Power *in* Numbers

Coaching principals to build teams that transform schools

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NYC LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

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WHO WE ARE

The **NYC Leadership Academy** is a non-profit organization with deep experience in leadership program design and delivery, strategic consulting, and capacity building services. We are committed to supporting leaders at every level of the school system to confront inequities and create the necessary conditions for students to thrive. Since our founding in 2003, NYCLA has partnered with more than 130 school districts, state departments of education, universities, foundations, and nonprofit organizations across 30 states and two countries. From our work, we know the change that can result when a school system focuses on improving and aligning leadership development programs and practices. Learn more about our work at www.nycleadershipacademy.org.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

contents

WHY TEAMS MATTER

The work of leading a school is a tall order for one person. When principals try to do it alone, they inevitably face a myriad of barriers: Important work is left undone; top-down efforts are resisted; student achievement remains stagnant; and opportunity gaps widen. In part because of the intense isolation many principals feel on the job,[1] principals turn over on average every three years, and more frequently in high-needs schools.[2] High principal turnover hurts student learning,[3] and in many districts there is often a dearth of strong leaders to take their place.

Successful school principals have been able to avoid some of these pitfalls by distributing leadership across their schools. They make the care and shepherding of teams that help set school policy and support the work of improving instruction a significant part of their jobs.

Any principal will likely tell you, however, that sharing leadership effectively is challenging work, and is not necessarily intuitive. The good news is, with deliberate efforts, school leaders can learn to build and maintain teams that lead continuous improvement in student learning. Principal coaches play a critical role in helping principals develop the capacity to lead teams. *Power in Numbers* serves as a guide for coaches and principal supervisors to support this work.

Why do teams matter? Both organizational and educational research indicate that collective leadership, if organized and managed effectively, has a greater impact on outcomes than any one individual can.[4] Schools with structured forums for professional learning and engagement are better able to increase student achievement.[5] In their five-year study of 180 schools, a team of researchers found that nearly all of the staff working in high-performing schools had more influence over school decisions than did staff from low-performing schools.[6] Developing staff ownership of high-leverage instructional initiatives is one of the tenets of both NYC Leadership Academy's Principal Supervisor Leadership Standards[7] and CCSSO's Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards.[8] A leader's success depends on cross-disciplinary collaboration, flattened hierarchies, and continuous innovation.[9] When educators look at student data together and observe each other's classes, they learn from each other. They develop a feeling of individual and collective responsibility

leadership and the ability to develop sustainable systems and structures for distributive leadership and collaborative learning. They need to create conditions that enable team members to trust one another and the principal, and to understand how to use teams to break down isolation between teachers and, in turn, spread effective practices across the school.[10] A principal with strong teaming skills takes a systems-thinking approach to decision-making, understanding how their individual work connects and impacts various stakeholders and fits into the work of teams and the school as a whole.

Districts leaders can take first steps toward supporting teaming by giving principals the latitude to determine how teams in their schools are structured, since the different contexts of each school require different teaming configurations. District officials can also create principal learning communities that bring teams of principals together from across the district to support and learn from one another, and design professional development that targets the teaming skills that school and teacher leaders need to collaborate effectively.

