less experience, and report feeling unprepared to lead their schools (Goldring & Taie, 2018). The most current numbers show that national average tenure of principals in their schools is about four years (Levin & Bradley, 2019). If principals have a strong influence in keeping our best teachers, improving how school districts manage their principal talent may be an important way to improve schools.

**Principal Talent Management Practices and Policies**

Recent research has highlighted the importance of using PTM strategies to improve schools. Gates, et al. (2019a) studied six districts implementing comprehensive PTM strategies through The Wallace Foundation’s Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI). The researchers found that when these districts improved or implemented policies related to leader standards, preservice preparation, selective hiring and placement, and on the job induction, evaluation and support, positive outcomes on principals, schools, and students occurred. According to the report, all six districts varied in how they implemented new systems, but that there were strong positive outcomes. For example, principals placed after the new talent management systems were in place outperformed their peers in comparison schools. Also, they were more likely to remain in their jobs longer.

Other experts have written about the importance of strategic talent management of both principals and teachers. Odden (2011) developed a conceptual framework that ties human capital
strategies to student achievement. In his framework, he lists recruitment, selection/placement, induction/mentoring, professional development, performance management, and compensation as key strategies to address. His framework relies on talent strategy; finding top talent is not enough—that talent must be supported and developed to have a true strategic management system. Bhatt and Behrstock (2010) argue that a systemic approach to talent management is needed, meaning that a district must address each piece of an educator’s career continuum in order to recruit, select, and retain the best talent in our schools.

A national non-profit created a PLC where four school districts from across the country learn about effective PTM practices. Only three districts are included in this study. The program team running the PLC chose to focus on principal talent management because of the important role that principals play in schools. The PLC has two goals: 1) Support districts in creating a stronger pool of effective principals who will stay in their schools longer, and 2) Use the work of the PLC to contribute to the larger literature on PTM to help other districts and educators across the country. To date, their convenings and technical support has revolved around research-based and/or expert guided best practices in the following PTM components: pipeline development, recruitment and selection, professional learning, evaluation, principal supervisors, compensation and incentives, and working environment. Below, I will summarize the research on each of these component areas as examples of what the participating districts are aiming to achieve by updating their own policies and practices on PTM.¹

¹ Identifying the non-profit would compromise the identity of the participating districts.
Pipeline Development

Recent research suggests that providing teacher leaders with job-embedded learning opportunities helps develop their leadership skills, so they are more prepared as new principals. For example, a U.S. Department of Education Investing in Innovation (i3) implementation study of the New Leaders program attributes strong impact on student outcomes over time to a programmatic shift towards developing leaders earlier on the path to the principalship (Valdez et al., 2019). One case study of a high performing school district also details how that district strategically places leadership experiences for teachers throughout their career path so that they are more prepared if they do decide to enter the principalship (Bush Institute, 2015). Not only do models where leadership opportunities are distributed to teachers give them valuable leadership opportunities, but some research has shown that they also help improve student achievement well before they decide whether or not to move into the principalship (Bierly et al., 2016; Heck & Hallinger, 2010).

Most states require aspiring principals to attend a formal preparation program (Anderson & Reynolds, 2015), but still, many principals report feeling unprepared, even with this formal training (Corcoran et al., 2009; Gates, et al., 2014). Traditional principal preparation programs have previously been criticized as not preparing today’s principals for the complexity of their jobs (Levine, 2005; Hess & Kelly, 2007). However, Young and Crow (2017) caution against assuming that all principal preparation programs are not effective. Young and Crow, as well as other experts, have identified “promising practices” in principal preparation, including:
- A recruitment and selection process that uses performance tasks and other selection techniques to find aspiring principals who have the right skills, dispositions, and previous experiences to potentially become a highly effective leader;
- An authentic residency experience that gives aspiring leaders a chance to apply their learnings in a true leadership setting;
- Commitment to continuous improvement and data and information sharing with their partner districts;
- Alignment to research-based leader standards (Darling-Hammond et al., 2007; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Mendels, 2016).

Research on the impact of these promising practices is not yet definitive. Gates et al. (2019b) conducted a quasi-experimental study of the New Leaders Aspiring Principals Program. They found that the New Leaders program aligned with the promising practices listed above, and they found statistically significant positive effects on student achievement and attendance. Other studies have shown effects on selected principal preparation programs on student learning and other outcomes of interest such as principal learning (e.g., Braun, et al., 2013; Gates et al., 2014; Davis & Darling-Hammond, 2012; Darling-Hammond, et al., 2007; Donmoyer et al., 2012; Patterson, et al., 2012). And a review of the published evaluation studies done on preparation programs shows that outcomes such as participant satisfaction, candidate learning, leadership practice, and job outcomes have been linked to quality principal preparation programs (Ni et al., 2017).

On the other hand, the same review by Ni et al. (2017) cautions about the use of outcomes such as student achievement being used to evaluate preparation programs. The
researchers assert that there is a large gap between a preparation program’s mission (i.e., to educate aspiring principals), and learning that occurs in the classroom. Also, research has been mixed on this outcome. For example, a 2016 study with the American Institutes for Research, the Bush Institute found that graduates of five selected preparation programs that embrace the promising practices mentioned above are no more or less effective, on average, than graduates of other preparation programs. The study did find, though, that preparation programs produce a significant variation of individual performers, meaning some principals have a very positive impact on student achievement while others do not.

Also, a study by Grissom et al., (2018) found that while the researchers were able to tie principal preparation programs to a variety of outcomes (such as principal performance, retention, etc.), they were not able to find a program that consistently measured well—or did poorly-- across outcomes. This may mean different programs are aiming to train their aspiring principal candidates to accomplish different things, or it may mean that we do not yet have sophisticated enough measurement strategies to evaluate principal preparation programs on longer-term outcomes.

**Recruitment and Selection**

Researchers have begun to identify the key components of effective recruitment and selection processes for school districts looking to recruit high quality principals. First, two quantitative studies associate succession planning with higher quality candidate pools (Gates et al., 2019b; Furgeson et al., 2014). Succession planning is defined as a district having systems in place to understand the scope of potential retirements, school openings/closings, and
understanding an average number of principal positions to replace each year. Experts also agree that when districts align job descriptions and the recruitment and selection process with research-based leadership standards or competencies that they are better able to select higher quality candidates (Turnbull et al., 2015). Gates et al. (2019a) highlighted this practice in their evaluation study of the PPI initiative as being a best practice.

Traditionally, districts have practiced “passive” recruitment, where a principal position is posted and there is a hope that the best candidates apply (Doyle & Locke, 2014). Two case studies suggest that more proactive recruitment in seeking out higher quality candidates may improve the candidate pool (Turnbull et al., 2015; Bush Institute, 2015). And, some research shows that once good candidates are selected, principals are more likely to feel successful and stay in their school longer when their skills and background experiences are matched with the school context within which they are placed (Turnbull et al., 2015; Gates et al., 2019b).

Professional Learning

Parylo and Zepeda (2015) found that when principals feel the professional learning they are receiving is effective, they are willing to stay in their districts longer. But research is mixed on what an effective professional learning system for principals might look like (Jacob et al., 2014; Nunnery et al., 2011). For example, a rigorous randomized study looking at the impact of the McREL Balanced Leadership Professional Development (BLPD) program found that while principals felt more prepared, their teachers did not report noticing any practice change in their principals (Jacob et al., 2014). BLPD focuses on 21 individual leadership responsibilities such as
how to monitor instruction. The program also focuses on change management and provides a network community for participating principals.

However, Nunnery et al. (2011) found that principals who participated in the National Institute for School Leadership’s (NISL) Executive Development Program (EDP) had a statistically significant positive impact on math and ELA compared to their peers in matched schools who did not participate in the program. The EDP focuses on improving instructional practices and on PLC design. There are online and face-to-face trainings, and the program focuses heavily on making sure that the sessions are highly interactive.

Despite this mixed research, emerging research shows that individualized feedback for principals is an important component to any professional learning design. A study using randomized control trial to assign teachers and principals into a treatment where they received more frequent feedback found that principals in the treatment group had a positive impact on instructional leadership and teacher-principal trust (Garet et al., 2017). Another study by Herman et al., 2016) suggests that learning communities, high-quality internships and mentorship, using evaluation results to drive professional learning, and ongoing coaching and collaboration are high leverage strategies to improving school leadership.

Performance Evaluation

There is no research that identifies a certain preferred model for principal evaluations. There is, however, a body of evidence that points to promising practices. For example, experts recommend using multiple measures and aligning evaluations with school leader standards (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Clifford et al., 2014). An ongoing challenge to principal evaluation is
consistency, as evaluation systems must rely on multiple people (usually principal supervisors) conducting them (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Teh et al., 2014).

**Alignment and Measures.** A literature review by Clifford, et al., (2012) suggests that principals have a direct impact on school culture, supporting teachers, and developing future leaders, and the study’s authors recommend aligning evaluation measures to those. Other research on principal evaluation practice recommends a structured process that provides timely feedback can help strengthen principal leadership skills, particularly when they are aligned to leadership standards (Clifford & Ross, 2011; Garet et al., 2017; Anderson & Turnbull, 2016). A district may even consider adjusting those standards based on context. For example, turnaround principals leading a turnaround school may be measured on behaviors and skills have been shown as necessary for those types of contexts (Hitt et al., 2018).

Herman et al. (2016) found that adding multiple measures could improve validity of a principal’s evaluation. According to other studies, important measures to consider including in a principal’s evaluation are: observation on practice with feedback, climate surveys, review of artifacts that show a principal’s leadership ability, and measures on student achievement growth (Anderson & Turnbull, 2016; Clifford & Ross, 2011; Goldring et al., 2009). It should be noted, though, that research on how exactly to use student achievement growth in a principal’s evaluation is mixed. Grissom et al. (2015) urge districts and states to clearly understand the tradeoffs between the different ways to attribute student achievement scores to a principal’s evaluation. Observations, when they provide timely feedback, have been shown to improve principal leadership practice that improves student outcomes (Garet et al., 2017).
One measure commonly used as part of a principal evaluation is the results of climate surveys from a campus. Clifford et al. (2012) reviewed the validity of publicly available climate surveys. They found that climate surveys are reliable, but that efforts need to be made to make sure that the vendors, survey creators, or districts do validation work to ensure their validity and reliability in each district, as there may be contextual variation that needs to be accounted for. One quantitative study found that adding teacher and student survey measures can explain additional variation in traditional evaluation measures (Liu et al., 2014).

**Evaluation Process.** Clifford and Ross (2011) recommend that the evaluation process itself is be regular, transparent, and occur according to a well-known schedule. And Grissom et al., (2018) caution that bias may play a role in how a principal is rated. The researchers looked at data from the Tennessee principal evaluation, one of the first states to implement a state-wide principal evaluation system. Their quantitative study looked to see if supervisor observation measures aligned with other measures, such as student achievement. The study found that they did, but that principals in schools with a higher portion of low-income students tend to be rated lower on observation rubrics. The authors were not able to conclude why this was happening, but they did suggest that further research be done to learn more about this.

**Principal Supervisors**

Research associates increased supervisory support with several positive principal outcomes, including: increased retention, a high-quality candidate pool, and improved student achievement (Goldring et al., 2018; Mascall & Leithwood, 2010). However, there is no current research that directly links specific principal supervisor practices with those improvements.
Principal supervisors, those within a district who directly supervise principals, have been a recent focus of funding and research. Goldring et al. (2018) studied the districts participating in The Wallace Foundation’s four-year, $24 million Principal Supervisor Initiative. In the first two years, Goldring and colleagues found that districts focused on training and supporting principal supervisors so that they have both the knowledge and skills—as well as prior experience—to effectively carry out their responsibilities. The mixed methods study also shows that the more time spent interacting with principal supervisors led principals to report a more productive relationship with them.

Other experts have pointed out the importance of giving principal supervisors time to provide extensive support and feedback to principals on their practice (Mascall & Leithwood, 2010; Bottoms & Fry, 2009; Fuller & Young, 2009). That means assigning manageable caseloads. Caseloads of eight to 12 principals per supervisor has been recommended by the Gates Foundation (2012).

**Talent Management of Principal Supervisors.** Goldring et al. (2018) also looked at how districts recruit and select highly effective principal supervisors. They found that high-quality systems must be in place to select, develop, and evaluate those in the role (Goldring et al., 2018). As a part of this, the research report recommends that a principal supervisor’s job description be heavily focused on supporting principals, as opposed to taking on other district office duties. Some districts have created development programs for high performing principals to develop their principal supervisor skills, which creates an in-district pipeline of future principal supervisors (Ikemoto & Waite, 2018; Saltzman, 2017).
Compensation and Incentives

Several studies associate competitive principal salaries at hard to staff schools with multiple outcomes, including increased retention, a higher quality candidate pool, and improved student achievement (Baker et al., 2010; Newton et al., 2003; Papa, 2007; Papa et al., 2002; Pijanowski & Brady, 2009; Pounder & Merrill, 2001; Rice et al., 2017; Roza et al., 2003). Tran (2017) found that principals’ pay satisfaction is influenced by the salaries of comparative peers and is negatively associated with intention to turnover. Yet, Fuller et al. (2015) found that two-thirds of principals felt underpaid based on their roles and responsibilities.

Some research has been conflicting on pay-for-performance systems, however. Two quantitative evaluations show mixed results on achievement that may not be generalizable outside of the program studied (Hamilton et al., 2012). Hamilton and colleagues examined how principals responded to new district reforms in Pittsburg, which included a pay for performance incentive for principals. They found that while principals were reluctant to support such an initiative initially, over time principals did observe teachers more frequently, scored higher on evaluation rubrics, and student achievement increased. Chiang and his colleagues (2015) examined several Teacher Incentive Fund (TIF) grantees who implemented teacher and principal pay for performance systems. They found small positive effects associated with these compensation incentives in English Language Arts, but none in math. The researchers found that pay-for-performance measures improved the retention of high performing principals at treatment schools. A recent study in Tennessee showed that higher-performing principals who stay in their schools (rather than leave) have slightly higher salaries (Grissom & Bartanen, 2019). This is true even when controlling for challenging student populations.
Goff et al., (2016) created a framework outlining the key decisions that need to be made when designing principal compensation incentive systems, based on a thorough literature review of compensation, as well as TIF grant recipient proposals. Per their framework, an effective evaluation system must be in place for incentive systems to work well. Second, the type of reward should be carefully considered. Employees in the social sector, like principals, may not be as motivated by financial incentives. Also, many times bonuses in education are too small to be motivational. Finally, the framework suggests that it is important to ensure everyone understands what the goals of the system are and how to meet them.

**Non-monetary Incentives.** There is very little research on providing innovative non-monetary incentives (Roza et al., 2003). States or districts can provide recognition of excellent performance that can include, master principal certification, flexible work environments, job sharing, or other awards. While research on nonmonetary incentives is sparse in many fields, there is some research that suggests that meaningful jobs, autonomy to design parts of a job, and positive work cultures motivate employees to stay in their roles (Cassar & Meier, 2018).

**Workload and Autonomy**

Recent research shows that the average number of hours per workweek for principals has steadily increased over the past few decades (Fuller et al., 2018). One study found that overall workload was a major factor for principals when deciding to stay or leave a job (Fuller et al., 2015). Fuller, et al. (2015) also found that many times principals do not feel like they have authority to choose their own staff. A case study done by the Bush Institute completed on Gwinnett County Public Schools in 2015 showed that a supportive district culture, effective
principal management and support, and aligned school-level talent management policies can positively influence the work of principals. Several studies associate increased autonomy with improved retention, job satisfaction, and student achievement (Papa, 2007; Burkhauser et al., 2012; Fuller & Young, 2009). The studies describe a practice where districts provide principals with increased autonomy in exchange for increased accountability for student learning.

**Summary**

In order to successfully conduct this mixed methods case study, it is important to first understand the research behind the PTM components that the three districts are working to implement. Using this information, I will look to see how districts are implementing these practices, which will help me understand at what rate their implementation progress is going.

**Talent Management and Job Embeddedness**

As mentioned above, many PTM strategies have been shown to improve retention of principals. Understanding how districts can best retain their most effective principals is critical for student success. One theory from the management research literature suggests that perceptions of “job embeddedness” can predict when employees may want to leave an organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). Knowing what future turnover might look like could help organizations, including school districts, work on retention strategies based on the job embeddedness theory, or at least prepare for turnover. For the purposes of this study, it is hypothesized that job embeddedness may be related to improved district policies and practices on PTM and may indicate progress towards those goals. Job embeddedness includes the following characteristics defined by Mitchell and colleagues:
• The extent to which employees feel connected to their workplace or people within their workplace and the extent to which employees feel connected to the community in which they live. The more “links” an employee has, the more likely he or she is to stay (p. 1104). Examples of links could be: financial pressure to remain, being older, feeling close to colleagues, and familial pressure.

• The extent to which employees feel that they “fit” within an organization and fit within the community in which they live. Fit is operationally defined here as how well someone fills their skills, background, and values relate to their current job roles and communities. This includes factoring in an employee’s values, career aspirations, and knowledge and skills to do the job. This fit can also include an employee’s perceived fit with the community within which the organization is placed (p. 1104-1105).

• The extent to which employees feel they will have to “sacrifice” by leaving a job or the community in which they live. This includes loss of friendships, salary, benefits, stability, and relocation efforts (p. 1105).

Figure 1 demonstrates the link between a district’s PTM practices and policies and job satisfaction of principals. The PLC supports districts in improving their policies and practices around PTM, as detailed above. The theory of change for the program asserts that when districts have effective PTM policies in place, principals feel more support and that they are in the right role. If this theory of change holds true, then principals in these districts should report higher satisfaction and feel more embedded in their districts. Looking at job embeddedness may be one indicator of early implementation success, though it may still be too soon to see any outcomes of this work. In future years, the theory of change suggests that once the principal workforce in a
district is more satisfied and more embedded, then turnover will reduce. The district will then have a stable of mostly effective principals, who will then improve culture, climate, and their own teacher workforce. Teachers, the most important in-school factor for improving student outcomes, will then be better equipped to help students.

**Figure 1**

*PLC Theory of Change*

*Note.* The current study is assessing the first two full years of the PLC program. Future studies are recommended for years three and on.

Job embeddedness has previously been measured with survey item questions first compiled by Mitchell et al. (2001) who constructed the theory. A content framework for job embeddedness includes the following three domains: 1) connection to workplace and community; 2) fit with workplace and community; 3) measure of sacrifice to leave the workplace.
and community. These three categories are detailed above in the construct definition. The questions have since been extended to other fields, such as sports management (Cunningham et al., 2005) and the military (Smith et al., 2011). To my knowledge, however, these questions have not been extended to school principals.

Central Office Role in Improving Principal Talent Management

Central office staff play a critical role in implementing and overseeing PTM policies and practices, and successful widespread implementation of new practices and policies does not happen without deep engagement of the central office (Honig et al., 2010). These leaders make personnel decisions regarding recruiting, hiring, training, evaluating, and disciplining all employees (Clifford, 2010; Fullan & Mascall, 2000; Opfer, 2011; Seyfarth, 2002). But, practices at the central office around human resources and talent management are not always strategic, and instead the work is approached in a more transactional nature (Clifford, 2010; Thompson & Kleiner, 2005; Tran, 2015).

Like other complex organizations, change in school districts can be difficult (Honig, 2006; O’Day, 2002). Some efforts to shift organizational structure or create major organizational changes have been successful (Bryk & Schnieder, 2002; Gates, Baird, Master, & Chavez-Herrerias, 2019a; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003) while others have not (Papa et al., 2002; Mintrop & Trujillo, 2007). Sometimes, districts work to solve this by restructuring management positions, but this alone is not enough (Honig et al., 2010). Tran (2015) observed that personnel management is emphasized rather than strategic talent management strategy in school districts, even after attempts to restructure. To have real central office transformation, the professional
practice of both central office leaders and building leaders need to be strengthened while increasing teaching and learning outcomes (Honig et al., 2009). Honig and team found that unlike more straightforward structural changes, this kind of change involves deep philosophical and other shifts in the district leaders’ work and relationships with schools.

Also, practices and policies having to do with recruiting, supporting, and retaining effective principals are complex (Mitani, 2018). For example, one such policy/practice change might include changing a recruitment and selection policy for principals in an attempt to attract more and better candidates while also reducing bias. To do this effectively, at least two departments in the central office (human resources and chief of schools) must work closely with the superintendent’s office to develop or refine the policy and practice. It is imperative that they follow the law, while also creating a process that is manageable and cost effective. These departments must have a clear understanding of what competencies and skills they are looking for in a candidate, as well an understanding of interview questions and tasks needed to evaluate candidates on those skills. Once the process is in place, they must communicate it internally and externally, and they may have to work with the school board to make official changes in the policy. Then, they must train all staff on the policy and ensure it is followed for fairness. Each of these steps is complex, and all of them require the kind of work that occurs in a “transformed” central office (Honig, 2008).

**Central Office Transformation**

Practices and policies for recruiting, supporting, and retaining effective principals fall to the leaders in the school district, referred to as central office administrators. Traditionally, central
office structures have been hierarchical (Townsend et al., 2013). But more recent research has shown the benefits of central office transformation, where central office members work and learn together with a common goal of supporting teachers to help students (Brudney et al., 2000; Honig, 2008; Knapp, 2008).

Honig (2008) drew from sociocultural learning theory to propose how districts can be “learning organizations” (p. 633). She describes assistance relationships, where a novice is paired with an expert for the purposes of learning. The expert, in this case, would be a central office employee. Honig describes in her 2008 article how these practices could look in a district, including: modeling, focusing on being a novice as opposed to a low performer, creating and sustaining social engagement, developing practice tools, boundary spanning, and working together. Knapp (2008) also looked at how sociocultural learning theory might support district improvement strategies. In his article, he suggests that change in a district happens when the daily practice of district staff changes. Therefore, he suggests that districts determine what supports, training, or other practices to focus on that might support change of daily habits. Taken together, these articles provide insight into the types of relationships between central office staff and school leaders that would be most impactful to change PTM practices.

There is other research that supports central office administrators creating and maintaining relationships with school principals in order to support schools (Honig, 2012; Johnson & Chrispeels, 2010). Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) studied the links between central office leaders and school leadership teams who were working on implementing a new reform. They found that focusing on these relationships was critical to the reform’s success, and that external partners were helpful in developing and strengthening those relationships. Copland and
Honig (2010) identified practices that observed districts put in place in order to more effectively support principals and teachers in schools, such as creating cadres of central office staff to assist principals, and creating conditions that are supportive of principals’ ability to provide instructional leadership.

