



CASE STUDY

BUILDING THE
INSTRUCTIONAL CAPACITY
OF PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

LAKESIDE

Lakeside is an urban school district in the Midwest. The district serves nearly 39,000 students, 67% of whom are identified as Black/Non-Hispanic, 14% of whom are identified as Hispanic, and 15% of whom are identified as White. Twenty-three percent of the students in the district receive special education services and nearly all students in the district receive free or reduced priced lunch. The district's reported graduation rate in 2014 was 66.1%, up almost 14 points from 2010.

Supported by the Wallace Foundation, the Education Center's work with Lakeside began and has continued as a professional learning initiative with a group of principal supervisors and their lead instructional coaches with the goal of deepening the content knowledge and instructional capacity of these principal supervisory teams to support Common Core aligned instruction. This work was done in service of the district's goal to reimagine the role of principal supervisors as powerful instructional leaders and alongside Lakeside's other efforts to support this shift. To anchor our work, we collaborated with the Chief Academic Officer's team to create the essential question:

How can we build the capacity of our network teams to support standards-aligned instruction across schools?

Together we created a professional learning series that would enable the principal supervisory teams (who oversee 12-15 principals each) to recognize and support Common Core-aligned instruction by applying related tools and leadership and coaching moves.

Principal coaches participated in school and classroom visits, led by the Education Center, to ground their collective learning in their district's teacher and student work. As the principal supervisors and coaches developed a shared understanding of strong classroom practice in relation to the Common Core, they shared these practices with building principals, in an effort to meet a district goal of increasing student engagement in rigorous instruction across the district.

The participants in our professional learning approach deemed it to be effective and an important use of time. Prin-

principal supervisors and coaches with whom the Education Center worked in Lakeside reported that participation in the professional learning sessions has clarified their work, their ability to use evidence, and their capacity to support principals in their work to implement and align instruction to the Common Core Standards. In a statement that reflected the general spirit of the feedback we received, one principal supervisory team member noted, “I think these sessions are making our team much more instructionally focused.” Another told us, “The sessions have caused me to reflect on the types of support that we provide our principals and how I can more effectively support the principals in assisting teachers in unpacking standards.” Finally, principal coaches reflected on how the professional learning series had sharpened their lens around high-quality instruction, citing the sessions as causing them to look, “with deeper ‘eyes’ in the classroom” and empowering them to bring that focus to their work with schools: “I feel more empowered to use the language around the Common Core and believe I can support principals more effectively.”

Notably, after two engagements with the Education Center on the professional learning of principal supervisory teams, with a deep focus on math in the second year, district leaders expressed concerns that the vision for student engagement and high-quality instruction that is now held in common by this group has not taken root among building leaders and teachers throughout the district. While we spent most of our energy building a shared vision for instructional quality with the principal supervisory teams, challenges remained in aligning key organizational supports such as adult learning experiences for principals and teachers that could help build a district-wide shared vision of strong classroom practice. This means that teachers and students are working together in ways that do not yet reflect the ambitious vision of instruction required by the standards and articulated by Lakeside’s Chief Academic Officer.

We attribute this continued gap between district vision and classroom practice, in part, to the uneven attention to various layers within Lakeside as principal supervisory teams engaged in this professional learning. One participant articulated this, when asked what would move their instructional work in the district: “Consistency — something in the

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SUPERINTENDENT

CHIEF ACADEMIC OFFICER

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

PRINCIPAL COACHES



STRUCTURES & SYSTEMS

ORG SUMMARY

Lakeside schools are led by the Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer. The Education Center partnered with the district's principal supervisory teams to support Common Core aligned instruction.

district that every school needs to be doing.” Achieving such consistency, especially within the district’s context of increasing school-level autonomy, is not an easy task.

In the second year of our partnership, we attempted to address this issue, which allowed for some in-roads with the Throughline approach. We introduced principal supervisors and coaches to the Internal Coherence Framework that drives much of the Education Center’s work at the school-level, carved out time for the principal supervisory teams to plan professional learning for school leaders during sessions, and provided a learning series based on *The Art of Coaching* by Elena Aguilar; additionally, Lakeside invited us to be a part of its annual summer school leadership institute, in which we shared some of the tools and activities used with the principal supervisory teams. Despite these efforts, in retrospect we can see how the design of the engagement did not build a clear set of ‘shared work’ with schools across the layers of the system to support strengthening instruction at the classroom level. We think this added to the level of challenge presented to principal supervisory teams in their efforts to impact instructional practices at scale across classrooms.

We recognize that this is a core challenge of

our district implementation work. The point of entry in this case generated important learning for the participants — and clarified the broader need. However, the absence of a consistent thread through the layers of the system to classrooms in our partnership meant that the broader need was more loosely addressed by our support efforts. In approaching partnerships moving forward, we have decided to strategically focus on **the school as the unit of change** in order to firmly ground professional learning experiences for leaders and executive teams in the everyday experiences of teachers and students. Given the finite resources of school districts, we believe it may be more productive to lead with this approach so that the type of change in classroom practices that school districts like Lakeside hope to see can be more fully realized.¹

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LAKE SIDE PARTNERSHIP



YEAR 1

DEPTH & BREADTH

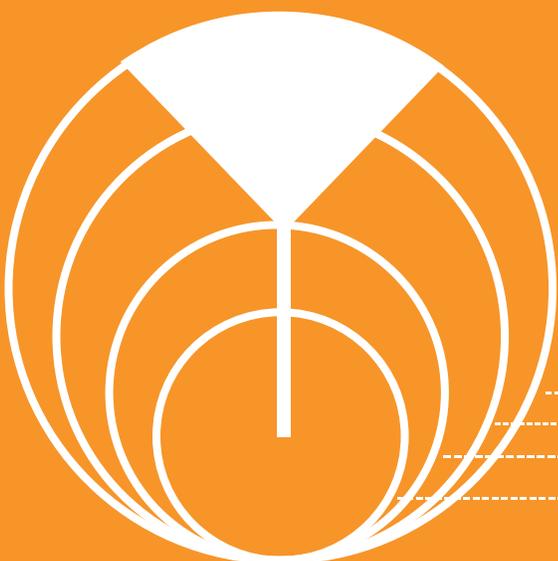
The partnership led to a broad initiative to support principal supervisors, which included school visits connected to Common Core quality practices.

----- DISTRICT LEADERS

----- SCHOOL LEADERS

----- TEACHER TEAMS

----- TEACHERS



YEAR 2

DEPTH & BREADTH

Broadened the work with district leaders and some building principals around math instruction and school change strategies, which included visits to school connected to the Common Core and school change strategies.

----- DISTRICT LEADERS

----- SCHOOL LEADERS

----- TEACHER TEAMS

----- TEACHERS