In our 14 years of developing school leaders, however, we have found consistent coaching to be the most crucial lever for supporting school leaders in building a teaming culture. Whether principal supervisors are able to actively coach their school leaders themselves or opt to hire coaches to do that work, it is important to understand coaching best practices. *Power in Numbers* details what effective coaching for team leadership looks like: the knowledge and skills principals need to do the work of teaming in their schools, the kind of coaching, professional development, and other resources principal coaches can provide that help school leaders develop those skills.
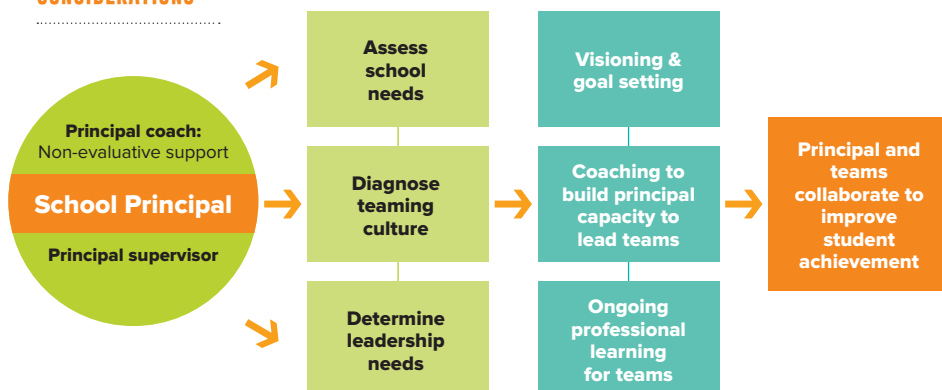
for every student's success. The inquiry work teachers do as a team is ultimately aimed at equity. With their collective insights, experiences, and observations, they can identify and develop strategies to address the needs of each student, particularly those who have historically struggled or had limited access to good teaching or educational opportunities.

This is why there is *Power in Numbers*.

To be able to do this work well, principals need particular skills and knowledge: They need the confidence to delegate

Exhibit 1.1

CAPACITY-BUILDING CONSIDERATIONS

Principal coach: Non-evaluative support

School Principal

Principal supervisor

→ **Assess school needs**

→ **Diagnose teaming culture**

→ **Determine leadership needs**

Visioning & goal setting

Coaching to build principal capacity to lead teams

Ongoing professional learning for teams

→ **Principal and teams collaborate to improve student achievement**

To bring this work to life, we also share stories from the field. This paper is meant to serve as a guide for principal coaches, whether from the formal seat of a principal supervisor, a non-evaluative principal coach, or another district leader in a support role, to build school leaders' ability to use teams as a means for school transformation.

Team configurations

At NYCLA, we have seen schools benefit when school systems and school leaders maintain four types of teams:

- **System-wide principal teams:** Principals from across the school system work together toward collectively meeting the larger district vision

- **School-based administrative teams:** The principal and her cabinet (typically assistant principals) collaborate as thought partners, set direction, plan for, and execute distributed leadership

- **School leadership teams:** Teacher leaders work with the principal to set school policies and practices, taking on tasks that allow for the fulfillment of the school vision

- **Teacher teams:** Teachers collaborate in grade-level and subject matter teams to engage in cycles of inquiry to improve instruction and student learning

The work described in *Power in Numbers* applies to each of these team structures. As principals work with the other leaders in their school and school system to solidify the school's vision and goals, they will determine the types of teams needed to accomplish those goals, which extend beyond the traditional structure. For example, a school with high suspension rates or poor attendance might create a school culture leadership team to tackle those issues.

WHAT PRINCIPALS NEED TO KNOW AND BE ABLE TO DO TO LEAD A STRONG TEAMING CULTURE

The long-term success of teams in a school rests with the principal. After all, it is the principal who oversees teachers' day-to-day responsibilities, whether, when and where teachers have time to meet to collaborate, and what kind of professional development teachers receive that might help them develop into leaders. Understanding what principals need to know and be able to do around teaming will help a principal coach be more effective. In this section, to inform principal coaches' work around building school leaders' team-leading capacity, we detail what skills and knowledge principals need to be able to lead effective teams, including how to build the capacity of their team members and diagnose the teaming culture in their school each step of the way.