Central Office-School Connections

True partnerships between the central office and schools are key to effectively implementing successful district-wide initiatives (Brudney et al., 2000; Honig, 2008; Knapp, 2008). As more focus is placed on improving instruction and being strategic, however, central offices have worked to create more support networks for principals (Knapp et al., 2006). Honig and Venkateswaran (2012) reviewed the research on how (and if) central office staff mattered when it came to using evidence for decision making at the school level. Not only did the researchers find that effective support from central office staff is critical in the flow of information for evidence-use, but that central office staff are also critical in helping school staff make sense of both the data evidence they are using and the process of data use. Johnson and Christpeels (2010) studied one district as it implemented districtwide changes and found that progress in implementation was aided by what they describe as “resource linkages” (p. 750), which include the central office providing supports such as professional development, talent, and coaching to the school sites. The researchers also found that communication—particularly from the central office to school sites, but also in reverse—was critical to linking the two. Honig (2012) also found that resource linkage in the form of providing professional learning is essential to change.
Assistance relationships can strengthen the link between the central office and school sites. Honig (2008) describes what quality assistance relationships look like in districts, pointing to the central office staff and school staff working side by side as learning partners. Further, a central office that provides quality and efficient customer service and communication are key to these relationships (Honig et al., 2010). Districts can create systems to maintain and support these relationships, so that day-to-day transactional practices to not get in the way of the support (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Honig, 2008).

**Trust and Social Relationships**

Social capital theory explores the interaction between the polices, the people, and the places. Social capital encapsulates the relationships embedded within a certain context that allow a person to get or give some resource (McGrath and Krackhardt, 2003; Spillane et al., 2003). Social capital resources that flow between the central office and schools are particularly important when studying policy implementation success and failure (Daly & Finnigan, 2011; Daly, 2015). Some research has found that high performing principals tend to have social networks that include other high performing principals, and that there tends to be low levels of trust between principals and central office (Daly & Finnigan, 2012).

There are many different types of social networks, and one of them is a professional network. Educators within a school district are part of a professional network, and strong professional relationships have been shown to increase retention, efficiency, and engagement in professional settings (Daly, 2015). Scholars have been looking at how social networks affect implementation efforts for some time (Daly, 2015; Coburn & Russel, 2008; Moolenaar et al.,
2011). Social Network Analysis (SNA) looks at networks to determine how social capital flows within and between networks, and people in those networks (Borgatti & Ofren, 2015). How that flow happens can constrict or enhance interactions—an even implementation efforts—within an organization (Borgatti & Ofren, 2015; Daly, 2015).

One way to measure the link between the central office and school sites is to look at the relational link between them; measuring relational trust can be an outcome (Bryk and Schneider, 2002). Bryk and Schneider (2002) observed major changes happening in urban school districts led the research to realize the importance of trust in the implementation process. The authors assert that this is particularly important in school districts that can have turbulent external environments and depend heavily on information sharing. Relational trust is particularly important when a school district is working to change a structure or system, such as a talent management system. Trust, or lack thereof, could directly influence the flow of information between school sites and central office (Daly & Finnigan, 2010; O’Day, 2002). But, an exploratory case study using SNA to understand the social relationships between central office and school site staff found that there were sparse ties between the two (Daly & Finnigan, 2010). Examining these ties are important, because previous research has show that participants’ attitudes toward a reform initiative can help or hinder it (Cole & Weinbaum, 2015), and trust is needed in order for participants in a social network to share information (Adler & Kwon, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2000). Using data like this might help researchers and others better understand the relationships formed between central office and principals, which may in turn help in understanding how those relationships play into implementation variation.
Summary

In summary, the central office has a critical role to play in implementation, however, they are rarely designed in a way that allows them to truly support principals. This study looks closely at the central office when reviewing how PTM policies and practices are implemented to learn the conditions in place that either help or hinder implementation.

Theoretical Framework

This mixed methods case study utilized a pragmatic perspective to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes in order to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining three districts actively working to implement and improve PTM practices and policies, this study sought to identify the conditions that best explain variation in implementation. This study fits within the broader context of implementation studies looking to understand more fully the conditions necessary for successful implementation in organizations working to implement complex policies and practices. To interpret and understand the data derived from the study, I used a pragmatic interpretive framework looking carefully at how policy, people, and places situate implementation effectiveness.

Pragmatism

According to Creswell (2013), using a pragmatic interpretive framework allows the research questions to drive researchers’ methods. Researchers using this approach have the freedom to match their methods, techniques, data collection procedures, and other processes with the needs of their research questions. This approach works well with multiple sources of data
collection (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2013; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Mixed methods research studies, such as this one, are compatible with a pragmatic interpretative framework (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011).

The pragmatic interpretive framework goes back to John Dewey, who encouraged a pragmatic approach to analyzing knowledge and warned against being biased by philosophical positioning (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). This approach also puts all methods on a level playing field and does not play favorites with one method over another (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Instead, the researcher’s job when using this approach is to pair the appropriate analytical method with the research question being asked (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019; Creswell, 2013). Those employing the pragmatic approach believe that different analytical techniques can be used to better understand the research problem (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019).

**Policy, People, and Places Impact on Implementation**

Policy implementation varies in its success rate, and policy experts have previously attributed this variation to the fact that implementation is affected by the policy being implemented, the people who are implementing, and the context of the place where implementation is happening (Meier, 2009; Odden & Marsh, 1988). More recent scholarship by Honig (2006) explores this further. For example, Honig’s (2006) framework allows researchers to explore “how and why interactions among these dimensions shape implementation in particular ways (p. 14)”.

Honig’s (2006) framework suggests that variation in implementation should not be surprising, but in fact should be expected. Because of how people, policies, and places are
linked, policy makers cannot expect a levelness and sameness in policy implementation across the board. This is not be viewed as good or bad, but Honig recommends that instead of worrying that policies were implemented differently and at different levels, researchers might learn more if they focus on how and why the implementation varied by closely examining the policy, the people, and the place.

It should also be noted that Honig (2006) points out that these three components of her framework are of equal weight. No one component can be left out, and one does not necessarily weigh more than another. The value in viewing data through this policy implementation lens comes from analyzing it with all three components linked. If data is looked at through only one piece, for example, only through the people that are involved in the policy implementation, then the researcher will miss key insights.

Using a framework that relies on the interconnectedness of policy, people, and place to get a clearer picture of policy implementation can help build implementation knowledge (Honig, 2006). This was a useful framework for this study, as it assumes that implementation will likely vary across the three districts because of the choice of policy, the people designing, implementing and being targeted by the policy, and the specific district context (or place) where the policies are being implemented.

Policy

Policies have different dimensions, including goals, targets, and tools (Honig, 2006). Honig points out that different policies have different goals—short term versus long term, large scale versus smaller scale, etc. This causes different consequences and opportunities for those
implementing the policy. Also, implementers have varying capacities at the beginning of implementation, which can help or hinder implementation. Policies also have targets, or beneficiaries. Policy designers can entice or frustrate the policy targets depending on how they use labels and policy design to define those groups. Finally, policy tools can cause variation in policy implementation. Tools may be mandates, consequences or rewards, or other methods that policy designers or implementors use to advance the policy. One-size-fits-all tools could stand to hinder policy implementation because of the variation in people’s starting capacity, local context, and other factors.

**People**

How people affect the variation in policy implementation has been explored to some extent in this paper above. First, some research shows that deep engagement by the central office can help or hinder policy and practice change at scale in a district (Burch & Spillane, 2004; Brudney et al., 2000; Honig, 2008; Knapp, 2008). Also, how policy targets react to policy implementation can cause variation in that implementation (Honig, 2006). The importance of social relationships with a district have been explored and found to be critical in effecting change in schools (Hallinger & Heck, 2010; Honig, 2008).

There are other ways that people can cause variation in policy implementation. For example, external groups that are neither implementing the policy nor targets of the policy can voice support or dissent (Honig, 2006). This could be external business groups, professional unions, specified groups (e.g., parents), or others. Also, how policy implementors and beneficiaries have different sense-making when it comes to the policies being implemented.
(Spillane et al., 2006). Each person interprets the implementation messages through their own schema. Spillane et al. (2006) encourages policy designers and implementors to consider three things that will cause variation in implementation: 1) understand that each person will understand the context differently; 2) allow people the chance to assimilate to these changes, and 3) understand that superficial implementation will likely occur because of number one and two above. Hill (2006) recommends strategies to overcome this superficial implementation. These include giving more concrete examples, giving more education and training on technical terms to ensure that everyone is speaking the same language, and using mediators to help close the gap between policy makers and implementors. An example of a mediator in the case of this study are principal supervisors, who serve as the bridge between central office and principals.

**Place**

Honig (2006) defines place as the environment in which the policy implementation occurs, including geographic, historical, and institutional context. For the purpose of this study, places are the three districts that participated in the PLC and are part of this study. As mentioned above, school districts are complex organizations (Honig, 2006; O’Day, 2002). But while the policies being implemented in this study are located within the boundaries of the school districts, the districts themselves are located within their own historical and political situations. All three are considered urban, for example, though two of the three span suburban boundaries.

The historical context of each district is as important as the geographic context. Not only does each district have its own historical context, but smaller communities within each district has their own historical context as well. Coburn and Stein (2006) describe how communities of
practice within a school site vary in their implementation of certain practices because their “histories of practice” (p. 34) varied. Participants engage with the policy learning differently, they construct meaning differently, and they negotiate differently (Coburn & Stein, 2006). The district conducted learning walkthroughs as a boundary mechanism to successfully reduce the variability.

**Summary**

In Chapter Two, I reviewed three areas of the literature that framed this study, and I described the literature that supported the theoretical framework that drove the analysis of the data in this study. The first three areas of literature reviewed were the research base on PTM practices and policies in districts, the central office’s role in implementation, and the literature on job embeddedness, particularly surfacing how this might apply to principals whose districts are improving their PTM practices and policies. For the theoretical framework, I reviewed the Honig’s (2006) implementation framework.

This study adds to the literature on implementation by using Honig’s (2006) implementation framework to further explore the connection between policy, people, and place in order to make recommendations in practice for how districts can improve implementation. Further, this study adds to the literature by identifying specific conditions in place that best explain implementation variation across three districts. This review of literature together prompted the following research questions:

In the first two years of implementing specific policies/practices around PTM,
• RQ1: What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?

• RQ 2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation the amount of progress made toward implementation?

Taken together, using a mixed methods approach to look at what policies were being implemented, how they were implemented, how central office and principals worked together to implement aids in understanding the connections between people, policy, and place in implementation variation. Figure 2 below shows how this relationship looks. First, I analyzed which policies were being implemented. Second, I used interview, focus group, and survey data to understand how people worked together to work on implementation, and then I used the same data set to understand district context and how that played into the implementation process. I paid particular attention to how the central office and principals interacted during implementation, if at all.
Figure 2

Theoretical Framework for Proposed Study

Note. This figure is a visual representation of how Honig’s (2006) implementation framework looks closely at policy, people, and place.
Chapter 3: Methodology and Research Approach

The purpose of this study was to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. By examining three districts actively working to implement and improve PTM practices and policies, this study sought to identify what conditions best explained variation and progress on implementation. This chapter describes the study’s research methodology and includes discussions around the following: 1) rationale for research approach; 2) description of the sample, which is derived from a larger evaluation study; 3) overview of the data collection; and 4) overview of the research design, including data analysis and limitations of the study. The chapter concludes with a brief summary.

**Rationale for Research Design**

This study used a mixed methods design, which uses both quantitative and qualitative research in an effort to understand the implementation work happening in three districts more fully (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The rationale for using this method was that neither quantitative nor qualitative data collection and analysis alone were enough to answer the research questions. Therefore, using a combination of both methods allowed for a more complete analysis. A heavier emphasis on qualitative data was used because of the stage of the intervention being studied and the theory of change behind it. Data in the study only covered the first two years of implementation of a complex project. It is theorized that it may take years for this intervention to impact quantitative outcomes such as talent retention and student achievement, but much can be learned by analyzing observation of practice, perceptions, and other qualitative data in the
interim to help understand the conditions necessary for change at this scale. There was value in looking at some quantitative data, even at this point in the intervention. Quantitative data used in the study supplemented the qualitative analysis and included descriptive statistics and some limited analysis of survey data. I used the theoretical framework described in Chapter 2 as the lens through which to interpret my findings, which helped add information about how interactions between people, policies, and places occur during the implementation process.

Creswell and Clark (2018) described the advantages of mixed methods research. First, using a mixed methods approach helps account for weaknesses in qualitative and quantitative methods. Using both allows the researcher to answer questions in one study that would not be able to be answered if only one method was used. The mixed methods approach was also practical in that it does not restrict me to only certain data collection and analysis approaches. Instead, I was able to choose the approach that made the most sense for the research questions, as well as the data available.

Mixed methods case studies are the most frequently used mixed methods approach (Creswell & Clark, 2018). The merging of qualitative and quantitative data in order to look across three cases and within each case allowed me to examine not just did the districts change, but also how did they change, and what helped them change--and what got in the way. While this approach required a significant amount of data, it also allowed me to fully examine each case, and was particularly helpful in looking across cases. As Creswell and Clark (2018) indicate, a mixed methods case study is an ideal design to, “develop an enhanced description and analysis of a case or multiple cases” (p. 116). The present research matched well with this criterion because
it sought to better understand how different district teams implemented policies and practices around PTM in order to identify critical conditions of successful implementation.

Larger Evaluation Study and The Research Sample

The data used for this dissertation study was a secondary data set. The original data was collected as part of a larger, longer-term formative evaluation of the district PLC. There were four districts participating in the PLC. However, due to COVID-19, one district was unable to complete additional data sharing agreements to be part of this study. I chose to restrict my follow-up with that district out of respect for the complicated situation district leaders are facing during this time.

My role on the project team was that of internal evaluator. In this role, I led the design of the evaluation with a team of evaluators and participated in evaluation activities. The main output from the larger formative evaluation were “diagnostic reports” for each district. The diagnostic reports, which will be discussed more in depth below, were annual reports that are delivered to each district. The evaluation team designed a rubric that aligned with the PTM components. Each component was scored. This was similar to a “report card” so that districts had an external perspective on their growth and lag areas across all the PTM components. Figure 3 shows how the program is structured to work, and how the diagnostics play into that.
To answer the research questions for this study, I completed new analyses with a fresh subset of the data collected for the larger evaluation. The only part of the evaluation analysis that was used in this study were the final diagnostic scores that the evaluation team developed. I used the diagnostic scores descriptively to show how much progress each district had made in implementing specific PTM practices and policies over the first two years of the initiative. I used a set of fresh, cleaned, de-identified survey responses to conduct the new quantitative analysis described in detail below. For the interview and focus group data, I started with a fresh set of de-identified transcripts which I coded with the set of a priori codes using the procedures I describe below.
As a researcher who used this same data to conduct a research study that was previously used in an evaluation I led, I understood my own bias. Because I have been so involved in the data to this point, I was tempted to jump to conclusions. To address this, I put steps in place to ensure I was conducting a systematic review of the data with the codes I developed to ensure the data spoke for itself. I carefully documented each data analysis step I took so that it could be recreated and checked for bias.

Sample

Districts were purposefully chosen to participate in the district PLC. A program design team sought to select between three to five districts that met the following criteria:

- Superintendent and board support for the project;
- A willingness to commit a team of 10-15 district leaders and principals to travel to meetings and work on this project during school hours throughout the year;
- A “readiness” to do the work, meaning that the district hadn’t yet begun in-depth PTM work, but had started some work in at least one of the component areas;
- No obvious signs of major dysfunction that could hinder the work, such as a school board in turmoil, high turnover rates, or the like; and
- Districts that were urban or suburban with at least 50,000 students.

In order to assess those criteria, the program design team solicited recommendations of potential districts from partners in the space. Out of those recommendations, seventy districts were sent a “Request to Apply”. The program design team narrowed the list down to approximately ten finalists. A team of experts in education leadership and mixed methods
research conducted full day site visits to these districts, and a final four were selected. Only three those to be part of this study. I was part of the original selection process.

The selected districts committed to the following upon agreeing to participate:

- Send a team of 10-15 team members to three convenings per year for three years,
- Set implementation goals around PTM, and work with a technical advisor to make progress towards those goals between convenings, and
- Participate in research projects during the project, and at least two years afterwards.

The research projects were not defined specifically in the beginning, but the districts have been kept up-to-date on them as time progresses. The districts signed data sharing agreements that allowed the research team to collect data each year.

The three participating districts are located around the United States, including two in the Southwest and one in the West. Table 2 shows how each district compares to one another. The districts range between 70,000 and 90,000 students. They have between 70 principals and 150 principals. All three districts participated fully in the first two years of the program (Year 1=2018; Year 2=2019).
Table 2

Key District Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Number of Students</th>
<th>Free &amp; Reduced Lunch</th>
<th>English Language Learners</th>
<th>Minority</th>
<th>Principal Average Tenure (years)</th>
<th>Current Superintendent Tenure (years)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>70,000</td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>&gt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>90,000</td>
<td>80%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>&gt;3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>80,000</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>70%</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>&gt;3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: The demographic data are rounded in order to protect district confidentiality.

Overview of Data Collection

This mixed methods research study drew on a subset of multiple types of data collected as part of a larger evaluation study. Methods of data collection included: survey responses, interview transcripts, focus group transcripts, evaluator assigned diagnostic scores, and artifact review.

In mixed methods research, using multiple methods of data collection in order to triangulate is critical in attempting to gain an in-depth understanding of a phenomenon being studied. This strategy adds rigor and depth to a study and ensures many sources of data are saying the same thing (Creswell & Clark, 2018). In this study, I looked to see what conditions were in place to support or hinder each district’s implementation, and what conditions across all districts best explained their varied progress in implementing PTM policies and practice. In order
to follow the principles of multiple data collection and triangulation, this study benefited from the multiple sources of data. The data listed below is the subset that I propose using to answer the research questions for this study:

- diagnostic scores,
- interview transcripts of central office staff and project team members,
- focus group transcripts of principals, assistant principals, and aspiring principals,
- survey responses of district principals and central office staff, and
- review of artifacts to help understand the content presented to the districts at in-person convenings.

**Diagnostic Scores and Artifact Review**

Each fall after the data was collected, it was organized into component areas. The components lined up with the PTM and implementation frameworks. Districts received a score for each component, and the indicators that made up that component based on the frameworks. For example, one component of the PTM framework is “Recruitment and Selection of High Quality Principals”. All the data collected that might inform that component or its associated indicators was placed together.

A team of raters were trained and normed on a five-point rubric, where a score of zero indicated that the district had no or poor practice in a component area, and a score of four meant that a district received a rating of model practice. At least three raters scored all components for each district, and scores were normed in a norming call. These scores were given to the districts as a formative assessment of their progress. The scores were accompanied by a paragraph of text
including a summary of how the district could consider improving their scores. Table 3 shows an example of one district’s diagnostic scores from baseline to the most current year of data.

**Table 3**

*District A Diagnostic Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Baseline (Fall 2017)</th>
<th>Year 1 (Fall 2018)</th>
<th>Year 2 (Fall 2019)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pipeline Development</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance Evaluation</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation and Incentives</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisors</td>
<td>N/A</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working Environment</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Pipeline Development was significantly expanded between Baseline and Year 1, so the first year’s score was not comparable. Also, the Principal Supervisor component was added in Year 1.
Figure 4 details the scoring rubric for the diagnostic process. For this study, the diagnostic indicator and component scores were used as a piece of qualitative data to show the progress each district made over the first two years of implementation. This was the starting point for looking at implementation variation. The rest of the analysis used to create the diagnostic scores, including interview coding that was done specifically to create the diagnostic scores, was not used for this study.

**Figure 4**

*Diagnostic Scoring Rubric*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>4 – Best Practice</th>
<th>3 – Strong Practice</th>
<th>2 – Emerging Practice</th>
<th>1 – Poor Practice with Action</th>
<th>0 – Poor/No Practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(Model practices with little room for improvement that are consistent)</td>
<td>(Effective practices that are becoming more consistent)</td>
<td>(Developing practices that are not yet consistent)</td>
<td>(Poor practices, but district leadership has demonstrated awareness through actions)</td>
<td>(Poor practice with little to no action and/or lack of awareness of problems by top-level district leadership)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In addition to the diagnostic, the organization leading this work hosted three in-person convenings each year. I reviewed agendas and PowerPoint decks in order to understand what PTM areas the district teams focused on during these meetings.

**Principal survey**

A survey was deployed to principals in each of the three districts annually from the start of the project. The first was given at baseline in the fall of 2017 just after district on-boarding, but right before any work on the project occurred in districts. The second and third were given
Each fall after that in 2018 and 2019 (see Figure 3 above for a visual timeline). This dissertation study will focus only on the surveys administered in the Fall of 2019.

Principal surveys were administered at an already-scheduled principals’ meeting. Each district allowed the research team to enter the meeting, give an update on the project, and administer the survey. That allowed us to have a large completion rate, as shown in Table 4. The surveys were sent electronically, and this survey format has been shown to increase survey response rates (Baruch & Holtom, 2009). Select-response items were used for maximum efficiency and objectivity (Lane et al., 2016). The questions on the survey included multiple choice, yes/no, and five-point Likert-type scales from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree.

Table 4

**Principal Survey Participation Rates**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>2017 Participation Rate</th>
<th>2018 Participation Rate</th>
<th>2019 Participation Rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>78%</td>
<td>91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>90%</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>94%</td>
<td>99%</td>
<td>96%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Principal survey questions were designed by a team of experts. This team relied on a literature review conducted on PTM, implementation, and other bodies of research, as well as the
team’s own expertise. This survey had never been used or formally validated before this project. The survey was designed in five parts (see Appendix A):

- principal demographics,
- principal perceptions of PTM and implementation practices in the district,
- principal perceptions of their own job embeddedness,
- principal perceptions of their own school climate/culture, and
- principal SNA questions.

Each part of the survey will be described in detail in the sections below.

*Survey Part 1: Demographic Analysis*

In the first part, principals reported demographic information such as how many years they had been a principal and what level of school they led. I used data on the demographic part of the survey to understand district context. For example, I looked at the numbers of principals responding, what types of schools they led, and how much experience they had.

*Survey Parts 2, 3, and 4: Principal Perceptions on PTM and Implementation; Job Embeddedness; School Climate/Culture*

The second part of the survey sought to understand principals’ perceptions of their districts’ PTM practices and implementation competencies. For example, one question on PTM, assessed on a five-part Likert scale, asked, “The selection process for principals is rigorous.” Another question on implementation asked about the extent to which, “Communication from district leaders has improved over time.”
The third part of the survey included six items, built around three different domains, designed to measure job embeddedness. The first domain measured was connection to workplace and community, and it included the “formal or informal connections between a person and institutions or other people” (Mitchell, et al., 2001, p. 1104). Two questions in this domain centered on how connected principals felt to their schools, their districts, their staff, and their communities. The second domain, fit with workplace and community, has two questions that measure how well an employee feels he or she belongs both on the job and in the community. The third domain, measurement of sacrifice to leave the workplace and community, is about what it would take to leave the position. For principals, the two items sought to measure how difficult it is to find another position, how competitive pay is, and how hard principals perceive it to be to leave the community. One question asks, “To what extent do you agree with the following statement: I feel like I am a good match for this school and role.”

The fourth part of the survey measured school culture questions, where principals reported their perception of their own campus’s culture/climate. An example question asked to what extent, “My school is a physically and emotionally safe environment for each student and staff member.” These five questions were identified as a factor a single scale, which is described in more detail in the following section.

Validity Evidence and Scale Creation. Some information was collected to understand the dependability of the principal survey. First, the survey protocol was reviewed for face validity by experts in the fields of education leadership and implementation. Cognitive interviews on the survey questions were conducted using a small sample of principals, assistant principals, and central office staff from other districts. The surveys were revised based on
feedback. However, I sought to add validity and reliability evidence to ensure I was only including survey items in this study that were measuring the particular constructs that would be helpful to answering the research questions or adding necessary context. Therefore, additional statistical tests were used to understand the underlying structure of the survey and how it fit with the designed structure.

As a first step, I used an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) on parts two, three, and four of the survey. I chose to do an EFA since this survey had never been formally quantitatively validated, so there were no previous factors to compare to in this study. Before conducting the EFA, I hypothesized that there would be at least four factors: measures of PTM, measures of implementation, job embeddedness factors, and school culture factors.

A principal axis factor analysis (PCA) was conducted on the items of parts two, three, and four of the principal survey with oblique rotation (direct oblimin). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO=.93 (Hutcheson & Sofronious, 1999). KMO values for individual items were greater than .7, which is above the acceptable limit of .5 (Field, 2015). An initial analysis was run to obtain eigenvalues for each factor in the data. Ten factors had eigenvalues over Kaiser’s criterion of one. The scree plot was ambiguous and showed inflexion points that would justify retaining three, five, or eight factors. I retained six factors that met the EFA criteria, had strong reliability scores, and fit with theorized constructs.

To decide if individual question items remained in the factor, I used two criteria. First, I used the data in Appendix C to look for question items with factor loadings of an absolute value
of .40 or greater, as recommended (Stevens, 2002). Second, I relied on my hypotheses and theory to determine other questions to include or exclude. For example, in the factor of job embeddedness, one question, “I feel I could find a similar job (similar pay, similar extrinsic and intrinsic rewards) with little effort.”, had a factor loading of -0.245, which did not meet my first criterion. However, because Mitchell, et al., (2001) show that this the ability to find a similar job may make people feel less embedded in their current job, I decided to still include it in the job embeddedness scale. Below I describe how I confirmed that it did not undermine the overall reliability of the scale.

The six scales that I decided to create, based on the factor analysis and the theorized constructs, are listed in Table 5. Additional details about how I grouped factors together to create scales can be found in Appendix C. Once I determined my six factors based on the EFA criteria and my theory and hypothesis, I then performed reliability testing on these six factors to ensure these items were consistently reflecting the construct being reflected. All had high reliabilities (>α=0.72). Because these six factors had such high reliability, and because they relate materially to the research questions, I felt confident including them in the study.

**Table 5**

*Principal Survey Scales*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Corresponding Factor Number</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
1. **Communication**
   Questions relating to how the district communicates, and how district leaders seek and use feedback from principals.

2. **Job Embeddedness**
   Questions about principals’ job satisfaction, and if they are looking for another job or felt they could find another job.

3. **School Culture**
   Questions about the mental and physical well-being on each principal’s campus.

4. **Principal Supervisor**
   Questions about principals’ perceptions of their principal supervisor and the feedback and support they receive.

5. **Compensation**
   Questions about principals’ perceptions on how well (or not) they are paid.

6. **Implementation**
   Questions having to do with district leaders’ implementation skills, such as achieving and celebrating quick wins and using progress monitoring data to improve.

**Survey Part 4: Social Network Analysis**

The fifth and final part of the principal survey contained SNA questions. These were not disseminated on the first survey given in the fall of 2017. When the work began in districts, it became quickly apparent of the importance of the network in passing information about implementation between the central office and school sites. For that reason, the research team decided to add SNA questions to the second survey administration. At that time, the questions were piloted and then refined based on cognitive interviews. Because of this, the only SNA data available to analyze is from the fall of 2019.

Because I only had access to complete the SNA survey questions with the principals and not the entire school district network, and because it has been shown that whole network studies
with fine-grained measures tend to be better at examining smaller populations (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2018), this study uses an ego-centric network analysis. The advantages of using an ego-centric network analysis are that they are more cost effective, they can provide richer data on a person’s network (Borgatti, Everett, & Johnson, 2018). There was a high response rate from principals, but no additional network data outside of this survey was collected.

Principals were first asked who they turned to for advice and support on becoming a more effective principal. Survey takers were given 30 blanks and could add more if needed. Survey takers were asked to list: the person’s full name, their role, the frequency of communications they had with these people (e.g., daily, weekly, etc.), and the influence of those interactions (e.g., extremely influential to not at all influential). This data was used to get a better understanding of the context and social relationships in districts, which may be able to explain implementation variation.

Central Office Survey

A similar but shorter survey was administered to key central office team members (See Appendix B). This survey was designed in the same way as the principal survey, but it did not contain the SNA questions. This survey focused mostly on the district’s implementation capacity. For example, one question asks, “District leaders adjust implementation plans as needed to improve implementation efforts.” Each district PTM team lead was asked to send an anonymous link to the survey to all central office employees who would have a good perspective on the work. A suggested list of departments was given as guidance, and this list included departments such as human resources, curriculum and instruction, and special populations
departments. This survey was the most difficult to get high response rates on, and the participation rates fell between 30% and 45%.

Similar to the principal survey, some validity evidence was collected before this study began, such as cognitive interviews and expert input; however, no quantitative validity testing had occurred previously. To determine which factors and question items to include from this survey, I started by comparing the questions on this survey to the principal survey. I hypothesized that the most useful data would be comparative data. I found that even though this was a much shorter survey, there was an overlap in the questions that made up the implementation scale from the principal survey. I decided to start with these questions. Once again, I conducted a PCA to explore the data. I only used the seven questions that overlapped with the principal survey in its implementation scale (see Appendix C). I used oblique rotation (direct oblimin), and the Kaiser-Meye-Olkin (KMO) measure verified the sampling adequacy for the analysis, KMO=.80 (Hutcheson & Sofronious, 1999). As with the principal survey, KMO values for individual items were greater than 0.7. In this analysis, I was not worried about the eigenvalues. Instead, I focused on factor loadings. As Table 6 shows, no values fell below 0.40. To double check this scale, I conducted reliability testing. This factor showed high reliability, \( \alpha=0.88 \), so I felt confident in using this parallel implementation scale for central office leaders.
Table 6

Summary of exploratory factor analysis for central office survey (N=74)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Rotated Factor Loadings</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q5_9: Quick wins (and subsequent wins) are frequently and publicly celebrated by district leaders.</td>
<td>0.856</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_1: District leaders focus on building momentum by achieving and celebrating some “quick wins.”</td>
<td>0.831</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_2: District leaders have a formal process in place to measure the effectiveness of new policies and practices.</td>
<td>0.775</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_10: District leaders use progress monitoring data to reflect on implementation and continuously improve.</td>
<td>0.746</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_12: New practices and policies become deeply ingrained in the district’s systems and functions.</td>
<td>0.643</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6_10: I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to receive coaching and feedback on my implementation of new practices and policies.</td>
<td>0.614</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q6_2: District leaders build the district’s expertise on how to recruit, support, and retain principals by leveraging research, best practice, and experts.</td>
<td>0.585</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Eigenvalues                          | 4.16 |
| % of variance                        | 59.46|
| α                                    | 0.88 |
Interviews

While interviewing can be resource-intensive and cumbersome, interviews can also add rich, thick descriptions to the survey data (Creswell, 2013). They can be used to clarify statements and probe for additional information. One benefit of collecting data through in-depth interviews is the ability to capture multiple perspectives (Creswell, 2013; Brinkmann & Kvale, 2015). Another challenge with interviews is that they are not always neutral. Creswell (2013) cautions researchers to consider the relationship between the interviewer and the interviewee so as to assure that the conversation can be open and equal.

Interviews were conducted each fall, starting in 2017, though this study will focus on a subset of interviews conducted in 2019. The evaluation team worked with each district’s project team lead to identify a list of people to interview. Interviewees included: the superintendent, at least one representative from the human resources department, at least one representative from the business and/or operations department, chiefs of departments such as school leadership and/or academics; principal supervisors; project team members, and staff who lead professional learning for principals. Interviewees were selected for their knowledge of both the project and the policies and practices being implemented. For example, project team members in all roles were interviewed because we assumed that they would best know about the specific policies/practices being implemented, how they were chosen, and how implementation was progressing. But we also chose to interview staff who were less involved on the project team, but who would (or should) be involved in the implementation of a particular policy. So, for example, if a district was focused on implementing a new professional learning model for principals, we may have chosen to interview someone who conducts the learning sessions, even if they weren’t on the
project team. We felt interviewing several district leaders was critical to understanding the context behind how and why policies and practices were being implemented.

I led the interview process, including selecting and training the team, conducting norming exercises, and sitting in on others’ interviews looking for consistency. Interviews were conducted one-to-one, or two-to-one by a four-person team. Each team member used a structured interview guide that was aligned to a closed coding framework. The interviews lasted between 30 and 90 minutes and were held in-person. There were a few interviews that had to be conducted by phone because of unexpected schedule changes, but these were rare. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the interviewer(s) took detailed notes during the interview using Google docs on a secured drive. The interview team continuously normed throughout the process by: conducting interviews together and giving each other feedback; and by reviewing one another’s detailed interview notes and transcripts to look for variation or anomalies. We also attempted to carefully match interviewers and interviewees in order to ensure that the interviews were able to be as open and transparent as possible.

Each job role type had a different interview guide. For example, there was a superintendent interview protocol, a district officer personnel protocol, etc. Each question was carefully aligned to matrices associated with PTM and implementation capacity indicators. The interview questions were reviewed by other experts and those in roles similar to those we would be interviewing. Questions were adjusted as needed. In addition, each year the interview team systematically debriefed the process, and updated any questions as needed. This dissertation study will focus on a subset of the interview data for 2019. I used the theoretical framework and the research question to hypothesize who to target for interview analysis. In total, I analyzed 36
interview transcripts as described in Table 7, which shows the interviewee roles across all three districts.

### Table 7

*Total Interviewees Across All Three Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Type</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisors</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District Chiefs</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Central Office Staff</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual Principals</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Interviewees</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus Groups**

Focus groups can be a way to uncover collective voices, and they can provide a sense of safety to those being interviewed in a way that one-on-one interviews do not always do (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Another benefit of focus groups is that they can be a more efficient way to collect qualitative data than one-on-one interviews. One limitation to focus groups, however, is that the collective voice may actually be representative of just one or few voices in the group who were more willing to speak up (Fontana & Frey, 2013).
As an evaluation team, we felt that the principals’ perspective on the implementation work happening in each district was critical in this project, as they are the intended beneficiaries of the work. We wanted to get as many principal voices in our data set as possible. However, we were restricted by time. Not only did we have to travel to districts for several days to complete the data collection, but principals are very busy and had limited availability. We were justifiably restricted to using only time around the monthly principal meeting we attended to interview principals. Because of this restriction, we decided to conduct focus groups for principals. This allowed us to be efficient in collecting as many principal voices as possible.

Like the other data, these focus groups were conducted in the fall of each year starting in 2017. This dissertation study will focus on a subset of the focus group transcripts conducted in the fall of 2019. These were approximately 90 minutes in length, and audio recorded, similar to the interviews. Also like the interviews, there was a structured, open-ended interview guide, and the same interview team conducted the focus groups. The one difference is that the interview team prioritized having at least one additional note taker in each focus group to help with notes and any other facilitation needs. For this study, I will only use de-identified final transcripts in my analysis. Table 8 shows the number of focus groups across all three districts.
Table 8

*Total Focus Groups Across All Three Districts*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role Type</th>
<th>Total Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Veteran Principal Focus Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Principal Focus Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aspiring Principal Focus Groups</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Focus Groups</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Overview of Research Design**

The purpose of this study was to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. In particular, this study focused on variation of progress toward that implementation, and conditions that explained variation in progress. This study was approved by Southern Methodist University’s Institutional Review Board as “exempt” because it used a subset of data from a larger evaluation study. Creswell and Clark (2018) assert that the philosophical assumption of a mixed methods case study is to have a, “strong qualitative orientation (p. 117)”, which is true in this study. Because there are so many unknown variables at this point in the implementation, a qualitative lens is important (Yin, 2014). This mixed methods research study sought to explore two research questions, which will be discussed in detail below.
Data Analysis Design

In order to understand what conditions were in place that either helped or hindered PTM implementation, a mixed methods case study design was conducted. The research questions for this study were:

On completion of two years of district implementation work:

- RQ1: What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?
- RQ 2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation?

This mixed methods approach was heavily qualitative. I analyzed each district as its own case first, and then looked across the three cases, or districts. As stated above, using both qualitative and quantitative allowed me to get a broader picture of each case I looked at (Creswell & Plano, 2018). I then used convergent mixed methods design described by Creswell and Plano (2018) where I cleaned, organized, and reviewed the quantitative data separately from the qualitative data. Once I reviewed the quantitative data, I then merged both data sets into an organization scheme that matched my coding framework. Table 9 shows how each piece of data was used in the design.
Table 9

Data and How They Relate to Research Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Sources</th>
<th>RQ1: What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?</th>
<th>RQ2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Diagnostic scores</td>
<td>Used as foundational data to show implementation progress of each district, as well as each policy/practice area(s) the districts focused on.</td>
<td>Used to determine which districts made more progress, and at what point progress was made, in order to compare variation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview and focus group transcripts</td>
<td>Coded and analyzed in the first coding phase to specifically look for conditions within districts.</td>
<td>In the second phase, coded to look for themes across districts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Surveys</td>
<td>Descriptive data used to help describe district people and context. Also, ANOVA tests used to compare means on survey factor composite scores. Regression on SNA data used to understand how network may predict job embeddedness.</td>
<td>ANOVA tests used to compare means on survey factor composite scores, specifically across districts. SNA data used to understand the role of the principal supervisors in implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Qualitative Analysis

Creswell and Plano (2018) encourage mixed methods researchers to use the organization of data as part of the analyzation process, and that is what I did in this study. All qualitative data
(de-identified interview and focus group transcripts) was uploaded to a qualitative research software, NVivo version 11, which helped facilitate the coding and notetaking throughout the analysis. The coding process occurred in two cycles, as described by Saldaña (2016). In the first cycle of coding, I grouped similarly coded data into nodes, which aligned with an a priori coding scheme. This initial set of closed codes were aligned to the research questions and the theoretical framework. To develop these codes, I sat down with my theoretical framework and research questions printed out. Using what I already knew of the interview data along with these, I brainstormed a list of any potential additional codes that would illuminate findings in each of the research questions. I specifically thought through potential codes aligned with:

- **Policy:** What codes could help me determine which practices and policies were being implemented, how they were chosen, and where they were in the implementation process?
- **People:** What codes could help me understand the different people involved in implementation, from design to planning to those who benefit from the policies? And how do those involved in each level make sense of the policies and practices being designed and implemented?
- **Place:** What codes can help me understand the historical context of the district, including social relationships, information flow, and trust?

In the second pass through these codes, I combined some codes, and I added further definition. In my final cycle, I further developed the codebook through additional examples of what kinds of data I might come across in a particular code. This helped me add definition, as well as do some further combining. Table 10 lists the a priori codes, with a definition, and an
example of the types of evidence I looked for during the coding process. A codebook was established, and I continued to add to it throughout the analysis process.

Table 10

_A Priori Codes, Definitions, and Potential Examples_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Definition</th>
<th>Example of Evidence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness</td>
<td>Evidence that multiple districts staff have identified the specific problem with PTM and understand at least one root cause.</td>
<td>• Interviewees describe the problem they are facing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Principal survey scores triangulate the problem.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTM practice/policy</td>
<td>The specific practice/policy (or practices and policies) that districts chose to implement</td>
<td>• Interviewees name specific policies being implemented.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey indicators show high agreement that district is addressing the certain policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation stage</td>
<td>An understanding of where the implementation of certain policies are, such as design phase, planning phase, beginning implementation phase, etc.</td>
<td>• Interviewees describe the process of implementation.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### People
An informal mapping of who is involved in the implementation at each phase, including the beneficiaries.

- Interviewees describe their roles in the process and the goal of the practice/policy.
- Survey responses specifically from the project team may reveal different roles.

### Codes related to potential conditions of variation across both RQ1 and RQ2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Interviewees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buy-in</td>
<td>Support for policy/practice, and the perception that it is the right problem to be solving.</td>
<td>- Interviewees speak positively about the practice/policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stickiness</td>
<td>How well the new practice/policy remains in place, particularly when difficulties occur.</td>
<td>- Interviewees are able to describe a barrier faced and how it was overcome.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectedness</td>
<td>The new practice/policy is connected in a logical way to other district practices/policies to create a system.</td>
<td>- Interviewees describe how the new practice/policy connects to the overall talent system. - Survey items related to the system can triangulate this.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership essentials</td>
<td>Evidence of a belief in the importance of principals and a commitment to the work</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviews of top district leaders describe and name this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey scores of principals and other staff triangulate.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Evidence that those implementing have the time, knowledge, skills, and support to do the work.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviewees of project team members and other district leaders specifically describe their role in implementation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey scores from principals and others triangulate this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External support</td>
<td>How districts or rely on external support to gain knowledge, skills, tools, or other resources to move the work forward.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviewees describe how external resources are used.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internal support</td>
<td>A diverse group of champions who support and move the work forward.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviewees describe their role, as well as others, in moving the work forward.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Survey responses from the project team triangulate this.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• SNA survey questions of principals can help understand specifically what those support roles are.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information flow</td>
<td>A look at how information flows from top down and bottom up, as</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interviewees describe how information gets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Decision making
A look at who decides what policies are needed, why, and which to choose
- Interviewees describe how the particular policy/practice was chosen.

### Ownership/Accountability
A description of who owns the practice/policy to ensure it continues or is adjusted as needed, and what measures are used to see how it is working
- Interviewees, particularly on the project team, describe this.
- Surveys of the project team triangulate this.

### Implementation tactics
The various tools and steps teams take to implement, such as creating a plan, having efficient and effective team meetings, etc.
- Interviewees, particularly on the project team, describe these tactics.
- Surveys of the project team triangulate this.

During the first cycle of coding, I used these closed a priori codes when I complete line-by-line inductive coding of the transcripts, as well as the convening agenda and PowerPoint artifacts. During the coding process I tried to generate meaning through patterns and themes that
emerged, which allowed me to further categorize and organize the data. Throughout the coding, I kept data split out by case, or district. For example, I started with a line-by-line review of the data for District A. I then added descriptive notes to my a priori codes during this first cycle to summarize the data and look for patterns (Miles et al., 2020). I kept detailed notes throughout the coding process, noting emerging themes, my own reflections, and my remaining open questions.

To give an example of what this looked like, I will use the code “Awareness” listed in Table 10 above. Awareness is defined as evidence that multiple district staff have identified the specific problem with PTM and understand at least one root cause. While I coded line-by-line across all interview transcripts for that code, there were several interview questions in particular were valuable sources of data. For example:

- Cabinet leaders, chiefs, superintendents, and the project team members were asked, “What is the district’s vision for improving principal effectiveness? What does that mean for changing practice?”

- Project team members were asked in a follow up survey after a convening, “To what extent do you agree that your district has a three-year destination in mind for the district’s PTM system”.

For the analysis, I first triangulated how the different interviewees responded to the interview questions, looking for numbers of staff that agreed on a same or similar vision, and noting how they answered the follow up question on changing practice. Then, I looked at the level of agreement to the survey question by the project team as confirming or disconfirming evidence.
Before my second round of coding, I once again reviewed my codes against the theoretical framework, research questions, and the descriptive notes I took during the coding process. Based on this I made one final revision/refinement to my closed codes. I updated my codebook with these codes where I created the matrix in Table 11 showing how each code aligns with sub-codes.

**Table 11**

*Updated Codebook*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Parent Code</th>
<th>Sub-code</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Awareness and Decision Making</td>
<td>Principal retention</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Principal Stress</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Ownership and Accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Capacity</td>
<td>Willingness to learn</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Implementation skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>External support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Internal support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information Flow</td>
<td>Team and Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Buy-in and Champions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Network</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Relationships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PTM Practice/Policy</td>
<td>Pipeline Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I used this updated set of closed codes during my second round of coding, where I took a more holistic perspective as I coded, looking across the cases for comparisons. I still used line-by-line coding, but I looked back and forth across cases and made additional notes. Throughout this process of categorizing, I used triangulation to ensure I had evidence to support my emerging themes. I noted quotes that were good examples and representative of what multiple people were saying. I categorized my major findings by my theoretical framework, as well as by research question. The themes were placed into the categories of policy, people, or place, and I specifically looked to see how social network theory appeared within and across these categories throughout the data. Finally, I resorted the data into four major findings that were most representative of the themes and patterns throughout. All of this ensured a tight alignment between my coding, my conceptual framework, and my results.

For the analysis, I first triangulated how the different interviewees responded to the interview questions, looking for patterns relating to how information flows. I triangulated that with principal responses about how feedback and input was sought, which is another form of information flow. Then, I looked at agreement to the survey question as confirming/disconfirming evidence. Finally, I used the SNA questions to look at numbers of ties between principals and central office and other analysis results. All of this information, as well
as other data was coded into this category was converged and reviewed for an over-arching emerging theme.