Leadership skills to lead teams

At NYCLA, we have found that school leaders who have been most effective at distributing leadership have been able to

- Align the school improvement plan to the district vision

- Establish and clearly communicate a compelling vision for school improvement

- Galvanize school and community stakeholders around the shared vision

- Understand the strengths and limitations of teaming across the school

- Understand the value of shared decision-making that leads to school improvement

- Use a systems-thinking approach to align decision-making processes and understand intended and unintended consequences for change

- Create a psychologically safe climate and culture that supports the empowerment of teacher leadership, and balances accountability with support

- Build a culture of giving and receiving effective vertical and lateral feedback

- Believe in teacher leaders' abilities to learn and grow into their roles and identify the roles they need to play at different times

Doing this work well requires particular leadership skills, dispositions and knowledge about facilitating teams. **One critical skill includes having the self-confidence to distribute authority and share decision making with team members.** Effective principals recognize they need their teams to get the work done. This requires valuing perspectives, styles, and approaches different from their own, welcoming constructive disagreement, and challenging assumptions in the service of school improvement. This

work also requires a growth mindset—staff members are most able to build their skills as leaders when their principal and other teacher leaders believe in their ability to do so.[11] Throughout the complexity of this work, principals benefit from maintaining a tolerance for setbacks, and know how to use those setbacks as learning moments that can move the work forward. Most importantly, the principal has to be willing to look in the mirror and use what she is learning from sharing leadership to change her own leadership styles.[12]

Principal coaches can help leaders think about and practice articulating their skill gaps. The vignette below illustrates how one school benefitted when a principal, working with his coach, acknowledged what he did not know and created a team of teacher leaders to fill those gaps.

Assembling effective teams

Leading teams isn't just about having particular leadership skills and dispositions. Principal coaches can support principals to consider:

- Whom to include on the team
- How to define team and team member roles and responsibilities (including the role of the principal), and help the team determine which team members are best suited for each role
- How to communicate the purpose and role of the team to the rest of the community
- How to assess team and individual team member efficacy, identify their needs, support and monitor their growth and train team leaders/facilitators
- When and how to intervene if a team is struggling, whether because there is too much dissention or not enough diverse thinking
- How to facilitate team meetings, ensuring the team is moving toward a common goal, that equity of voice is present in the discussion or the work, and that team expectations are developing, clearly communicated, and monitored
- How to identify and establish processes for decision making, problem solving, and situation analysis
- How to navigate ownership and responsibility, develop the ability to hold each other accountable for the work, and engage in difficult conversations when needed

Filling the Principal's Skill Gap

The initial work of building a principal's capacity to lead teams looks different depending on the principal's existing leadership skills. When one principal started at an elementary school in the Bronx two years ago, he immediately recognized his knowledge gaps. He knew he lacked expertise in special education, so with support from his principal coach, he sought out staff in his building who could help lead the school's special education work. The coach was relieved that the principal was willing to admit what he did not know, a skill leadership experts have found is critical to leading successful organizations.[13] Working with his coach, this principal took steps to build the team by first bringing together several teachers who had been doing special education work on their own, but without cohesion or collaboration. The principal created space for them to share their current successes and challenges, and discuss what the work could look like if they were functioning as a team. The team, with support of the principal, identified the need to bring in a special education expert to build their own capacity as individuals and as a team—an early win for the principal. This work did not happen immediately but with persistence from the principal and his ability to manage the initial resistance, the team continued to meet and ultimately set regular meetings to collectively tackle problems of practice around implementation. Behind-the-scenes, the principal coach helped the principal be resilient and manage his leadership moves and strategies in order to continue pursuing what would have long lasting benefits for the school and students.

- How to assess the team's impact on professional learning and student achievement

Qualities of effective team members

Like the principal, it is important that team members **believe in and support a culture of learning** that enables all students to achieve at high levels, while maintaining a laser focus on improving instruction and student achievement. Team members should **understand the school vision and mission and how it aligns to all aspects of the team's work.** They need to be able to see their work as part of a larger system, intertwined with the work of the school and the school system. They should **own authentic leadership responsibilities.** An effective team is also able to communicate the team's work to the rest of the staff, whether individually or collectively, given that the proposed practices and policies are only meaningful if the school community is willing to buy into them and put them to practice. To be received well, a team must be transparent about its role within the school and how team members are selected, and maintain a process for receiving and responding to feedback from the staff. In fact, a psychologically safe environment must exist where team members are **willing to share ideas and disagreements,** and listen to others so that they can develop a culture of respect and trust for one another. They can do this by enabling open dialogue, cooperation, and respect, by identifying and addressing challenges as they surface, and by developing and following norms for the ways in which the team functions.