Throughout the entire process, I carefully used the NVivo software to create memos to capture my reflections and thoughts about the data analysis section (Miles et al., 2020). This also helped me to check for researcher bias throughout. The data are represented in the findings by case, and then across cases. The cross-case analysis included analyzing the similarities and the differences in the cases. I also aligned the research questions in this way.

**Quantitative Analysis**

As described above, some data needed a first layer of examination to prepare it for the analysis phase (e.g., the six scales described from the principal survey). However, others, such as the demographic data, did not. To start the quantitative analysis, I looked at the descriptive survey data as a first step. I started with a cleaned, fresh survey data set. As suggested by Creswell and Clark (2018), I completed a visual inspection of the quantitative data through a scan to look for outliers and patterns. I did that by using SPSS to run descriptive statistics on all the survey data. Then, I analyzed the survey data in the ways described below.

**Reporting Means.** As described above, PCA testing revealed that the principal survey contained six factors that were informative to this study (communication, job embeddedness, school culture, principal supervisor, compensation, and implementation) and the central office survey contained one comparable factor (implementation competency). I used this data to calculate composite scores of each factor on both surveys. I used SPSS’s compute variable feature to average the items in each factor to create the composite score. I then calculated the z-
score from these composites to make each mean more easily comparable. I reported the mean z-scores and incorporated them into my qualitative analysis by coding them as a piece of qualitative evidence. I did this by listing the district mean next to the mean of all districts for a descriptive comparison. For example, I used the composite z-score mean for job embeddedness to look for additional evidence of implementation variation between districts.

**Comparing Means.** Once composite z-scores and means were calculated, I then conducted one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) tests to determine if any single district mean was significantly different than another. I did this for following scenarios:

- In the principal survey, I ran a one way ANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference in all six factors among all three districts.
- In the central office survey, I ran a one-way ANOVA to determine if there was a significant difference in implementation skills or capacity building between the three districts.

**Social network questions.** I used the SNA questions on the principal survey to understand numbers of ties between principals and central office, as well as the perceived value of these ties by principals. Table 12 below demonstrates how each SNA question was analyzed. To analyze size, I started by simply counting the number of ties in each principal’s advice network. Because there was variation in the number of survey respondents per district, I created a ratio for number of ties over the number of survey respondents in each district so that the data was more comparable across districts. I also conducted ANOVA tests to understand if the
number of ties was significantly different between districts, as well as frequency of interactions and influence of interactions.

Table 12

**SNA Question Analysis**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SNA Question</th>
<th>Data Elements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Who do you turn to for advice or information about becoming a more effective principal (Name and Role)?</td>
<td>• Number of total ties per principal and average number of total ties across all principals in a district.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of principal-to-principal ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of principal-to-central office ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Number of principal-to-principal supervisor ties.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• A qualitative understanding of who principals turn to.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Regression Equation.** Strong professional relationships have been shown to increase retention, efficiency, and engagement in professional settings (Daly, 2015). As part of this study, I hypothesized that job embeddedness might be one early outcome variable that could show implementation progress or variation. Reporting mean differences as described above was one way I approached this. However, I also wanted to see if the SNA data could also explain the interactions with people in the district to get an understanding of how those interactions might be a condition for successful implementation, given that one of the main goals of the work was to
retain principals in their roles longer. To do this, I analyzed the SNA data to see whether or not it predicted the factor of job embeddedness by running two simple linear regressions: one looking at all ties principals reported, and another looking at ties specifically to principal supervisors. I used the following regression equation:

\[ Y_i = (b_0 + b_1 TIE_i + b_2 DIST_A_i + b_3 DIST_C_i) + \varepsilon_i \]

In this equation, \( Y \) are the scale scores for job embeddedness by district, and \( b_0 \) is the constant. In the first, variable \( b_1 \) is the coefficient for the “TIE” variable, which represents all ties principals reported. In the second regression, “TIE” represents only principal supervisor ties principals reported. In order to account for each district, I also created and inserted a dummy variable for District A and C, using District B as the control variable. \( b_2 \) and \( b_3 \) are the coefficients of those district dummy variables.

The survey data was used in my convergent design by incorporating it into the qualitative analysis. After creating and displaying all of the charts in an analytic memo, I then coded parts of that memo in the Nvivo software. That way, I could interpret the qualitative and quantitative data together.

**Legitimation**

Many times, mixed methods researchers use terms other than “validity” to describe how reliable and valid their study results are (Creswell & Clark, 2018). Similar to Creswell and Clark, I am using the term “Legitimation” to describe how I will attempt to ensure my data collection and analysis procedures can be trusted. Reliability in a mixed methods case study refers to whether that study can be replicated with similar results (Merriam, 2009). Threats to reliability occur when
there is not sufficient documentation about the data collection and analysis process. In an attempt to solve for that, I will carefully record all my notes in NVivo and on an organized drive. I will use best practices in data naming conventions and tags so that data and analysis notes are easy to locate.

Validity is the accuracy of the results (Creswell & Clark, 2018). One threat to validity in a case study such as this one is the data analysis because of researcher bias (Merriam, 2009). I came to this study with my own experiences, context, bias, and meanings about the data collected and reported. These may have created a potential validity threat, known as research bias. To attempt to control this, I worked to use my theoretical framework to ground my findings. I was careful in the data organization and analysis steps to check for my own biases, and I forced myself to produce and systematically explain my evidence for each theme. I used recommendations by Miles et al. (2020), which include: carefully reviewing the data multiple times, triangulating the data, and using my theoretical framework and research questions as foundational guides. Another recommendation I used recommendations by Creswell and Clark to provide a report of disconfirming evidence to confirm the accuracy of the data. Another potential threat to validity was the unequal sample sizes between the qualitative and quantitative data. However, this is more of a threat when using the data to study individual participants rather than looking to triangulate perspectives (Creswell & Clark, 2018).

Summary

The purpose of this study was to examine how central office leaders in three school districts implemented policy and practice changes to more effectively recruit, support, and retain school principals. Specifically, I looked at variation within and across the three districts to
understand what conditions best explained their implementation successes and challenges. The data in this study were pulled from a larger evaluation study of this program. The data included surveys of principals and other district staff, interviews, focus groups, artifact review, and district diagnostic scores. This study utilized a mixed methods case study approach to look specifically at the two research questions. This study had a heavy qualitative orientation but used limited quantitative survey data as a supplement.
Chapter 4: Findings

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to explore how three districts were implementing PTM practice and policy changes. Specifically, this study looked to identify the conditions that supported or hindered the implementation work in each district, and it sought to look for conditions that best explained the variation in implementation across the three districts. This chapter presents the key findings obtained from the 36 interviews, the 12 focus groups, and all 366 survey response. Four major findings emerged from this study:

1. While all three districts progressed on implementation, they all took different approaches and implemented at different rates.
2. The greatest challenges to implementation progress included: capacity gaps, gaining buy-in, and communication flow.
3. Across all districts, the conditions that best explained the variation included: ownership, autonomy, and accountability for the work, willingness to learn and build capacity, and strategies to improve information flow to support implementation.
4. In particular, the role of the principal supervisor acts as the “glue” between the central office and principals, and aided in implementing the PTM work.

These findings confirmed the theoretical framework on the importance of looking at policy implementation variation through the lens of the policy being implemented, the context of where the policy is being implemented, and the people implementing the policy. This chapter is divided into three main parts. In the first section, I described the district background and implementation stage in more depth across all districts, and I reported the principal and central
office survey results. In the second section, I focused on answering the first research question by describing the implementation work of each district, pointing out the supporting and hindering conditions, and relying mostly on the qualitative data with the quantitative data used as a supplement. In the third and final section, I focused on answering the second research question by describing patterns found across districts that help best explain implementation progress and variation.

**District and PLC Background and Stage of Implementation**

To answer the research questions, it was first important to understand each district’s context and where they were in the implementation process. The three participating districts are located around the United States, including two in the Southwest and one in the West. Table 2 shows how each district compares to one another. The districts range between 70,000 students and 90,000. They have between 70 and 150 principals. All three districts participated fully in the first two years of the program (Year 1=2018; Year 2=2019).

All three districts made progress on various PTM components throughout the two years. Appendix D shows each district’s score on each PTM policy/practice as reported by the diagnostic described above. There are a few things to note about the scores. First, the scores are divided by component area, which are labeled with whole numbers. For example, “1. Pipeline Development” is an overarching component. Each component is then made up of indicators. In this case, pipeline development has six indicators: 1a1) pipeline recruitment; 1a2) development, 1a3) selection, etc. Each year, the district is scored on indicators and components as listed in the chart in Appendix D—though the chart only reflects baseline scores and the most recent year two
scores to show change over time. Making a point gain on an overall component, like pipeline development, is more significant than making a point gain on an indicator, such as pipeline recruitment, because several indicators have to improve in order for one overall component score to improve. It is also important to note that the components and indicators changed slightly from year zero (baseline) to year two. For example, the component “Principal Supervisors” was originally a single indicator under the component “Working Environment”. However, a full component area was created for principal supervisors by year one diagnostic.

The districts attended three in-person convenings per year in the first two years (six total). Table 13 shows what topics the districts were exposed to at the in-person convenings. While the convenings had specific focus areas to help build capacity of the district teams, each district was allowed to choose its own focus areas. The agendas for the in-person convenings were developed through a combination of diagnostic scores and feedback from each district’s project advisor assigned by the PLC leaders.

**Table 13**

*PTM Agenda Topics at In-Person Convenings*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Convening</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. March 2018</td>
<td>• “Why” behind the work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Performance Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Summer 2018 (these were held at each district throughout the summer)</td>
<td>• Performance Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November 2018</td>
<td>• Overview of Recruitment and Selection, Professional Learning, and Principal Supervisor role</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 2019</td>
<td>• Diagnostic debrief and individualized support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 2019</td>
<td>• Concurrent sessions on: Professional Learning, Performance Evaluation, Principal Supervisor</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2019</td>
<td>• Strategic and aligned Professional Learning</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As demonstrated by Appendix D, all districts have made steady progress in a few key PTM component areas in their first two years implementing. All districts made progress on professional learning feedback (3b2), which has much to do because of each district’s focus on refining the role of the principal supervisor (described in detail below). Also, districts made progress on recruitment and selection and performance evaluation. However, there has been little movement on pipeline development, compensation and incentives, or working environment. That aligns with the artifact review explained above in Table 13, meaning, the convening content has not yet covered these topics. While districts could choose any topic they wanted to focus on, it is not surprising that no district is strictly focused on topics that have not yet been a focus of the PLC. Each district’s work is explored more in the section after the survey results.
Survey Results

Before reviewing each district in depth, I present all survey results in aggregate in this section. I then referenced back to the survey results in the district cases in the next section, and in the cross-case analysis, which is the final part of this chapter. Looking at survey data from principals and central office staff added additional evidence of variation and implementation progress across districts. Below, the data is laid out first by the principal survey, and then by the central office survey.

Principal Scale Score Survey Results

On the principal survey, District A had 79 participants; District B had 125; and District C had 105. Of all survey participants, 42% led elementary schools, 11% led middle schools, 11% led high schools, and 2% reported leading K-12 schools. Participants had been principals for an average of seven years, with 60% of participants reporting tenures less than that.

The principal survey described in Chapter 3 contains five parts and was administered through Qualtrics at principal meetings held in the fall of 2019 across the three districts. The results in this section focus on six scales created from the survey data. Table 14 shows the correlations of those six scales. Some scales are highly correlated, such as communications and implementation ($r = .81$, $p < .001$). This is not surprising given the qualitative data showed that communications were a critical part of effectively implementing new policies and practices.
Table 14

*Principal Survey Scales: Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Communications</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>.374***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. School Culture</td>
<td>.186**</td>
<td>.283***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>.645***</td>
<td>.407***</td>
<td>.151**</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Compensation</td>
<td>.535***</td>
<td>.353***</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.420***</td>
<td>-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Implementation</td>
<td>.810***</td>
<td>.303***</td>
<td>.198***</td>
<td>.659***</td>
<td>.498***</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* *p*<.05. **p*<.01. ***p*<.001.

Table 15 shows each district’s mean on the six scales described in Chapter 3. Questions were asked on a five-point Likert scale (e.g., 0=Strongly Disagree, 5=Strongly Agree), so the lowest possible response for any one item was zero and the highest was five.
Table 15

Means and Standard Deviations of Principal Survey Scales

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>A (N=79)</th>
<th>B (N=125)</th>
<th>C (N=105)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td>3.65 (.95)</td>
<td>3.77 (.99)</td>
<td>3.50 (.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>4.50 (1.02)</td>
<td>4.06 (.79)</td>
<td>4.25 (.86)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td>4.65 (.58)</td>
<td>4.67 (.75)</td>
<td>4.79 (.74)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>4.13 (1.09)</td>
<td>4.27 (1.01)</td>
<td>4.51 (.84)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>3.62 (1.11)</td>
<td>2.89 (.99)</td>
<td>2.92 (.99)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>3.62 (.89)</td>
<td>3.86 (.88)</td>
<td>3.83 (.96)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Standard Deviations are provided in parenthesis.

Next, ANOVA tests were used to evaluate the null hypothesis that there were no differences in the six scales. District was the independent variable and the composite z-scores for each scale were used as the independent variable. Each scale was run as its own ANOVA, meaning, in one ANOVA the independent variable was district and the dependent variable was the composite z-score for information flow. Then a separate ANOVA was run where the dependent variable was district and the independent variable was the composite z-score for job embeddedness, and so on.
An alpha level of .05 was used on all analyses. Table 16 below shows the results of all the tests performed, including their significance levels which can be found in the last column. One scale, job embeddedness, did not meet Levene’s test of Homogeneity: $F(2, 306)=3.57$, $p=.03$. Because of this I used Welch’s $F$ test and found that this factor was significant: $F(2, 177.93)=5.42$, $p=.01$. All other factors met the assumption of homogeneity. The ANOVA was significant for two additional scales: principal supervisors ($F(2, 306)=3.57$, $p=.03$) and compensation ($F(2, 306)=14.63$, $p,.00$). The other three scales were not significant.

Table 16

Analysis of Variance for Principal Survey Composite Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>SS</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>MS</th>
<th>$F$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>4.13</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2.06</td>
<td>2.08</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>303.88</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308.00</td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Between</td>
<td>11.73</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5.86</td>
<td>5.47</td>
<td>.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>296.27</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>.97</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308.00</td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Between</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>----------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>1.10</td>
<td>.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Within</td>
<td>305.8</td>
<td>306</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>308.00</td>
<td>308</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

|                      | Between  |          |          |          |          |
| Principal Supervisors| 7.03     | 2        | 3.52     | 3.57     | .03      |
|                      | 300.97   | 306      | .98      |          |          |
| Total                | 308      | 308      |          |          |          |

|                      | Between  |          |          |          |          |
| Compensation         | 26.88    | 2        | 14.44    | 14.63    | <.00     |
|                      | 281.12   | 306      | .92      |          |          |
| Total                | 308      | 308      |          |          |          |

|                      | Between  |          |          |          |          |
| Implementation       | 3.65     | 2        | 1.83     | 1.84     | .16      |
|                      | 304.35   | 306      | 1.00     |          |          |
| Total                | 308.00   | 308      |          |          |          |
Post hoc comparisons using Tukey procedures were used to determine which pairs of the three group means differed on job embeddedness and coaching. These results are given in Table 17 and indicate that principals from District A score the job embeddedness factor on the survey significantly higher than those from District B ($p<.01$). In addition, principals from district C score the coaching factor significantly higher than those in district A ($p<.01$). These results will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

**Table 17**

*Tukey Post Hoc Results and Effect Size of Principal Scale Scores*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>Mean Differences</th>
<th>Effect Size (in parentheses)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Job embeddedness</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>B</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.20</td>
<td>-.49** (.18)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>.30</td>
<td>-.29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Supervisors</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>-.18</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>-.05</td>
<td>.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Central Office Survey Results

To understand how the means among districts compare on the implementation factor on the central office survey, composite z-scores were calculated for each factor. Table 18 shows each district’s composite z-score on the two factors. As the table shows, sample sizes for these surveys were considerably smaller than the principal survey.

Table 18

Means and Standard Deviations of Central Office Survey Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th>n</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>-.04</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>.07</td>
<td>.98</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Similar to the principal survey above, an ANOVA test was used to evaluate the null hypothesis that there were no differences in implementation as a function of district. An alpha level of .05 was used on the analysis. The assumption of homogeneity of variances was tested and found tenable using Levene’s Test: $F(2, 55)=1.27$, $p=.29$. The ANOVA was not significant, $F(2, 55)=.14$, $p=.94$.

**Principal Social Network Analysis Results**

In the SNA questions, principals were asked who they turned to for support, and the relationship between principals and principal supervisors was particularly interesting for this study. I first analyzed the number of total people each principal listed in the question asking who they turned to for advice and support. These are called ties. Each principal could list up to 30 ties, but the most any one principal listed was 13. In District A, principals reported an average of 3.08 ties; District B principals were at an average of 2.56 ties; and District C at 3.03 ties. Across all districts, principals reported an average of 2.85 ties. An ANOVA revealed that the total number of ties per district were not significantly different ($F(2, 306)=1.65$, $p=.20$).²

Principals were also asked to provide their tie’s role type. When looking through the data, four categories summarized all the role types: other principals, principal supervisors, other

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² The ANOVA did not violate Leveine’s Test $F(2, 306)=.52$, $p=.95$. 
central office, and other. I broke the number of ties down by role type and then normalized it by district by taking the number of ties in each role type and dividing it by the number of survey respondents in that district (Figure 5). I did this so it would be easier to compare across districts. As expected, principals listed other principals as the top tie type in all three districts. However, principal supervisors came in as the second most popular tie type. Interestingly, an ANOVA found that there were statistically significant differences between number of principal supervisor ties across districts, $F(2, 306)=3.18, p=.04$. Other variables such as frequency of interactions and influence of ties were tested for mean differences, but there were no significant differences between districts. Results of these test are in Appendix E.

Figure 5

Normalized Number of Reported Ties by Principals in Each District
Post hoc comparisons using Tukey procedures were used to determine which pairs of the three group means differed on numbers of principal supervisor ties. These results are given in Table 19 and indicate that principals from District A have the highest number of ties to principal supervisors ($M=1.08$), and that is significantly higher than Districts B and C ($p=.05$). However, District B principals do not have significantly more principal ties ($M=.76$) than District C principals ($M=.99$).

**Table 19**

*Tukey Post Hoc Results and Effect Size of Numbers of Principal Ties*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Job embeddedness</th>
<th>District</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>A</td>
<td>1.08</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>.32 (.11)</td>
<td>.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>.76</td>
<td>- .32 (.11)</td>
<td>0.00</td>
<td>- .23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>- .09</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* Bold are significant at $p=.05$

Finally, a multiple linear regression was calculated to predict principal job embeddedness based on principal-to-principal supervisor ties, controlling for district-related significant differences (see Table 20). Principal supervisor ties were significantly related to principals’ job
embeddedness ($F(3, 305)=10.97, p<.00$), with an $R^2$ of 1.00. For each principal supervisor tie reported, the average principal job embeddedness scores rose by .26.

This model also indicates the variation in job-embeddedness across districts. For example, District A was found to be significantly different from District B ($p=.01$), the control district (see Table 16), but District C was not ($p=.23$). Remember that the job embeddedness scale was developed by making a composite of six questions that were all measured on a 5-point Likert scale from strongly disagree to strongly agree. These were then standardized into Z-scores for greater comparability. The standardized constant for the control district, District B was -.39 and for District A was .41. While both would rise .26 in job embeddedness scores for each additional principal supervisor tie, District A has a $B$ equal to .41, which is significantly higher than District B ($p=.01$).

**Table 20**

*Regression Results*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>$B$</th>
<th>$SE$</th>
<th>$t$</th>
<th>$p$</th>
<th>95% CI</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constant</td>
<td>-.39</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>-4.09</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>[-.57, -.22]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisor Ties</td>
<td>.26</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>4.48</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>[.15, .37]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District A</td>
<td>.41</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>2.96</td>
<td>.01</td>
<td>[-.00, .15]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District C</td>
<td>.15</td>
<td>.06</td>
<td>1.15</td>
<td>.23</td>
<td>[.15, .37]</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. CI=Confidence Interval*
Within District Analysis: Supporting and Hindering Conditions

In the following section, I reviewed the data collected to answer the first research question—what conditions supported and/or hindered district’s work to implement PTM policies. I looked specifically within each district for this section, and I viewed the data through the lens of the theoretical framework. I used interview and focus group data for the bulk of this analysis, but I also supplemented with survey scores. When completing this analysis, it quickly became clear that districts struggled in three main areas: capacity building, gaining buy-in, and communicating the work. I presented findings by each district and describe how the findings fit in Honig’s (2006) implementation framework of policy, people, and place. As described by Honig, these three elements of the framework are very interwoven. Where possible, I made references to one of the three elements, but it should be noted that that these were almost always dependent on one another.

For example, in order to choose which policy and practice areas to focus on, the elements of people and place came into play. Those on the project team, and particularly those leading the team, had opinions and strong reasoning for choosing certain focus areas. The superintendent was almost always mentioned here as well (e.g., a policy focus area was chosen because the team knew this was a priority to the superintendent). Place played a role because of historical context in each district. The district team noted when they felt their district culture was not ready to focus on a particular policy or practice, and district context was noted throughout.

Within each district case, I first presented an overview of where the district started the work, and what they focused on in the first two years of implementation. I presented each
district’s PTM component scores, and then I ended each district case with a discussion about the challenges encountered in implementing the work. This section ends with a summary, tying learnings from all districts together.

**District A**

District A started the work with strong scores in pipeline development. The district received a grant that allowed them to create internal training programs for aspiring and new principals. The team that implemented the pipeline work applied to enter the PLC, so there was some continuity. When District A began the work, they were interested in strengthening their pipeline development work as well as focusing on professional learning. District A also focused on leadership standards, the role on the principal supervisor, and performance evaluation.

**Focus Areas**

In the first year, District A started the work off slowly. The original team that applied for the grant was reconstituted, and a new leader of the project came on board. The new leader was more senior in the district, and this was helpful for two reasons. First, this leader had the autonomy to make decisions and begin implementation, where someone less senior would have had to spend time getting permission. Second, the new, more senior leader had a direct line to the superintendent. While this was helpful, the team still struggled to work cohesively. One project team member described what happened,

I think the most improved area for our team has really been the trust that we have in each other that we didn't start with because we didn't really know each other. Some of us had hardly had any conversations with some of the other individuals on the team because
we're a large district… But we got to the point after, I'm going to say about the first year, here we could break up into subcommittees and trust the subcommittees to do the work and bring it back to the team, and they would trust the work that was done, and that was a big step for us to get there and for all of us to get onto the same page and feel like, ‘You know what, we have a singular message here that we can share,’ and a lot of that was introspection. I mean, how willing was our group to reflect on what our own deficiencies were? In the beginning, it was very, very different because when you have an environment where everyone doesn’t trust each other or know each other, that's a hard environment to be in.

**Aligned Leadership Standards.** Once the district project team was solidified, they started with a focus on defining their principal leadership standards, so they could be clear about what skills, experiences, and competencies a highly effective principal in their district looked like. Using the standards from their current principal evaluation system, the project team added new standards and further defined old ones. Then, a group of principal supervisors put this list in front of principals. According to one principal supervisor, they took multiple steps to get feedback from principals. First, “[All principals] got a survey on what leadership standards they thought were most important in a rank.” Then, after the district project team revised the standards, “We did a focus group with about 15-20% the principals from different levels where…we went through some activities to kind of flush out the standards and which ones were most important and most needful to improve student learning.” When they had a final draft of the standards, then, “We did individual interviews, about 45 minutes long, where maybe only about 10 percent of our principals were interviewed. With all those three things, a district-wide survey,
focus groups and individual interviews, that data helped inform adjusting the leadership standards.”

This work led to improvements in diagnostic scores in several areas including recruitment and selection, performance evaluation, and professional learning. The district project team was able to use their work on principal leadership standards to strengthen these areas because defining competencies of highly effective principals in their district helped them better recruit and select principals who matched those competencies, as well as evaluate and improve current sitting principals. This also helped the team realize that they needed a more streamlined technology solution for their principal evaluation, which they began to look for. District leaders began to realize how the principal evaluation could be a true tool for improvement as opposed to a compliance task. According to one principal supervisor,

[Our] new standards say it in a way that’s more measurable…Then we can say, ‘These things are not in place at the school, and if we can get these things in place, perhaps student achievement growth will benefit,’ and that’s the whole goal. It’s not about the principal’s score [on the evaluation]. It’s about kids being more prepared.

**Role of the Principal Supervisor.** The district realized the importance of the role of the principal supervisor in this work. This led to a heavy focus on the role in the second year. Interestingly, this was largely led by the principal supervisors themselves who had strong opinions about what they wanted their role to be. A small group of principal supervisors on the project team first determined that they wanted and needed to be in schools more. One principal supervisor who started at the same time as this project began had a good perspective on how they
were able to make a change. He described his first year in the role, “Sixty to 70 percent of my
time was in district meetings…20 percent of my time in phone calls, parent responses, patron
concerns, emails…and then maybe only 10 to 20 percent of my time in the schools.” Then he
noted how that changed in the second year. “The second year I probably went up to maybe more
like 30 percent of time in the schools, and meetings went down maybe to 50 or 60 percent.” He
attributed this change to two things. First, he said, “We…created a criteria for our attendance in a
meeting that aligned to our…vision and goals, and if the meeting didn’t meet that criteria, then
we had…an honest conversation with that district department that we would not be attending that
meeting.” And secondly, principal supervisors worked hard be efficient with their time. As he
described, “The other thing that helped reduce meetings was that we are splitting up where one
goes (to a meeting) and represents our department.” He saw a huge benefit from taking these
steps. He mentioned, “We’ve doubled the amount of time I’ve been able to spend in schools
doing a job in better coaching, observing classrooms with principals, leadership team meetings,
professional development meetings, PLCs and building committees…I’m able to participate with
the schools more.”

In the second year, additional steps were taken to define and refine the role. First, the
district hired an additional three principal supervisors so that they could have lower case loads on
 principals. Second, from the beginning of the work, the district had debates about what the role
should actually look like—compliance and accountability, or coaching. Over time they were able
to develop a role that most were comfortable with—a coach that provided support but who also
holds you accountable. The district even hired an external partner to train principal supervisors
and other district staff on this type of coaching. They also reworked the job description and took further steps to protect the time of the principal supervisors.

**Professional Learning and Performance Evaluation.** Because of all of this, principal supervisors were able to do focus on two key areas in year two, which led to diagnostic score improvements: professional learning and performance evaluation. Principals immediately noticed more presence on campus and welcomed the support. Most principals felt that their supervisors were thoughtful in how they spent time on campus, doing classroom walk throughs, being available to help problem solve, etc. According to one principal, “I feel more comfortable now that they’re coaches with the evaluation because they’re in with me…So I trust when they say this needs improvement or this is going really well, they actually have experience with me versus the old system.” According to another, “I feel like our number one support comes from our directors. I can call my director pretty much any time. That’s where my biggest support comes from if I need it.”

Then, principal supervisors also focused on the evaluation process in year two, building on the work they had done on leadership standards and the new technology tool the district had purchased. Prior to year two of the project, the evaluation was very compliance-based. According to one principal, “Honestly, with the self-assessment before this year, I really felt like it was a hoop-jump. It was part of our professional growth and evaluation process, and you just did it….It wasn’t really interactive with your supervisor.” At the beginning of year two, each principal supervisor sat down with every principal she/he supervised after the principal took a beginning-of-year self-evaluation. The supervisors used these meetings to coach each principal through the new standards. They explained the types of evidence they were looking for on each
score and ask questions to push the thinking of each principal. The same principal noted the change, “This year, my supervisor and I had a really good conversation about it, and I was really able to unpack those standards.”

Interview evidence suggested that it was well-known that principal evaluation scores throughout the district were inflated. Top district leaders, including the superintendent, began messaging that the district was taking steps to reduce that inflation so that the evaluation tool was more useful, but all involved knew that this might make it a difficult transition year. One principal supervisor was able to recognize this, “I mean, it was so cultural just to give everyone huge, inflated, scores…We went back and just had honest discussions, and it was very challenging for all of us to train our staff that…no, you're not a four on everything.”

As noted in the diagnostics scores and described above, three areas improved for District over the first two years. First, professional learning and performance evaluation went from scores of one (poor practice) to scores of two (emerging practice). Also, indicator scores went up in the principal supervisor component, with two indicators being scored at a three (strong practice). Figure 6 shows how District A’s component scores have changed over time. Each box represents the component score on the label. One the left axis of the chart, you see a scale from 0 to 4, representing the diagnostic score received on that component in each year. District A’s progress on each component from baseline to year 2 is represented by the area chart. The color of the area corresponds with the most recent score. For example, professional learning in colored yellow because the most recent scores is a 2, up from a 1 in prior years. The colors correspond with Figure 4 located in Chapter 3 above (e.g., a score of a zero is red; a score of 1 is orange; a score of 2 is yellow, etc).
Figure 6

District A Component Score Changes
Challenges to Implementation

The district got off to a slow start to the work, but then quickly caught up with the other districts. Survey results on the implementation scale from both central office staff (M= -.04) and principals (M= -.18) were below the mean; however these findings were not significantly different from the other districts. Questions on this factor get at things like the district’s ability to implement change and prioritize competing interests. The district team faced the following challenges while working implement new PTM practices and policies: 1) building capacity, 2) getting buy in, and 3) communicating about and through the work. These three challenges were consistent across all districts.

Building Capacity. From the very beginning, district leaders had philosophical disagreements at the highest levels about the role of the principal supervisor. Some could not believe that a supervisor could also be a coach, and that those two roles needed to be separate. One long-time central office staff described this shift:

From about 2009 until the beginning of this project, the role of the [principal supervisors] was largely accountability and compliance. Now that's really changed to where the principal supervisors are...working with the principals helping them to expand their skill set, responding in a collaborative and coaching way to problems but still holding them accountable when that becomes necessary.

However, in order to make this cultural shift, the district had to put considerable effort into building its own capacity to move from a compliance-focus to a support-focus. As a starting point, the district hired an external partner to help train principal supervisors, as mentioned
above. Data was mixed about how effective this was. On the scale score for principal supervisors, District A had a mean of -.18, which was significantly lower than the score in District C (M=.20, p=.01). However, as reported from the social network data, principals in District A reported significantly more ties to principal supervisors than in other districts (p=.05). This was somewhat explained in the interview data. One principal observed about the current principal supervisors, “We didn't hire them to be coaches. We hired them for a skillset to be accountability and compliance focused. Some of them are transitioning to coaching really well; some of them are not.” Other interview data suggests mixed support for principal supervisors as well—when a principal perceived their supervisor as highly effective, they were effusive in their praise of the new model, and vice versa.

Even the principal supervisors felt this tension in the shift. One said, “It’s hard and scary. We wish that we felt more competent, and I think maybe in a year or two we will feel better about this. But I'm trying.” Another noted, “[You try to] keep track of 150 things in your mind at once…we feel the pressure that … we’ve reduced your caseload, but there’s an expectation that the schools are going to improve. Principals are going to improve.” In addition to the pressure of the expectations that principal supervisors would help principal improve, another challenge consistently brought up in interviews was time. The principal supervisors did not feel they had time to get all of their new responsibilities done in a competent manner. They recognized that they needed time to grow into the role. And, the district was starting to realize that this complex system change work takes time. The district did have plans to continue the partnership with the external partner to keep the coaching training going.
To District A, capacity building is not just about principal supervisors’ capacity. As one central office staff member put it, “We would like the [all] directors [in central office] to adopt the same coaching stance that [principal supervisors] have been asked to adopt.” The staff member went on to say, “One example of a challenge is that sometimes a principal calls the central office and ask a question. They’re told-- you should've already known that, or you can't do that, and you've created a serious problem, or something like that.”

This was repeated in various ways in multiple interviews, particularly from those on the project team, and it represents a shift in how the district plans to operate going forward. Previously, principals were responsible for serving teachers and students alone, “owing” various things to the district office, such as compliance, reporting, and improvement. In this new model, the entire district has shared accountability in improving students learning. However, as noted by multiple interviewees, this type of work takes time.

**Getting Buy-in.** There were three stakeholder groups that were challenging to District A in terms of gaining buy-in. First, the district had to ensure the superintendent was not just passively supportive, but that the superintendent proactively championed the work. There was a shift seen in this, due much in part to the new project team leader, who was able to keep this work front in center on the superintendent’s agenda. According to one staff member,

I would say [the superintendent’s support] has dramatically improved. Our superintendent this last year has really embraced — it’s not that he didn’t ever embrace it, but again, I’ll use the big moment of his keynote message at the beginning of the school year. The one time he’s got all the administrators in the room, he chose to utilize the
principal talent management work as the way that we are going to improve our leaders in the schools. So that was big.

And one project team member described how this helped move the work forward, saying, “Once we learned and understood that our superintendent supported the work that we’re trying to do, we felt like we could dive in with both feet.”

Additional evidence of top leadership buy-in came when the grant the district had received ended. This grant funded much of the work that was in place, including staff positions and principal interns. The superintendent and board decided to find additional internal funding to replace that grant as a show of support for furthering the work.

The second group the district had to get buy-in from was the principals, who were the beneficiaries of this work. There was no evidence in the principal focus groups of any principals who didn’t believe in the broader goal of the PTM work. And, the survey results show that principals report higher rates of embeddedness than other districts (M= .30), and significantly higher than District B (M= -.20). However, there were principals who reported not experiencing the positive outcomes of the work just yet. One principal said, “It’s a competency thing. That’s causing a lot of morale issues when people are feeling not confident in the person who is supposed to be coaching them. And that’s a relationship-building issue. It’s a trust-building issue.” Another agreed, describing, “Principals feel like their plate is overflowing, and then their coach says, ‘Okay, we're going to look at your this,’ or whatever, and [principals are] like, ‘But I need help with taking some of this stuff off this plate.’”
Finally, the district began work at the end of the second year to get buy-in from other staff in the central office. As the quote above described, it became apparent that principals were struggling with other departments, which at times got in the way of their main goal of serving teachers and students. Highest level leaders admitted that while most departments got along and worked alongside each other fine, they didn’t really work together. Alignment of departments became a key goal at the end of year two, and district leaders recognize this challenge. As one district project team member described, “It's been hard to get the other central office departments up to speed...We now know that every single person matters, as we're trying to increase student achievement and create a safe place for students to learn and grow.”

**Communicating About and Through the Work.** The final challenge described by interviewees was around communication. The principal survey revealed that principals scored District A at just in the middle of, but not significantly different from, the other districts on communication (M=.00, p=.13). First, the district struggled over the two years to communicate to get the work done. This started with the project team struggling to find an agenda and workplan template that worked for them. It continued throughout, including in communicating across departments. This came down to time and emotions. Lack of time was a consistent theme mentioned throughout all interviews. Many times, project implementors felt they barely had time to implement the work, much less communicate about it. Secondly, the project team felt they were communicating about sensitive issues. For example, when project team members learned that principals were having a hard time with certain departments, they struggled with how to address those departments, given the fact that the people who worked in those departments were many times friends and colleagues. While a principal might have seen a faceless bureaucrat in
the central office giving them trouble, a project team member saw that same person as an officemate with whom they shared workspace.

The district approached this communication challenge by using data. The project team developed a survey that would help do two things: 1) get a clear understanding about which departments were most problematic, and 2) communicate back to those departments in a fact-based manner. This strategy allowed individuals to avoid the emotional conversations that may have come in handling this a different way. And, all members of central office got input into how the survey was worded. One central office staff member admitted that there was more work to be done here, saying, “I wouldn’t necessarily say that we have been exceptional at getting the communication all the way to the end of the row yet, but we are trying to put things in place to get better at that.” Even with these acknowledgements of needing improvement, the interview data showed that across the board, everyone interviewed had a very specific awareness of the work and was able to describe it in detail.

The data show the critical role of principal supervisors in communicating this work—and all other implementation work—to principals. Interestingly, principal supervisors were mentioned in every single interview transcribed, across all districts, even before any questions were asked about the role. Principal supervisors spent time one-on-one and in meetings with principals, and they were the key players in getting feedback from and to principals. The SNA data showed how influential principals feel principal supervisors are, and District A seemed to grasp this in their philosophical shift around the role.
District B

While all three districts were in similar stages of implementation (i.e., scoring at emerging practice on most component areas), District B was able to start on the work the fastest and make the most progress. Coming in, this district’s diagnostic scores were lowest of the three districts, with only two component areas scoring in the emerging stage (performance evaluation and working environment). The district staff person who originally applied to be part of the work ended up leading the project when it started. Also, this same person was promoted to a more senior level position, giving him/her the authority to make decisions about the work. Immediately, the project team was interested in looking at recruitment and selection efforts, noting that the district scores a zero on the diagnostic in this area.

Focus Areas

Over the two years of the progress, District B focused on building leadership standards, recruitment and selection, professional learning, and the role of the principal supervisors. One way the district was able to move so fast in implementation was that they rarely focused on one component area in isolation. The project team understood from the beginning how interrelated each component area was. Both the central office staff (M= .07) and principals (M=.08) scored District B higher than the other two districts on the implementation factor of the survey, though these results were not significant.

Aligned Leadership Standards and Recruitment and Selection. Similar to District A, District B started the work by defining principal leadership standards. They did a similar exercise where they received and used principal feedback on their leadership standards. Once they had
their standards, they immediately tested them out in their recruitment and selection work. The district project team used these standards to determine what lines of evidence were needed in an interview to select high quality candidates. They then refined or developed interview activities to get this evidence. To pilot these activities, they started with the assistant principal selection process. Once this was done, they reflected and adjusted as needed, and then moved the refined activities to the principal selection process. The district used these activities as a screener to create a “pool” of high-quality candidates. Then, when an assistant principal or principal position opened, the district saved valuable time because they already had a screened pool of candidates to select from.

These first steps helped the district move from a zero (no practice) to a one (poor practice) on the diagnostic in the first year. The project team wanted to save even more time in the selection process. In prior years, the process did not begin until the spring semester, when many talented principals were already solidifying their plans for the next school year. So, the district moved their timeline up. One central office staff said, “The hiring pool starts in December. We’ve typically waited for vacancies to be…official, and then we would go hire. We know we’re going to have 10 to 15 principal hires [each year]. So why not hire your 12 best now.”

District B began collecting data on potential retirements, historic trend data, and other data to help them estimate how many positions they would need to fill in the upcoming year. In the second year of implementation, the district worked to create school profiles to help them determine better fit of candidates to a school, as well as continued efforts to reflect and improve on the entire process. One central office employee described this, saying,
We’re in the process of selection right now. We are looking at everyone’s background, and certifications, and areas of specialization. But…we want to make sure that we have both science and art as part of this, so identify who has a secondary background, who has an elementary background, who’s good with language minority students, Spanish, bilingual, et cetera. And then really match and pair personalities, strengths and weaknesses, with our principal [candidates].

This work improved their diagnostic scores for this component up to a two (emerging practice), and two indicators were scores as threes (strong practice), which includes candidate pool and rigorous assessment. This work also played a role in principal performance evaluation, as now more than ever before, principal supervisors had a clear understanding of what the district was looking for in a highly effective principal.

**Role of the Principal Supervisor.** Another focus area that District B had in year one was the role of the principal supervisor. Coming into the work, the district already had some emerging practices related to the role, such as a time to support principals, clear roles, and a focus on providing individualized support. Additional role definition was provided, and a clear job description was written. The district also invested in training and support for principal supervisors to improve their coaching skills in their support of principals. The survey data shows the principals scored the principal supervisor factor just below the mean, but not significantly different than the other two districts (M=-.05).

Most recently, the district decided to have all principal supervisors reapply for their jobs. There were two reasons for this. First, the district was restructuring their top levels and how
schools feed into one another. Secondly, with the new job description and clear expectations, district leaders wanted to ensure they had top talent filling those roles. As one central office staff member described, “We want a principal supervisor who is able to focus on keeping the work aligned from early childhood to college, establishing common practices for looking at data, common practices for prideful events in the community.”

**Professional Learning.** District B naturally turned to improving professional learning through their work on principal supervisors. This started because principal supervisors were providing stronger on-the-job coaching to principals, but then transitioned over to other supports. The district carefully selected and paid mentors to be assigned to newer or struggling principals. For example, the district strengthened its mentoring program. One interviewee mentioned,

I think we’re being purposeful about some of our new principal mentoring approaches that we’re taking….What we heard from some of our newer principals, but also from some of our struggling principals, is they needed a strong principal supervisor, but sometimes they needed someone outside of that, who could really help them talk about systems, and structures, and what needs to be in place at their campus.

The principal meetings improved as well. “I think we’re getting better. We’re listening to principals. We’re doing half-day principal meetings instead of the full-day. We are sending things via email [instead of having a meeting]. We’re doing more differentiated instruction targeted toward student learning...” And one thing that came out in the interview data was how focused the district intends the principal meetings to be, and that a priority was given to respect principals’ time. One principal mentioned, “They’ve done a really great job improving those
meetings. I liked really how, at this last principals’ meeting, they really tried to do more of the instructional support piece, so that every little piece is aligned.” One story came up multiple times during interviews about a recent principals’ meeting. A central office employee got up to speak to principals, and it was clear to several interviewees that this person was not prepared. After a few minutes, a district leader stood up, respectfully interrupted the presentation, and let principals know they were moving on to the next agenda items. Principals enthusiastically reported this story in focus groups and expressed how this example made them feel respected and that the central office—or at least this district leader—had their back. A principal admitted, “I actually sent a text…to some other principals and said, ‘What just happened—that just did really show me that our time is valued.’”

What came up most positively in interviews about professional learning had to do with coaching. The district began coaching walk throughs where a principal supervisor would gather the principals who reported to her/him and do focused walk throughs on campuses. The principal supervisors’ boss joined these as much as possible and would give feedback to the principal supervisor on these walks. Principals reported that this modeling of coaching was reassuring—everyone in the district is being coached to improve, not just them.

To date, the district has not formally focused on performance evaluation for principals, but these learning walks have led to score improvements on indicators in the evaluation component area in the diagnostic, specifically in alignment and evaluation process. One central office employee made that connection, “There is a need for calibration and alignment on an effective tool that not only guides the conversations with the principals for their growth, but also
guides the executive directors, the principal supervisors, in their work.” A principal has noticed this as well:

I especially like the walks. My principal supervisor sends the agenda ahead of time, so I can kind of expect some of the things…Whenever he comes, he’s like, ‘I don't want to waste your time. I want to help. Let's just hit this goal that you’ve been working on.’ He asks some thought-provoking questions and challenges my thinking about certain things or process in the school… But he always goes back to my goal.

In all, the district progressed on their diagnostic scores in the areas of pipeline development, recruitment and selection, professional learning, and coherence (see Figure 7). Like Figure 6, the line graphs on the right side of the chart show how the district scores have changed on the diagnostic in each component area.
Figure 7

District B Component Score Changes
Challenges to Implementation

District B faced similar challenges to District A in implementing this work, but in different ways. The challenges faced included the same patterns noticed in District A of: 1) building capacity, 2) getting buy in, and 3) communicating about and through the work. However, the specifics of these challenges were different, and the district’s approach to overcoming them unique.

Building Capacity. Immediately upon starting the work, the project lead for District B knew that the district needed to build its capacity to implement new PTM practices and policies. When the first district diagnostic was delivered, the project lead brought it to every meeting, quoting data from it as evidence. Soon, the full project team began doing the same thing, and all started looking to external partners for help and support on best practices. This was particularly true around recruitment and selection, the first big component the team worked on together.

Even though District B worked hard to strengthen the skills of principal supervisors, there was some perception from principals that more work needs to be done. For example, one principal reported this about her/his principal supervisor, “My principal supervisor is amazing. He’s extremely responsive, and he will come if I need him to come. We text frequently…I would do anything for him.” Yet another said, “Total negativity…always coming onto the campus critiquing. ‘This doesn’t work. That needs to come down. This is not good enough. That’s not what I was expecting to see,’ being critical and then not responding when I needed help.” As mentioned above, the district was working in part to resolve this by having principal supervisors reapply for their jobs. While it may be expected that this would cause anxiety or instability in the district, there was no evidence of this in the interview responses.
Interviews with district leaders showed a tension between moving this work forward as quickly as possible and providing stability in the district. As one way to help with capacity, the district worked with local foundations to fund extra positions. These included positions like principal network coaches, and a manager specifically to help move the PTM work forward. Even then, time was a strain. One district leader described the tension,

How do you create a safe place? How do you create urgency and high expectations, with a safe place, with feeling like a safe place to grow? Because we have to have high expectations. We have to have urgency. We’re talking about children’s lives. But how do we do that? If we're going to recruit and retain, and support and grow, do we have a culture where we have high expectations, and we have systems, but also a safe place to grow and feel like you can grow?

**Getting Buy-In.** As soon as this work started, the district had a buy-in problem, and this was with the school board. While the board was generally supportive of the work, they retained considerable decision-making authority that had the potential to slow the work down. There were reports of politics in interviews, where a board member might try to use his/her power to get someone a job or keep someone out of a job. Some reports showed board members trying to use their authority for good, but even that was problematic. One principal supervisor gave this example, “I think it is political sometimes… If we put a work order in [and nothing happens], and a board member…gets it done, I hate that. Because if it can get done, let’s do it because it’s the right thing to do.” This type of behavior trained central office staff in certain departments that they could ignore requests from some people, and prioritize requests from others, as opposed to taking requests equitably.
But at the beginning of this work, district leaders were able to show the board the importance of reducing this kind of behavior. They used data and research, and they were able to convince the board to make changes that would give the leadership team more autonomy and authority. They also worked with other central office staff to try to bring them on board. There were reports of silos between departments, and one central office staff member described, “I think we describe it saying the school leadership department likes to simplify…and say, ‘We know better,’ and the academics department doesn’t recognize how difficult it is to implement instructional ideas.” Another interviewee added, “I think it goes back to what we’ve always talked about, that there’s this perception, like, ‘Once I get promoted to central office, I'm not accountable to [schools].’” The district specifically recruited one leader to work to bridge this divide, but that continues to be a work in progress.

**Communicating About the Work.** District B was able to quickly overcome significant challenges with capacity and buy-in, but one challenge with communications almost stopped the work completely. Upon seeing very low diagnostic scores in the compensation and incentives component area in the first year, the district decided to act, even before the larger PLC focused in this area. They found funding to give a raise to principals, assistant principals, and teachers. However, they did not communicate this clearly to staff. Even almost two years after that communication mistake, this topic came up in the principal focus group. One principal said, “I still don’t know [how] that pay raise came, because most people didn't get anything, and some…got a big raise…when they tried to come and explain it, they wouldn’t give enough specifics. It just wasn’t clear, and everyone was frustrated.” Others in the group agreed. The district learned an important lesson about communication after this. While survey scores showed
that District B principals report higher on the communication factor (M=.12) than other districts, the finding isn’t significant. However, there are wo important significant survey findings. District B principals rate the compensation (M= -.19, \( p, .01 \)) and job embeddedness (M= -.20, \( p<.01 \)) factors significantly lower than the other districts.

**District C**

District C’s progress has been less straightforward than the other two districts. Coming in, this district’s diagnostic scores were relatively emerging, with three of the eight component areas measured as emerging and no areas rated as “no practice”. However, they are also the only district to get three indicator score drops over the two years of implementation. The first drop was between the baseline diagnostic and year one, and it was in evaluation process under performance evaluation. The second two were between year one and year two in compensation and incentives, performance-based and non-monetary incentives. Three staff members in the district applied to be part of the work, and they began leading it as well. The district entered with a focus on professional learning, and they were open to working on other areas as well.

**Focus Areas**

District C focused on recruitment and selection, professional learning, the role of the principal supervisors, and performance evaluation. This district approached this area differently than District B in that different sub-committees worked on each component area in a very separate and siloed way. Throughout interviews, interviewees had a hard time speaking to the areas they were not directly a part of.
**Recruitment and Selection.** Like District B, District C put a heavy focus on improving their recruitment and selection process in the district. They worked to develop a pool system for their assistant principals and principals, and the process in both districts was similar. They also began collecting data to determine possible number of openings in the next year. This caused score improvements on the diagnostic in this component in the first year. In the second year, District C worked to reflect and refine the process. In particular, project team members were worried about reducing bias in the screening process as much as possible. As a first step, they worked on getting clearer school profiles so the district would understand what type of principal was needed at a certain school. One central office member mentioned, “In the past…the principal profile ended up being hundreds of things long and walking on water needed to be one of them. We have found a way to condense that and to align it with our leadership framework.”

Next, the district worked to do as much of a blind review as possible during the initial screening for the pool. For example, names were removed from resumes and other documents. During these refinements to the recruitment and selection process, the project team paired up with the district’s internal research and evaluation team. The research and evaluation team was able to observe and analyze data to do a quick internal evaluation of the work. This helped the project team refine the process more objectively. In this evaluation, they were specifically looking at ways to reduce bias in the process.

**Role of the principal supervisor.** Like District A, District C invested in additional principal supervisors to reduce the caseload of principals-to-principal supervisors. They also shifted their job description to be more focused on supporting principals as opposed to compliance. While this was not a philosophical shift like in District A, it was still a cultural shift
because in the first year, many principals did not even know who their supervisor was. They rarely saw them, and some principals even reported getting a first look at their evaluation or any feedback through an electronic evaluation tool at the end of the year. The district brought in a partner to give principal supervisors and others training on coaching. In addition to reducing caseloads and providing coaching, the district worked with an external partner to further define the role. As one project team member explained that this was still a work in progress:

We should be working on a written policy that protects time for the principal supervisor. It’s an exciting role but the principal supervisors are finding so much of their time is sucked up with meetings and other things that they don’t have as much time as they would like to do what they feel like should be the role of a principal supervisor, the coaching behind it.

**Performance Evaluation.** Like the other districts, District B worked on their leadership standards. They were in a good starting place when this work began because they had recently revamped their evaluation tool. They used the standards contained in this tool and found them to be accurate. However, where they needed refinement was in the definition and scoring language. The project team spent the first two years of the project refining and rolling these out, and this work led to two indicators under performance evaluation being scored “strong practice”, alignment and variety of measures (see Figure 8). However, the district received a score drop in the indicator of evaluation process. This had much to do with the refinement of the new role of principal supervisors, discussed in more detail below. Figure 8 below shows progress on component scores over time similar to Figures 6 and 7 above.
Figure 8

District C Component Score Changes
Implementation Supports and Hinderances

Again, the same patterns of challenges were uncovered for District C as faced in Districts A and B: 1) building capacity, 2) getting buy in, and 3) communicating about and through the work. However, the specifics of these challenges were different, and the district’s approach to overcoming them unique.

Capacity Building. District C attempted to address gaps in capacity in implementing PTM practices and policies in similar ways to the other districts. They brought in coaching training, redefined the role of the principal supervisor, reviewed research and talked with experts. But at some points, follow through was lacking. For example, the coaching training brought in was a single event, and a year later, interviewees revealed there was no follow up on it, either internally or externally. In the other districts, follow-up happened consistently and was on-going, even years later. Also, while additional principal supervisors were brought in to reduce the case load, no efforts at protecting their time were made. Because of this, principal supervisors reported struggling to find time to work with principals, and work together to calibrate and learn from one another. Several principal supervisors made comments similar to this one, “We are trying to calibrate. That’s kind of a huge — it’s been a struggle…We wanted to be able to say the principal supervisors met because we really want to be fair to your evaluations.”

When principal supervisors described their daily work in interviews, there was little consistency, and many expressed the wish of wanting to be in schools more. This was even noticed by a central office staff member. While this staff member agreed that the district needed more principal supervisors, he/she also pointed out the tradeoff that had to happen to get these extra positions. The staff member describes that the district had to cut several critical principal
coaches that were assigned to new and struggling principals in order to afford the salaries of the new positions. When the staff member heard that even with the new principal supervisors that time was not being spent in schools, she/he remarked, “That was a big red flag to me…We pulled away something that our leaders said was valuable on the hope and expectation that this other thing was going to be provided that people just haven’t been able to do.”

That said, survey scores offer an interesting contrast here. Principals in District C reported higher scores on the principal supervisor scale than any other district, and this difference was significant ($p<.01$). And central office staff reported about middle of the pack on capacity building and were not significantly different than the other districts.

Time was brought up in District C, just like in the other districts. One project team member admitted, “It’s like sometimes in an effort to be expedient or just do things the way we’ve always done them, we don’t want to more thoughtfully engage in a new process and be reflective about our own practices as leadership developers.” Throughout interviews, evidence was presented that many district staff reverted to the “old ways” even after updating practices and policies because it seemed to be faster or more efficient.

Capacity was also stunted by other major initiatives happening in the district. Unlike the other two districts, District C had a major change initiative that could not be avoided competing with the implementation capacity of the project team. Many project team members led parts of
both initiatives, and this conflicting tension was apparent throughout interviews. Also, every interviewee mentioned the stress in implementing the other change initiative.³

**Buy-in.** District C struggled with buy-in for the same stakeholder groups as District A and B, but they had one additional. Interview data suggested that several principal supervisors were not bought in to the work. In addition to the sentiments expressed in the interviews, transcript lengths were telling in this case. When I dug further, I learned that principal supervisor interviews in District C were much shorter than in other districts. For example, one interview was 26 minutes long, and was interrupted by a phone call where the principal supervisor stepped out for a few minutes. In other districts, the shortest principal supervisor interview was 47 minutes long, and there were many apologies about needing to leave to go support a principal.

In other districts where the principal supervisors were driving much of the work forward, some principal supervisors in District C had a hard time being specific about what the work entailed. Also, some principal supervisor reported that the work was getting in the way or was inconvenient. For example, one principal supervisor mentioned this, “We didn’t have a principal meeting that month because we had two days of coaching training. So missing out on that meeting put us behind. That really hurt us not having the meeting.” This principal supervisor implied that the capacity building work the district brought—mostly for principal supervisors—was not very important. Another principal supervisor explained why this work was not a priority, saying the priority was to get critical mid-year staffing shortages of principals filled instead of

³ The specifics of the change initiative are not being revealed in order to protect the district’s anonymity.
“wasting hours on this project”. There was no indication that this principal supervisor connected that “this project” was focused on retaining top principal talent.

Like other districts, District B was challenged with getting buy-in on the work from others. For example, when the district piloted the new selection process, it was very successful, and interview data revealed that many were supportive of it. One principal noted, “Once candidates are at those hiring assessment centers, it’s a far more rigorous process than it was before. Before, it was just you submit and then principals try and pull whoever’s resumes look like they must be most qualified.” However, this process was tested when staff wanted to reverse back to the old way for efficiency. For example, one interviewee mentioned:

The biggest pushback, of course, is when people wanted to circumvent the system and — ‘I know my person didn’t apply, but they’re really great.’ Well, this is not a new process. Why didn’t you inform them of the process? Why didn’t you help them prepare and give them the tools that they needed to be successful? So that seems to be where we get the most resistance is when people just don’t want to follow the process.

**Communication.** Several interviewees pointed out the struggle with communication related to the work. First, they talked about communication struggles across departments. One central office staff member said, “Depending on what department you’re working with, there’s different communication styles…And a lot of times, different departments will be saying different things.” When asked about how much communications were aligned between principal supervisors, one principal supervisor responded, “I think we know about each other’s work. But
we all focus on something different—elementary focuses on literacy, middle school on catching up, and high school on college and career readiness.”

Other interviewees talked about the difficulty communicating the new work being done. For example, one project team member said, “Yeah, we have continued to struggle in that area as a team just really effectively communicating the process so people understand these are the steps.” This member went on to describe what they are trying to do to rectify this, “We are still trying to shore that up and generate some info-graphics and things to help people grasp the steps of the process.” And, the interviewee stressed the role of the principal in communicating about the pipeline work, “It’s not those of us here in central office. It’s really…the principals and assistant principals who need to be looking for that talent, growing their people, building capacity and recruiting them and encouraging them to move forward in their careers.”

Survey scores echo this. Principals scored the communication factor on their survey the lowest among any district, though it was not a significant difference. And the central office rated the district’s implementation skills lower than the other district, though again, the difference is not significant.

Summary

In this section, I looked within each district using Honig’s (2006) implementation framework of policy, people, and place to understand implementation focus areas, progress, and challenges faced. While doing that, I also noticed patterns across the three districts. Two patterns emerged. First, it was encouraging that all three districts made progress on PTM policies and practices in the first two years of the implementation work. It was also clear that the district
teams were still committed to progressing further. Second, there were three consistent challenges to implementation that all districts faced: 1) building their own capacity to do the work, 2) gaining buy-in from different stakeholders within and outside of the district, and 3) ensuring communication was consistently happening to implement the work and to ensure that beneficiaries knew the work was happening.

Each of these connected back to the theoretical framework differently. Table 21 shows these connections. For example, the challenge of ensuring communication was consistently happening connects to all three elements of the theoretical framework. District leaders and implementers had to be very clear about the policy and practice being communicated. As explained earlier in this chapter, District B’s lack of communication on their new compensation structure caused issues with the implementation of this policy. The people (both beneficiaries like principals and implementers like their supervisors) in this instance did not understand the changes being made. When designing the new policy, implementers took part of historical context into account when they understood that principals had not received a significant raise in some time, neighboring districts were paying more, and principals were expressing their dissatisfaction. However, they failed to understand that principals are very loyal to one another and would be comparing salary increases.
Table 21

*How Within Case Challenges Connected to the Theoretical Framework*

<table>
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<th>Challenge</th>
<th>Connections to Theoretical Framework</th>
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| Building their own capacity to do the work                                | People: There was a challenge to make sure that leaders and the others had the skills, competency, and capacity to fully design and implement focus area policies and practices.  
Place: Districts had to shift to become “learning organizations”            |
| Gaining buy-in from different stakeholders within and outside of the district | People: Those choosing and designing the policies and practices had to understand how the work would impact beneficiaries of the work. Beneficiaries had to understand the benefits of the work and how they would be affected.  
Place: Policy designers and implementers had to have a deep understanding of district culture and history to understand which policies and practices would be tenable at different timepoints during implementation. |
| Ensuring communication was consistently happening to implement the work and ensure beneficiaries knew what was happening | Policy: District leaders and implementers had to understand the policy and how it would impact beneficiaries in order to make implementation smoother. Communication practices had to be adjusted depending on what policy was being implemented.  
People: People were more likely to trust implementers when they felt they understood what policies/practices were being implemented.  
Place: District leaders and implementers had to understand district context in order to know... |
In the next section, I completed a cross case analysis, looking at conditions that best explained implementation variation across all three districts. The findings from this section informed that analysis.

Cross Case Analysis: Conditions that Support Implementation in the First Two Years

In the previous section, I looked at each individual district to understand what areas they focused on in the first two years of implementing new policies and practice on PTM. I also reviewed what challenges they faced in implementation and found three consistent challenges: capacity gaps, gaining district-wide buy-in for the work, and communication. In this section, I reviewed the data collected to answer the second research question—looking for conditions that best explained the variation in implementation across the three districts. Similar to the analysis above, research question two was answered by reviewing the qualitative data and supplementing with the survey scores.

When first digging into the data, I did not find any significant variation in district’s implementation. All had started some of this work before coming into the project, and all had made progress. Most diagnostic scores looked similar—all three districts had scores of twos (emerging practice) on the majority of component areas, and they had not yet explicitly focused on the areas where they had scores of ones (poor practice). However, after analyzing the data, I did see patterns of variation (see Table 22). For example, while two districts both focused on recruitment and selection, they went about it differently. Both districts had their own context and
policies to consider, and because of that, approached the work in slightly different ways. Also, looking closely revealed that each district progressed at different rates. District A started very slowly, making almost no progress the first several months of the project. District A made no component score increases from baseline to the year one report. Had this research study been done then, it may have looked like no implementation was happening in that district. But, the district quickly caught up in year two. District A’s progress in that first year had to do with building the right team and creating processes for that team to work together. District B started implementing very quickly. Over the two years they made steady progress. But, their team was already largely in place even when they were applying to be part of this work. District C provided the most challenging to interpret across all data. While their survey scores stood out positively in some areas compared to the other two districts, and they made progress on diagnostic scores, there was also evidence that there have been more setbacks in this district than in others. For example, they were the only district to have received indicator score decreases. Also, interview data showed a higher lack of buy-in and capacity to do the work. Table 21 shows the variation in scores. The second column highlights the difference between district A and B in the first year. While progress on component areas is similar in the fourth column, the final column shows indicator growth.
Table 22

Variation in Diagnostic Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>District</th>
<th># of Component Score Increases in Year 1</th>
<th># of Indicator Increases in Year 1</th>
<th># of Component Score Increases in Year 2</th>
<th># of Indicator Increases in Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>14**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6*</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>19***</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. District C received two indicator score decreases in Year 1.

**Note. District A had a two-point score jump on one indicator, the only district to receive such a score increase to date.

***Note. District C received one indicator score decrease in Year 2.

Finding variation in implementation made the analyses richer. Because the districts were experiencing implementation at different rates, I was able to critically analyze across-district data through the lens of the theoretical framework. This allowed me to look crucially at each element of the framework as well across it. This variation in the three districts clarified what conditions might best explain implementation progress. The four conditions that best explain variation in implementation included: ownership, autonomy, and accountability to do the work, a willingness to learn and build capacity, having strategies for improving information flow, and an understanding of the critical role of the principal supervisor. Each of these will be discussed in turn below to answer research question two.
Ownership, Autonomy, and Accountability to Do the Work

In order to make progress on implementation, districts had to own and be able to make decisions to progress the work forward. The first pattern that emerged in the data was the team structure. All three districts changed the project team makeup within the first year of the project.

It became clear that the team makeup needed to have these roles at a minimum:

- At least one person who was senior enough in the district to have the autonomy and authority to make critical decisions without having to go through significant steps to make those decisions.
- At least one principal who was able and willing to be the voice of the larger group of principals (though all districts had more than one principal).
- At least one principal supervisor, though by the second year, two districts had put all of their principal supervisors on the team, and the third were working to involve all heavily in some way.
- At least one person from other critical departments, such as academics, human resources, the business office, etc.

Almost the entire project team was interviewed in each district about their role and the vision for the work. Two interesting themes emerged from these interviews. First, every district divided into subcommittees in an effort to get more work done and spread the load. Second, in Districts A and B, the subcommittee members were able to speak about the vision for the work with specifics. While they may or may not have quoted a memorized “vision statement”, all committee members were consistent in the language they used, and they used action steps. For
example, Table 23 shows three responses about the vision of the work from three different
project team members in District B. All three members touched on the focus areas of the district,
and they were able to describe the work being done. In follow up questions, all three were able to
describe each sub-committee working on the focus area, what they were working on, and when
work was scheduled to be done.

Table 23

*Three Sample Quotes from District B on Vision*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Quote on Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>My understanding is an effective leader is one who understands the invaluable role and impact that the campus principal plays in student success, that they are the key lever, and that they are a leader, that they have an understanding of the role that equity plays in the work, in the daily work of the district, and that they understand that it’s not a title…I think it starts with our definition of high-quality leadership. How are we defining what a school leader looks like? How are we being clear with that expectation, starting from the recruitment piece? What is in our job description? What is the definition of a quality school leader in our schools? How are we building a tool that helps us go out and search for those individuals?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>How do we select those individuals through the interview process, a more rigorous interview process that really gets at the heart of what a school leader is, and who’s prepared for that, and how we can go through the selection process to identify the right people? To how we onboard them, get them prepared for knowing the school district, knowing what it takes to be a leader. And then the evaluation of those individuals, so how we’re looking at the job that they’re doing and performing. And then in the middle of all that, how we are actually supporting those individuals to be successful, the work of our principal supervisors, how we can grow those individuals and help them understand how to provide quality feedback, development for the principals that we’re putting in place at the campus.”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>So under the principal talent management piece, we’re working on recruitment and retention, which we’re doing through establishing a process for early identification and increasing and aligning our process to the evaluation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
instrument to increase the rigor for selection process and streamlining the way that process is handled and also beginning a lot earlier than we were before so we can get better quality candidates, improving the quality of our candidate selection, improving the selection process, making it a transparent process for the schools.

In comparison, Table 24 lists three quotes from District C when asked the same question. The quotes are generally shorter. For participant three, the interviewer probed for more. While the participant added, the response is off-topic. The second participant talked more about aligning the team than specifics about the work happening.

**Table 24**

***Three Sample Quotes from District C on Vision***

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Team Member</th>
<th>Quote on Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>I’m not sure. I’m not sure. I’m sorry. I’m just sort of following the lead for a subcommittee person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Principal selection is one of them and professional learning. Here recently we really try to delve into the role of supervisors in support of the principal supervisor and we’ve kind of dabbled in that. We are looking forward to making some inroads in that. A lot has been centered around professional learning and principal selection. The other piece is just having everybody to the extent that we are right now, just moving in the same direction and understanding what we are trying to achieve. So I think that has — having a more shared vision for the work has been — again, that comes to effective implementation. When you don’t have effective implementation with the core team, and we don’t all have the shared vision, then when we split up the subcommittees how does that work to even move forward?”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Probably — I would hope it would be the strategic plan that is developed and for every five years. I would say that one thing that everybody should know is the districts three core beliefs. I’m setting myself up for do I know what those are? No, I do know what they are.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
3, after a probe from the interviewer

For principals? I don’t know that there’s anything specific for principal professional learning. I do know (district leader) is a fan of the instructional core by Dr. Richard Elmore out of Harvard, who I think now has retired since….But in terms of that being connected to a framework for principal talent management, it definitely could be, because the principal as the campus lead, right, for the instructional leader should be able to work in that core and support the teachers, right, in that regard.

Implementation seemed to go most smoothly when the team composition is made up of the right groupings of people, the team sub-divides the work but keeps the full team informed, and when the work is made to be part of the district’s work, and not as an add on. A project team member from District B described this, “I feel like we’re just ensuring that it is the focus of our leadership meetings, with the understanding that we keep saying that this work is our work; then it has to be the most prominent item on our agenda.”

*Connections to the Theoretical Framework*

This condition specifically connected to two elements of the theoretical framework: policy and place. While many of the districts’ policy foci were aligned with the foci of the program convenings, there were times when districts chose to go a different way. For example, District B chose to focus on compensation in the first year because that was a priority to them, even though the program had not addressed that specific practice in the COP meetings. District B noted information they were getting from their principals, as well as the low scores in this area on their principal survey, as evidence that this was a key policy to focus on.

Also, a big focus in the COP meetings was evaluation, and while District A chose to focus there, they slowed the work down significantly and spread it over two years. They did this
because of their district context. They knew they were making big changes to their principal supervisor role and assumed that they would need to get that in place before making major changes to the evaluation system that the principal supervisors would be leading. As the data show, while their implementation was slow in the first year, it did speed up considerably in year two. Understanding district context and history was critical to helping pave the way for implementation.

Accountability in this case means having structures in place that allowed district teams to understand their own progress, reflect, and improve when needed. This refers to structures in place that kept the people on track but were done in ways that took into account the district context.

**Willingness to Learn and Build Capacity**

A second theme that became clear in the data was that implementation went more smoothly when the district team showed a willingness to learn and build their own capacity. I first noticed this by trends in the data, where during an interview, the interviewee would ask questions, seeking additional information to help them with the work. For example, in District A, one principal supervisor responded to a question about how he spends his time, and when he was done responding he asked, “Hey, do you happen to know of any good research I can read on how much time I should be spending with each principal?” In District B, someone asked, “Do you know anyone who does that well?”

All three districts relied on external partners to help build their capacity, the most prominent in the interviewees being the external partner who was leading this PLC work. Each
district was assigned a district advisor, and these district advisors were widely positively referenced throughout the interview data. The interviews also revealed that the time at the in-person convening and the tools and resources given to them were helpful in building their own expertise. One interviewee described how these helped, saying, “The experts at the convening helped a lot because they were…listening and giving me input. I mean, just being there and doing that helped tremendously…We changed the way we do our [learning] walks because of the expert.”

Not only did external partners help build the content knowledge of the project team, but they also helped the districts stay focused on the work. One project team member described how they worked with their district advisor, “Normally when [our district advisor] comes, every sub-committee sets a deadline on what we need to do…And she brings us all together like, ‘Where are we with the work?’” And an interviewee from another district said, “This…has been transformational for our district. We have had critical conversations that were necessary. It was great for [our district advisor] to be there [to] help navigate, and it’s given us a focus that has been really good for us.”

In addition, two of the districts hired external partners to provide coaching training. A third district had strong internal resources on coaching, and while they didn’t hire an external firm, they did rely on their internal resources in a bigger way to provide training throughout the district. That same district did hire an external firm to help them review their resource allocations to look for ways to give their principals a raise as part of this work. One district partnered with an external partner to review their principal supervisor role and get input.
Finally, there has been one other way districts have looked at expanding their capacity. The issue of time—and not having enough of it—came up in every district. Already, the people leading and benefiting from this work were strapped for time. At first, this project felt like another thing to add to their already overflowing plates. Each district had to work to expand their actual capacity to get things done. As previously mentioned, the first thing they did was expand their project teams and divide into sub-committees. Past that, districts took the following strategies:

- District A: Created strategies to formally protect the time of principal supervisors and other committee members; Created a project management structure that made them more efficient; Worked on focus areas where there was already some momentum and staff dedicated to moving them forward; Supplemented expired grant funding to keep certain staff positions in place.

- District B: Partnered with local grant-giving foundations to fund extra staff for the project; Made the work part of their work by deprioritizing other tasks and initiatives; Created strategies to formally protect the time of principal supervisors and other committee members.

- District C: Conducted an analysis to determine which department the work should sit under to make it most efficient; Created space in the portfolio of the person who serves as the project manager so that this person had time to follow up and keep the work on track; Created a project management structure that made them more efficient.
Connection to the Theoretical Framework

This condition specifically connected to the place element of the theoretical framework. Data from two of the three districts show a shift in a cultural norm. The districts became learning districts where multiple interviewees showed that they were interested in learning more in order to improve implementation.

Strategies for Improving Information Flow

No district admitted to being good at communications and information flow in the interview notes, but all three were devoting time and energy to getting better at it. The districts identified four ways in which information had to flow in order to make this work successful: among the project team; to other departments, including the superintendent and other high-level leaders; to principals and other beneficiaries of the work; and to others outside of the organization.

As noted throughout the findings, communication among the project team took time to improve, and at times, districts were still struggling with it. Interview data suggests this had to do in part with the team needing to learn to work together, as well as team members just not having the time to communicate well. One team member joked, “Yeah, but I don’t have time to talk to my friends — they know I’m on this committee. I’m okay with that. There’s a lot going on.” Each team had to find a way to sub-divide the work while keeping the full project team informed. As one sub-committee member put it, “We’ve added another meeting to talk about PTM once a week, and we talk about different strategies…I feel…so far behind on it that, at this point, [I won’t catch up]. And, in the meetings, I’m getting it secondhand.” Many interviewees
talked about this being a work-in-progress, but that it was improving. One project team member said, “But we’re still working together and thinking about who else needs to be in the room. I think that’s probably the biggest improvement that I’ve seen.”

The findings also showed the importance of communicating this work (and gaining buy-in) from other departments, including the superintendent. All districts had success with getting this work in front of their superintendents, and all three superintendents showed in multiple ways how they understood and bought into the work throughout the interviews. But the area where districts admitted to continuing to struggle in was communicating and getting buy-in and feedback from other departments or department members who were not as closely linked to the work in the central office. One interviewee said, “Culture change takes time, and we have some directors in different departments who have been there a long time. Those conversations are happening. Are there frustrations? Absolutely.” One district was proactively attempting to improve information flow on the project to other departments. A project team member described this approach, “We’re going to meet with the department heads as a whole first, but then we’re going to each department to go over this page.” He gave an example of how the department meetings would go, saying “Let’s say we meet with X, Y, Z Department…We’ll go through and show you how you could support principals…then we’ve identified the ways that they feel they can support principals.”

Communicating with principals was an equal struggle for districts, but one they are getting better at. One district worked hard to make short documents, infographics, and website pages to store the work on that are simple and easy to read. The main strategy of communicating with principals was through the monthly principal meetings, which every district had. One
district described an activity they did to bring awareness to the work. They asked people to stand and remain standing if they knew about or were involved in certain district initiatives, such as a revamped recruitment and selection process, improved leader standards. Within a few minutes, nearly every principal was standing. The project team member made the point that all of this work was the PTM work. They also noted the principals still sitting and created a strategy to get them more involved in the work.

Finally, an area where districts have not done much work is communicating externally. District B had done some work in this area by partnering with local foundations and creating an externally facing website with highlights from the work. And, the organization leading the work had done some to promote what the districts are doing. As one interviewee astutely pointed out, “We’re kind of the trailblazers, and I anticipate that my replacement, whenever that is — ten years from now, five years from now, twenty years from now — will be better at this than I am. It’s definitely exciting, but it’s hard.”

Connection to the Theoretical Framework

This condition specifically connected to all three elements of the theoretical framework: policy, people, and place. As a matter of fact, this condition seemed to connect all three together. For example, in order to choose a policy, the project team had to understand the current need, their people, and the district context. Once they understood that and chose a policy of focus, information about that policy had to be communicated among members of the project team, up to the superintendent, down to the beneficiaries of the policy, and out to other stakeholders. If the policy was not clearly articulated, information flow became a significant challenge to
implementation. Each district had to understand their own context to know how information flow was most effective.

**Critical Role of the Principal Supervisor**

Throughout the data, principal supervisors were brought up over and over again. No interview transcript was without some mention of the role. Strategies for success included protecting their time so they could be on the project team and implement the work, letting them lead major pieces of the work, and having them be the “glue” between the central office, the project team, and the principals. And, the SNA data from the principal survey further emphasized their important role in this work. As reported in the survey results section, principal supervisor ties were significantly related to job embeddedness of principals ($p=.01$).

This data, taken together with the interview, focus group, and other survey data, shows the critical importance of the role of principal supervisor as a key mediator in this work. Principal Supervisors, most of whom were former principals themselves, had direct contact with both principals and members of the central office. They spent much of their time navigating both relationships in support of principals. And, they were key leaders in all of the component areas of PTM, in that they are involved in pipeline development, recruitment and selection, principal professional learning and evaluation, and others.

All three district project teams appeared to have realized this important role, even in the district where some of the principal supervisors were not as bought into the work. Districts were investing significantly in this role, finding funding for additional principal supervisors, investing in training, prioritizing their schedules so they could work more with principals. Even then, the
project team, including principal supervisors themselves, reported that more needed to be done to build their capacity and give them extra time to be able to do their jobs effectively.

**Connection to the Theoretical Framework**

This condition specifically connected to the element of people. Principal supervisors were key to implementation in this work. They collaborated between people in the central office, the principals, and the project team. Central office leaders who were interviewed felt the principal supervisors knew the place the best. For the most part, principal supervisors had been principals in the district (with a few rare exceptions), and they had considerable historical knowledge. They also had to understand the policies the most. Many times they were the ones designing or co-designing policies, and then they were the ones responsible for implementation as well.

**Summary**

This mixed methods case study sought to identify the conditions that supported or hindered the implementation work in each of three districts focused on implementing PTM practices and policies, and it sought to specifically look for conditions that best explained the variation in implementation across the three districts. Four major findings emerged from this study:

1. While all three districts progressed on implementation, they all took different approaches and implemented at different rates.
2. The greatest challenges to implementation progress included: capacity gaps, gaining buy-in, and communication flow.
3. Across all districts, the conditions that best explained the variation included: ownership and accountability of the work, willingness to learn and build capacity, and strategies to improve information flow around the work.

4. In particular, the role of the principal supervisor acts as the “glue” in implementing the PTM work.
Chapter 5: Discussion and Implications

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to explore the how three districts were implementing PTM practice and policy changes. Specifically, this study looked to identify the conditions that supported or hindered the implementation work and sought to specifically look for conditions that best explained the variation in implementation across the three districts. This study was heavily oriented by qualitative data and used quantitative data as a supplement. Data from this study were drawn from a subset of data from a larger evaluation study, and they incorporated information from district staff that included 36 interviews, 12 focus groups, and all 366 survey response. In-person convening agendas and PowerPoints were also reviewed. Data were coded in two cycles, and quantitative survey results were analyzed and then coded into the qualitative data using a convergent design. Data were analyzed through the theoretical lens of Honig’s (2006) implementation framework looking closely at the interactions between the policy being implemented, the people implementing and benefiting, and the context of where the policy is being implemented. A codebook was designed that aligned with this theoretical lens. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

- RQ1: What conditions supported or hindered the implementation of PTM changes within each district?
- RQ 2: Across all districts, what conditions best explain the variation in the amount of progress made toward implementation?

The previous chapter presented the findings of this study by organizing the data from various sources into categories to produce a readable narrative. The purpose of this chapter is to
provide interpretive insights into these findings. In this chapter, I attempted to reconstruct the data around the findings, specifically interpreting each finding through the theoretical framework for the study. This interpretation was also influenced by the other literature reviewed in chapter 2. I organized these insights first by the four findings. Then, I consider the limitations of the study and make recommendations to practitioners, policymakers, and researchers.

**Finding 1—**

**While all three districts progressed on implementation, they all took different approaches and implemented at different rates.**

All districts made progress on their PTM focus areas in the first two years of implementation, but there was variation in that progress. First, districts were able to choose their own focus areas, and many chose areas that already had momentum or buy-in in the district. Each district approached their focus areas differently, using the context of their own districts to guide their choices. However, all three districts implemented their focus PTM areas in line with the literature presented in Chapter 2. The role of context from the theoretical framework played a huge role in what focus areas each district chose, and how fast and to what extent progress was made in those focus areas. For example, diagnostic data pointed District B toward focusing on their principal evaluation system first. However, district leaders were worried about how slowly it was taking them to fill open principal positions when this work started. Because there was already interest and momentum in this area, District B decided to start with a focus on recruitment and selection, and they were able to make significant progress in that area. It is
possible that progress may have been slower or stunted if they had chosen a different focus area that did not consider their current context.

While all districts did make progress, there was some discrepancy in the data that was difficult to interpret. First, according to diagnostic scores, all districts were at a similar stage in their implementation efforts, with most component scores in the “emerging” range. However, one district’s qualitative data reflected less buy-in, awareness and capacity to do that work. There was tension between what the principals understood the work to be, and the central office. There were also key team members interviewed that explicitly expressed frustration with the work. To further complicate this, survey scores for that district were at times more positive than some of the other districts. Specially, principals’ evaluations of their principal supervisors and the coaching and feedback they received from them were higher than those from the other districts, and that finding was significant ($p<.01$). However, interview data showed that while they were happy to be seeing their principal supervisor more, that the visits were not always productive. This discrepancy in the data could have occurred for a few reasons. First, as Honig (2008), Mitani (2018), and others describe, implementation in school districts is complicated. With only two years of implementation efforts under their belt, it may have been too soon to have consistent data. Second, while this district’s practice may not have reflected “best” practice, it may have been perceived as a strong improvement over previous practice.

Finally, the job embeddedness data may be an additional window into variation in progress. I hypothesized at the beginning of this study that the implementation work would take time. Since many rightfully want to see quantitative outcome data as evidence that implementation is on the right track and worth the significant efforts, I hoped to find a leading
proxy indicator of successful implementation. One theory from the management research literature suggests that perceptions of “job embeddedness” can predict when employees may want to leave an organization (Mitchell et al., 2001). For the purposes of this study, it was hypothesized that job embeddedness may be related to improved district policies and practices on PTM, and may indicate progress towards those goals, before other indicators such as principal turnover, principal and teacher satisfaction and climate scores, and eventually, student achievement. I had hoped that this job embeddedness data might be able to differentiate each district’s variation in their implementation progress. In fact, the data did show significant differences between district with District A principals responding significantly more positively on the job embeddedness scale than the other districts ($p<.01$). The qualitative data corroborated this finding, showing that District A leadership invested in a significantly philosophical shift in their thinking on how to support principals. In addition, the district invested time and other resources into building their own capacity in this work. The job embeddedness scale may be a useful tool to help districts understand early on if and how they are making progress.

Findings 2 and 3—

The greatest challenges to implementation progress included: capacity gaps, gaining buy-in, and communication flow.

Across all districts, the conditions that best explained the variation included: ownership and accountability of the work, willingness to learn and build capacity, and strategies to improve information flow around the work.
Taken together, the conditions that were most challenging in districts turned out to be the conditions—or at least some of the conditions—that best explain variation and progress on implementation. Here, Honig’s (2006) implementation framework comes in to play in a significant way. First, district context drove what policies and practices the district chose to focus in on. District team members described needing to “own” the work. It was clear in the team structures that at least one team member had to have autonomy and authority to make decisions on the work to drive it forward. The data also showed that implementation sped up when districts had at least one team member with that kind of autonomy and authority, and this was particularly evident in District B. District B was able to start off quickly in the work because their team leader was also a senior leader who could make key decisions. However, District A did not have this senior level team member, and it ended up taking months to sometimes make the smallest decisions.

Second, this PTM policy implementation work was the work of people. People on the project team had to learn how to communicate with each other and learn how to get better. They had to trust one another. They also had to garner trust and buy-in from their colleagues in central office, and the principals who were the target beneficiaries of this work. The central office in all three districts were going through a transformation as described by Honig et al. (2009). It has been reported that practices at the central office around human resources and talent management are not always strategic, and instead the work is approached in a more transactional nature (Clifford, 2010; Thompson & Kleiner, 2005; Tran, 2015). And to have real central office transformation, the professional practice of both central office leaders and building leaders need to be strengthened while increasing teaching and learning outcomes (Honig, et al., 2009).
et al. found that unlike more straightforward structural changes, this kind of change involves deep philosophical and other shifts in the district leaders’ work and relationships with schools. Throughout the data, there was evidence of this philosophical shift happening in each district. In District A, it took a year to work through. In District B, the shift was quicker and easier to make because the top-level district leaders already had a vision of restructuring in this way. And in District C, significant steps were being taken to get through this philosophical shift, but other, unavoidable major district initiatives were potentially hampering this shift.

One condition that eased this philosophical shift in the three districts was each district’s ability to be a “learning” district. Honig (2008) drew from sociocultural learning theory to propose how districts can be “learning organizations” (p. 633). She describes assistance relationships, where a novice is paired with an expert for the purposes of learning. This happened in two ways in the three districts studied. First of all, the project team was paired with external experts to help them build their capacity. Then, the project team came back to the district and became the internal expert, who in turn, shared their new expertise. Knapp (2008) also looked at how sociocultural learning theory might support district improvement strategies. In his article, he suggests that change in a district happens when the daily practice of district staff changes. That sort of deep, embedded daily improvement-focused practice was evident in the interviews when interviewees asked questions during their interviews like, “Do you know anyone who does that well?” The district teams were always eager to learn more and become even deeper experts in what they were implementing.
Finding 4—

In particular, the role of the principal supervisor acts as the “glue” in implementing the PTM work.

Another condition that eased the philosophical shift described above was the districts’ efforts to improve how information flowed throughout and across the work. Christpeels (2010) and Honig (2012) found that implementation was aided by linking resources at the central office to the school sites. The researchers also found that communication—particularly from the central office to school sites, but also in reverse—was critical to linking the two. The data in this study uncovered that the main link between the two in these three districts were the principal supervisors.

Daly and Finnigan (2012) found that principals have social networks that largely include other principals and that there are generally low levels of trust between principals and central office. While that was found to some extent in this study, one exception was between principals and principal supervisors. Principal supervisors reported in the interview data how they felt their primary role was to build trust with principals. In return, principals reported in the interview and survey data how influential their relationship with their principal supervisor was—the survey data even suggested that principal supervisor ties may be linked to principals feeling more embedded in their districts. While it would be imprudent of any district to put all the weight of communication and trust between central office and principals on principal supervisors, it is imperative that districts understand the key role principal supervisors play in implementing this—and any—work in the school district.
Summary

Interpreting the findings in light of the research literature reviewed in Chapter 2, and the theoretical framework for this study, made me reflect on how Honig’s (2006) implementation framework could be elaborated to add more specificity for those interested in understanding what and how certain conditions support implementation progress (see Figure 9). First, I added a box between the policy being implemented and the place, showing how the district, the school sites, and individual (formal and informal) communities of practice drive how policies are chosen and implemented. Second, I added a box between central office and principals, demonstrating how principal supervisors act as the “glue” between the two. Third, I expanded the “place” box to show that implementation progresses faster when organizations are willing and able to learn and build their own capacity. Finally, I put the critical element of information flow in the middle of the triangle. Having strategies to move information about the work is critical to the success of implementation and could be represented by the red arrows in the figure.
Taken together, these conditions are referred to in the literature as change management strategies or effective implementation strategies. District leaders may find themselves responsible for major change initiatives without having proper training on effective implementation skills.

**Limitations and Implications**

In light of the findings and current research on implementation variation in districts working to implement complex policies and practices, the following section provides recommendations that may guide district leaders, policymakers, and other stakeholders in future
efforts. In this section, I first discuss the limitations of this study. Then, I present recommendations as they relate to three key audiences: practice, policy, and research.

Limitations

This mixed methods case study of three districts implementing complex PTM practices and policies added to the literature on implementation by identifying conditions that best explain implementation variation in three districts working to implement PTM practices and policies in support of principals. Despite this contribution, there are several limitations.

The first is that this case study provides a snapshot of the very difficult work these three district teams are undertaking. Through this study, I documented patterns and themes that I came across in the data on how each district approached implementation. While I drew from a significant body of data, this study does not measure long-term, longitudinal trends on the work.

Second, mixed methods research always has the potential for bias in how data is collected and analyzed, and that is true in this case as well. While I took significant steps to be systematic, triangulate data, and search for confirming and disconfirming evidence, there is still the potential that the analysis contains bias.

Also, this study relied on self-reported interviews and perception data from surveys gathered from a larger evaluation study. Document review, while limited, provided some additional context. However, the bulk of the evidence was from self-reported data, which limits the generalizability of the study. Future researchers may find that with additional site time and more observations, this limitation may be overcome.
Finally, the timing of this study is a significant limitation. This study occurred after only two years of implementation work of complex policies and practices. Additional years of data following this implementation work would yield more consistent and reliable findings.

**Implications**

Findings and interpretations from this study may be useful in guiding practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in future implementation endeavors. Below, I detail implications for each audience type.

**Practice**

Implementing complex initiatives such as PTM policies and practices is a challenging task for districts. District leaders and project team members will likely face complex challenges. Findings from this study shed light on how districts can improve their own implementation capacity. Districts and their partners who are interested in improving implementation capacity should carefully review the conditions that best explain variation and progress in implementation. These should be viewed as readiness factors to taking on major change initiatives. In some cases, districts may find they need to do additional preparation before launching large scale implementation. Districts who find themselves in the middle of large-scale implementation who feel they do not meet these conditions should take time to pause, reflect, and adjust. Districts, and their partners, should focus on building effective implementation skills in their district staff.

Districts should recognize that this work starts with transformation of their central office staff so that they work in support of principals. Also, they should recognize the key role of the
principal supervisor. Clearly defining and communicating the vision for the work and clear leadership standards is a solid first step in getting this work off to a good start. Table 25 below provides key considerations and critical questions that align with the updated theoretical framework. The left hand column describes each element of the framework in more detail. The right side proposes some critical questions that district leaders could ask to determine if they are ready to start policy design and implementation. If these questions can be answered, that may indicate that the district is in a good place to implement major policy/practice changes.

Table 25

*Key Considerations and Critical Questions for Practitioners Who Are Interested in Implementing New Policies and Practices in a School District*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key Considerations</th>
<th>Critical Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Policy</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| The policy of focus must consider the district’s current context and staff, as well as district need. Once the policy is chosen, structures must be set up to monitor progress, keep the design/implementation team on track, and reflect and improve. | • Do we have objective data that helps me understand my district’s current need?  
• Have we considered my district context before choosing a focus area (e.g., would making major changes in this area be tenable given my current context and staff)?  
• What structures are in place (or can be put into place) to monitor progress of policy design/implementation?  
• What structures are in place (or can be put into place) to keep the team on track?  
• What communication structures are in place to improve information flow, and what parts are the policy and |
People

People include: those designing the policy, those implementing the policy, those who are beneficiaries of the policy, and other stakeholders. People bring with them their own background knowledge and interpretations, as well as skill level and experiences. There is also a risk that those at different levels of the implementation process may interpret the policy different (e.g., those who choose the policy may interpret differently than those who design it, etc). Having a well-defined, cross-functional design/implementation team enhances implementation, and principal supervisors play a key role in design and implementation.

- How can we communicate the policy and implementation to all the different types of people involved in the policy implementation?
- Is the design/implementation team cross-functional (e.g., all central office departments and school level staff are represented)?
- Is there someone on the team who has the authority to make key decisions and be a liaison with the superintendent?
- Do we have enough well-qualified principal supervisors, and do they have time to engage in the design and implementation of this work?
- What is the relationship between the current principal supervisors and other central office staff as well as the school principals they supervise?
- Are there structures in place to align and coordinate all departments in the central office, as well as align and coordinate the central office with school site leadership?

Place

Place refers to the district context that must be taken into account when considering implementation. This also includes ensuring that the district has or develops a culture of learning, which is needed when designing and implementing new policies. It is critical that any policy chosen truly takes into account district context so that the team has ownership and autonomy to design and implement in a way that meets a district’s need.

- Does the team have the time, capacity, and skills to design and implement the policy, and what structures are in place to help them build their capacity?
- What structures are in place to build the capacity of the beneficiaries of the policy?
- Does the team understand the district context and history? Do they understand what major changes may
be tenable, as well as those that would not be?

Policy

Policymakers should consider the time and capacity this work takes and determine how and when to offer support. Without requiring mandates, policymakers at the local, state, and federal level could assemble resources and convene experts to help districts as they grow their own capacity. In some cases, districts are ‘recreating the wheel’ each time they start to implement something new or get a new leader.

Also, policymakers should consider the conditions mentioned in this report when making mandates that require notable implementation efforts. Policymakers should determine what policy tools they can use to motivate and support districts to align with these conditions before implementation starts. That may include drafting rules around a “pre-implementation” phase to begin before required implementation starts. This study reinforces the idea that we should expect variation in implementation, and policies should be designed to take that into account. Measurement and evaluation strategies should be adjusted to take this into account as well, so that we better understand “what works”.

Finally, policymakers should determine how and when district leaders build up their effective implementation skills. While some of these competencies are taught in graduate education programs, it may be that those opportunities are not thorough enough.
Research

While the literature was helpful in framing this study, and literature on implementation in general has shifted over time to look at variation, more specificity would be helpful for practitioners and others. This case study compared three districts after the first two years conducting implementation work, but it was too soon to use more traditional quantitative outcomes to evaluate the work. Following this work long-term would be beneficial to see how implementation continues to vary. A longer-term study could add to these findings, including confirming or disconfirming them.

Additional mixed methods case studies looking at districts’ PTM practices and policies, and how they implement them, would be beneficial to the field. While mixed methods research can be resource intensive, having both quantitative and qualitative data adds richness to the findings.

Researchers may also want to do more work with the job embeddedness and SNA methods used in this study. Future studies on district teams who are further into implementation could provide important information on how to use these tools as early indicators of implementation success.

Finally, research on the specific PTM policies and their role in the over-arching talent management system would be helpful to guide districts in where to focus their efforts. For example, does implementing practices and policies on recruitment and selection matter “more” than policies on compensation and incentives?
**Summary**

The purpose of this mixed methods case study was to determine what conditions support implementation of talent management policies and practices in three school districts. The conditions found to support implementation align with a previous implementation framework that looks to policy, people, and place to explain implementation variation (Honig, 2006). However, this study expands that framework and further defines each element. In order to have effective policy implementation, those designing and implementing it should ensure they have diagnostic data that helps them understand which policy or practice to choose and how to design it. They should also put structures in place to keep their design and implementation team on track. People are critical to policy implementation, and in school districts, principal supervisors play a key role in collaborating among other departments in the central office and being the link between central office and schools. A district’s context and history play a critical role in implementation, and when districts ensure they have a culture of learning, implementation is enhanced. District leaders should also consider district context and need before choosing a policy of focus. Implementation is complex and takes considerable time but understanding the conditions for change can help district leaders, other practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in their implementation efforts.
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Appendix A: Principal Survey Protocol

Q1: To which district do you belong?

- District A
- District B
- District C

Q2 Which of the following best describes the type of school you oversee?

- Pre-K School
- Elementary School
- Middle School
- K-8 School
- High School
- K-12 School

Q3 How long have you been a principal? (Please record in years; Do not record this year)

________________________________________________________________

Q4 At how many schools have you been a principal?

_______________________________________________________________

Q5c Which of the following describes the school you oversee?

- Neighborhood School
- School of Choice
- Alternative School
- Other, (please specify): __________________________________________

This survey asks about your district’s efforts to improve principal talent management, which refers to the ways a district recruits, supports, and retains high-quality principals. Please keep this in mind as you answer the survey questions. Also note that the term “district leaders” throughout the survey refers to officials in relevant leadership positions at the central office level. In addition, to simplify the rest of the survey, almost all remaining questions follow a consistent answer scale. We appreciate your thoughtful response to each question. (All questions in this section are measured on a 5 Point Likert from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree)
Q7 This set of questions asks about the role of pipeline development of principals in the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statement.
• The district has a fair approach to deciding who to recruit into teacher and school leadership positions.

Q8 This set of questions asks about the role of recruitment and selection of principals in the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• The district fairly and actively recruits individuals into principal positions.
• The selection process for principals is rigorous.
• The district places principals in schools where there is a strong fit between principal strengths and school needs.

Q9 This set of questions asks about the role of professional learning for principals in the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• I am satisfied with the amount, quality, and type of professional learning I receive from the district and/or its partners.
• The district provides principals with high-quality opportunities to receive feedback on their leadership practice via ongoing coaching.
• The district provides principals with other high-quality job-embedded learning opportunities (such as communities of practice or stretch assignments).

Q10 This set of questions asks about the role of principal performance evaluation in the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• The principal evaluation process is transparent and fair.
• The principal evaluation process is useful to principals.
• Evaluation results are a critical input to professional growth opportunities.

Q12 This set of questions asks about the principal supervision in the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• Principal supervisors have knowledge and skills as well as prior experience to effectively carry out responsibilities.
• My principal supervisor provides meaningful support and feedback to me.

Q13 This set of questions asks about the general working environment of the district. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• District leaders support me in addressing my school’s priorities.
• Districts clearly and thoroughly focus on equity and the need to prepare each student.
• Districts clearly and thoroughly focus on identifying and removing any forms of bias in how talent is managed.
• Principals have the autonomy they need to effectively support student outcomes.
Q14 The rest of this survey will ask you some questions about your district’s efforts to implement changes to the way it recruits, supports, and retains principals. As you answer the remaining questions, think about new policies or practices your district has tried to implement in this regard. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- When implementing a change in the district, leaders create a sense of urgency in a way that makes me excited to contribute to the change efforts.

Q15 This set of questions asks about the role of engaging stakeholders with respect to your district’s efforts to improve the way principals are recruited, supported, and retained. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders expect and proactively seek feedback from principals when planning.
- As a principal, I feel my voice is heard by the district and that I play an integral role in implementing change.
- I understand what changes have been and are being made to the way the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.
- I understand how my feedback is being used.
- Communications and messages about changes in the district are clear and make the staff feel more comfortable with the work.
- Quick wins (and subsequent wins) are frequently and publicly celebrated by district leaders.
- With respect to messaging throughout the district, district leaders purposefully check for understanding and action to determine whether their messaging was a success.
- Communication from district leaders has improved over time.

Q16 This set of questions asks about the role of building capacity in the district with respect to recruiting, supporting, and retaining principals. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders invest extensive resources of time, people, and money in improving how the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.
- District leaders build the district’s expertise on how to recruit, support, and retain principals by leveraging research, best practice, and experts.
- I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to build my understanding of new practices and policies before trying to actually implement them.
- I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to receive coaching and feedback on my implementation of new practices and policies.

Q17 This set of questions asks about the role of executing, reflecting, and improving with respect to your district’s efforts to improve the way principals are recruited, supported, and retained. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders focus on building momentum by achieving and celebrating some “quick wins.”
• District leaders have a formal process in place to measure the effectiveness of new policies and practices.
• District leaders use progress monitoring data to reflect on implementation and continuously improve.
• New practices and policies become deeply ingrained in the district’s systems and functions.

Q20 Who do you turn to for advice or information about becoming a more effective principal? Please write full first and last names, and give a brief description of that person’s role or position. You do not need to fill in all of the spaces. (You can submit up to 30).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Full Name</th>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Type of Advice</th>
<th>Frequency of Advice (Daily or almost daily, weekly, monthly, a few times per year)</th>
<th>Influence of Tie (Extremely influential, influential, somewhat influential, not at all influential)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Q23 This set of questions asks about your job satisfaction as a principal. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• I am satisfied with my current position as a principal in this district.
• I am likely to remain in my current position for the near future.
• I frequently explore other job opportunities.
• I feel like I am a good match for this school and role.
• It would be very difficult to leave my school for a new job.
• I feel I could find a similar job (similar pay, similar extrinsic and intrinsic rewards) with little effort.

Q24 On a scale of 0-10, how likely are you to recommend to a colleague that they should consider working as a principal in this district?

Q25 This set of questions asks about your school’s culture. Please rate your agreement with the following statements.
• My school has a professional culture that enables staff to be the best educators they can be.
• School staff have healthy, positive relationships with one another and with me.
• My school is a physically and emotionally safe environment for each student and staff member.
• School staff have the autonomy they need to effectively support students.
• Students have the support they need (e.g., cultural and linguistic supports, special education supports, counseling and mental health supports, etc.) to enable their learning and growth.
Appendix B: Central Office Survey Protocol

To ensure the results of this survey are useful for your district, please be completely honest and candid in your feedback. The survey will not ask for your name, and all responses will be kept strictly confidential.

Q1 Which district do you belong to?

- District A
- District B
- District C

Q2: Which of the following best describes your primary area of responsibility within the district?

- Executive Leadership (superintendent office, cabinet member)
- Area or Network Office Staff (2)
- Principal Supervisor (main function of your job is to supervise school principals)
- Assessment / Research / Evaluation
- Communications / Community Engagement
- Curriculum / Instruction
- Student Services / Special Education
- Leadership Development
- Teacher Development
- Finance
- Human Resources
- Operations / Facilities / Food Services / Transportation
- Technology
- Other (please specify):

The following set of questions asks about the role of implementation in your district.

Implementation refers to the process by which an organization translates intended changes into actual, day-to-day practices. As you answer this next set of questions, think about the last several times your district attempted to implement new changes (e.g., new policies, programs, practices, systems, etc.), regardless of whether those attempts were successful or not.

Also note that the term “district leaders” throughout the survey refers to any and all officials in leadership positions at the district level. In addition, to simplify the rest of the survey, almost all
remaining questions follow a consistent answer scale (7 point Likert, Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree). We appreciate your thoughtful response to each question.

Q5 This set of questions asks about the role of initiating change with respect to recruiting, supporting, and retaining principals.
Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- When implementing a change in the district, leaders weigh potential costs and benefits.
- My district has a coalition of the most important district-level stakeholders necessary to improve how the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.
- When implementing a change in the district, leaders create a sense of urgency in a way that makes me excited to contribute to the change efforts.

Q6 This set of questions asks about the role of engaging stakeholders with respect to recruiting, supporting, and retaining principals.
Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders expect and proactively seek feedback from stakeholders (including principals) when planning.
- District leaders effectively use feedback from stakeholders by carefully evaluating it and incorporating elements that add real value.
- Communications and messages about changes in the district are clear and make the staff feel more comfortable with the work.
- Quick wins (and subsequent wins) are frequently and publicly celebrated by district leaders.

Q7 This set of questions asks about the role of building capacity in the district with respect to recruiting, supporting, and retaining principals.
Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders invest extensive resources of time, people, and money in improving how the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.
- District leaders build the district's expertise on how to recruit, support, and retain principals by leveraging research, best practice, and experts.
- I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to build my understanding of new practices and policies before trying to actually implement them.
- I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to receive coaching and feedback on my implementation of new practices and policies.
Q8 This set of questions asks about the role of creating goals and planning for change with respect to your district’s efforts to improve the way principals are recruited, supported, and retained.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- When implementing multiple initiatives, district leaders leverage complementary efforts and goals and resolve conflicts between initiatives.
- When planning for implementation, district leaders anticipate common pitfalls and adjust accordingly.
- District leaders almost always plan how to achieve quick wins when implementing a new policy or practice.

Q9 This set of questions asks about the role of executing, reflecting, and improving with respect to your district’s efforts to improve the way principals are recruited, supported, and retained.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders focus on building momentum by achieving and celebrating some “quick wins.”
- District leaders have a formal process in place to measure the effectiveness of new policies and practices.
- District leaders use progress monitoring data to reflect on implementation and continuously improve.
- District leaders adjust implementation plans as needed to improve implementation efforts.
- New practices and policies become deeply ingrained in the district’s systems and functions.

Q9 This is a final general question related to the way principals are recruited, supported, and retained.

Please rate your agreement with the following statements.

- District leaders support principals in addressing individuals' school priorities.
## Appendix C: Summary of Exploratory Factor Analysis for Principal Survey (N=309)

### Summary of exploratory factor analysis for principal survey (N=309)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Theorized Construct</th>
<th>Rotated Factor Loadings</th>
<th>Final Scale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q15_12: Communication from district leaders has improved over time.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.76 0.02 -0.04 0.10 0.01 -0.09</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_11: With respect to messaging throughout the district, district leaders purposefully check for understanding and action to determine whether their messaging was a success.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.74 -0.03 0.04 0.07 -0.05 0.08</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_1: District leaders expect and proactively seek feedback from principals when planning.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.74 0.01 0.01 0.13 0.02 0.07</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_9: Communications and messages about changes in the district are clear and make the staff feel more comfortable with the work.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.67 0.03 0.04 -0.03 0.04 0.13</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_8: I understand how my feedback is being used.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.53 -0.03 -0.01 0.04 0.11 0.15</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_2: As a principal, I feel my voice is heard by the district and that I play an integral role in implementing change.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.48 0.04 0.10 0.19 0.15 0.12</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_7: I understand what changes have been and are being made to the way the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.38 0.05 0.03 0.09 0.13 0.16</td>
<td>Communication</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Correlation Coefficients</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q14_1: When implementing a change in the district, leaders create a sense of urgency in a way that makes me excited to contribute to the change efforts.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.31 0.13 -0.08 0.05 0.04 0.26</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_2: I am likely to remain in my current position for the near future.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>-0.07 0.71 0.03 0.06 -0.13 0.03</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_5: It would be very difficult to leave my school for a new job.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>0.02 0.67 0.11 -0.07 0.09 0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_1: I am satisfied with my current position as a principal in this district.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>-0.06 0.58 0.04 0.12 -0.03 0.09</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_4: I feel like I am a good match for this school and role.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>-0.09 0.57 0.31 0.13 -0.22 0.18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_3: I frequently explore other job opportunities.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>-0.09 -0.48 -0.03 -0.12 -0.17 0.14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q23_6: I feel I could find a similar job (similar pay, similar extrinsic and intrinsic rewards) with little effort.</td>
<td>Job Embeddedness</td>
<td>-0.15 -0.25 0.13 0.06 -0.23 0.23</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25_2: School staff have healthy, positive relationships with one another and with me.</td>
<td>School Culture and Climate</td>
<td>-0.09 0.04 0.74 0.00 0.04 0.01</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25_1: My school has a professional culture that enables staff to be the best educators they can be.</td>
<td>School Culture and Climate</td>
<td>-0.07 0.05 0.72 -0.06 0.00 0.07</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25_4: School staff have the autonomy they need to effectively support students.</td>
<td>School Culture and Climate</td>
<td>0.03 0.00 0.66 0.04 0.16 0.02</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25_3: My school is a physically and emotionally safe environment for each student and staff member.</td>
<td>School Culture and Climate</td>
<td>0.02 0.18 0.60 0.05 -0.22 -0.10</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q25_5: Students have the supports they need (e.g., cultural and linguistic supports, special education supports, counseling and mental health supports, etc.) to enable their learning and growth.</td>
<td>School Culture and Climate</td>
<td>0.22</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12_2: My principal supervisor provides meaningful support and feedback to me.</td>
<td>Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q12_1: Principal supervisors have knowledge and skills—as well as prior experience—to effectively carry out responsibilities.</td>
<td>Principal Supervisor</td>
<td>0.03</td>
<td>0.04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16_8: I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to receive coaching and feedback on my implementation of new practices and policies.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9_2: The district provides principals with high-quality opportunities to receive feedback on their leadership practice via ongoing coaching.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.09</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13_1: District leaders support me in addressing my school’s priorities.</td>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>0.21</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11_3: The district provides principals with effective non-monetary recognition of performance.</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>0.15</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11_2: The district provides effective performance-based incentives to principals.</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q11_1: Compensation for principals is competitive.</td>
<td>Compensation</td>
<td>0.01</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13_4: Principals have the autonomy they need to effectively support student outcomes.</td>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>0.18 0.10 0.16 0.14 0.21 0.04</td>
<td>Left out of scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_2: The selection process for principals is rigorous.</td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>-0.07 -0.06 0.00 0.01 -0.05 -0.04</td>
<td>Left out of scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_1: The district fairly and actively recruits individuals into principal positions.</td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>-0.09 0.03 -0.06 0.04 0.12 0.10</td>
<td>Left out of scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q7_1: The district has a fair approach to deciding who to recruit into teacher and school leadership positions.</td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>0.05 0.05 -0.01 -0.01 -0.01 0.02</td>
<td>Left out of scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q8_3: The district places principals in schools where there is a strong fit between principal strengths and school needs.</td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>0.04 -0.03 0.06 0.01 -0.04 -0.03</td>
<td>Left out of scales</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17_1: District leaders focus on building momentum by achieving and celebrating some “quick wins.”</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.22 0.01 0.07 0.07 0.18</td>
<td>0.61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q15_10: Quick wins (and subsequent wins) are frequently and publicly celebrated by district leaders. (Q15_10)</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.25 0.11 0.06 0.11 0.19</td>
<td>0.52</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17_3: District leaders use progress monitoring data to reflect on implementation and continuously improve.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.29 -0.10 0.05 0.06 -0.03</td>
<td>0.50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17_2: District leaders have a formal process in place to measure the effectiveness of new policies and practices.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.25 0.00 -0.04 0.01 -0.05</td>
<td>0.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16_3: I have frequent, meaningful opportunities to build my understanding of new practices and policies before trying to actually implement them.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.22 0.13 -0.02 0.15 -0.02 0.38</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question</td>
<td>Scale</td>
<td>Values</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>--------</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q17_8: New practices and policies become deeply ingrained in the district’s systems and functions.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.18</td>
<td>0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16_2: District leaders build the district's expertise on how to recruit, support, and retain principals by leveraging research, best practice, and experts.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13_2: Districts clearly and thoroughly focus on equity and the need to prepare each student.</td>
<td>Work Environment</td>
<td>0.23</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q13_3: Districts clearly and thoroughly focus on identifying and removing any forms of bias in how talent is managed.</td>
<td>Recruitment and Selection</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.02</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q16_1: District leaders invest extensive resources of time, people, and money in improving how the district recruits, supports, and retains principals.</td>
<td>Implementation</td>
<td>0.12</td>
<td>0.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q24 NPS</td>
<td>Satisfaction</td>
<td>0.11</td>
<td>0.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10_3: Evaluation results are a critical input to professional growth opportunities.</td>
<td>Performance Evaluation</td>
<td>0.05</td>
<td>0.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10_2: The principal evaluation process is useful to principals.</td>
<td>Performance Evaluation</td>
<td>-0.01</td>
<td>0.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q10_1: The principal evaluation process is transparent and fair.</td>
<td>Performance Evaluation</td>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>-0.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Q9_3: The district provides principals with other high-quality job-embedded learning opportunities (such as communities of practice or stretch assignments).</td>
<td>Professional Learning</td>
<td>-0.12</td>
<td>0.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Q9_1: I am satisfied with the amount, quality and type of professional learning I receive from the district and/or its partners.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Work</th>
<th>Environment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.07</td>
<td>0.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.06</td>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0.21</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Left out of scales</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Eigenvalues**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>17.29</th>
<th>3.83</th>
<th>2.17</th>
<th>1.96</th>
<th>1.60</th>
<th>1.24</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>% of variance</td>
<td>35.29</td>
<td>7.82</td>
<td>4.43</td>
<td>3.99</td>
<td>3.27</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>α</th>
<th>0.93</th>
<th>0.79</th>
<th>0.79</th>
<th>0.87</th>
<th>0.72</th>
<th>0.89</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

*Note: Factor loads over .40 appear in bold.*
## Appendix D: District Diagnostic Scores

### Figure 10

#### District Diagnostic Scores

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 0</th>
<th>Year 2</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

#### 1. Pipeline Development
- 1a. Pipeline recruitment
- 1b. Development
- 1b. Selection
- 1b. Coursework
- 1b. Residency
- 1b. Data sharing

#### 2. Recruitment & Selection*
- 2a. Planning
- 2b. Strategic recruiting
- 2b. Candidate pool
- 2c. Rigorous assessment
- 2c. Placement

#### 3. Professional Learning
- 3a. Support for new principals
- 3b. Individualized
- 3b. Feedback
- 3b. Job-embedded

#### 4. Performance Evaluation*
- 4a. Alignment
- 4b. Variety of measures
- 4b. Evaluation process
- 4c. Connections to professional...

#### 5. Compensation & Incentives
- 5a. Competitiveness
- 5a. Performance-based
- 5b. Incentives for challenging...
- 5b. Non-monetary incentives that...

#### 6. Principal Supervisors*
- 6a. Role definition
- 6a. Selection, development ...
- 6b. Knowledge and skills
- 6b. Individualized support
**Note.** Some indicators and components changed slightly over time. There are blanks on the left side of the figure because those indicators or components were not measured at baseline.
### Table 26

**ANOVA Results for Non-Significant Findings of Mean Difference of Tie Types Between Districts**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Per District</th>
<th>Levine’s Test</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levine’s Statistic</td>
<td>$df$</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Ties</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: 1.19</td>
<td></td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>2, 306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: 1.37</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 1.47</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Office Ties (non-principal supervisor)</td>
<td></td>
<td>10.30</td>
<td>2,306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: .46</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: .22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: .24</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other Ties</td>
<td></td>
<td>1.65</td>
<td>2, 306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: .35</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: .22</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: .33</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note: *Welch’s test used here because Levine’s was not tenable.
Table 27

ANOVA Results for Non-Significant Findings of Frequency and Influence

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Mean Per District</th>
<th>Levine’s Test</th>
<th>ANOVA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Levine’s Statistics</td>
<td>df</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A: 100.05</td>
<td>.99</td>
<td>2, 306</td>
<td>.78</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B: 125.38</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C: 127.71</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Principal Supervisor</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frequency</td>
<td>A: 35.14</td>
<td>6.46</td>
<td>.002</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: 44.08</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: 44.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Influence</td>
<td>A: 3.32</td>
<td>.38</td>
<td>.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B: 2.56</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>C: 3.28</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note: *Welch’s test used here because Levine’s was not tenable.