Finally, team members are most effective when they **value shared leadership and collaboration,** setting aside the inclination to be the superhero and instead

Exhibit 2.1 PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

In her body of research on building effective teams, psychologist Amy Edmondson has found that work environments in which staff are afraid to voice concerns and ask questions inhibit a culture of learning. Withholding robs significant moments of learning, which further inhibits new ideas and innovation. Time is spent managing impressions as opposed to contributing to collective learning to better the organization.[14]

To be an organization that is continually learning, innovating and improving, staff members must be willing to identify and make mistakes, and to take risks without fear of retribution. At NYCLA, we use Edmondson's work as inspiration for encouraging school leaders to create productive team environments, to

- Be accessible and approachable

- Invite participation

- Acknowledge the limits of current knowledge

- Be willing to display fallibility

- Model curiosity by asking a lot of questions, creating a need for multiple voices

- Frame the work as a learning problem, not an execution problem, and recognize that there is uncertainty ahead. Trying out identified strategies will invariably lead to improvement

Using Edmondson's work as a guide, principal coaches can support principals to create this teaming environment. As Edmondson points out, we often learn to avoid admitting weakness or ignorance at a young age. But when principals model learning and take deliberate actions with staff members, they form environments in which teachers feel safe questioning and challenging practices, which are critical for using teams to improve schools.

Rest assured, this work does not preclude principals from holding their staff accountable. In fact, according to Edmondson, psychological safety without accountability creates apathy. Work environments in which staff focus on collaboration and learning for the sake of achieving high outcomes have high levels of both psychological safety and accountability for meeting demanding goals.

EXHIBIT 2.2 SCHOOL LEADER PLAN FOR LEADERSHIP TEAM INQUIRY MEETING

Purpose	Empower team leaders to identify data-informed areas of focus for further inquiry
Participants	**School Leadership Team** (e.g. grade level chairs; department chairs, etc.)
Preparation	Bring at least three data sources across your grade level or content area (i.e. Grade 3: ELA & math student achievement data, along with discipline and attendance data). *Note: Principals can leave this open or target specific data depending on need.*
Task 1	Triangulate multiple sources of data across a grade level or content area to identify focus for inquiry.
Process	*Part One:* 1. Data selection from grade level or content area • How did you choose which pieces to focus on and why? 2. Use a low-inference, descriptive, evidence-based lens • What do you see? • What do you count? 3. Describe the relationship among the triangulated data • What patterns and trends emerge? • What is your preliminary hypothesis? 4. Push your thinking further • What other information do you need and why? • What did you discard and why? • What big questions remain? 5. What is the relationship among the analyzed data and the curriculum and instruction in the school? *Part Two:* 1. Based on the above, what would you recommend focusing on for your team's inquiry study? 2. How does the selected focus of inquiry align to the school's theory of action for instructional improvement?
Task 2	Draft an agenda for your upcoming team meeting. Workshop your agenda with other grade level or department area chairs. Consider: • How will you engage your team in a collaborative manner? How will you get buy-in? • What are some of the leverage points that can be used to mobilize your team towards this focus area? • How will you use your team's strengths? • What does your team need to know and be able to do to engage in the inquiry process? • How will you ensure that the focus area selected corresponds with the school's mission, vision, and goals? Consider political, social and cultural capital as well as each member's expertise.

understanding that effective teaming increases every person's capacity to put forth their personal best.

Building team capacity

Once a team is established, principals need to know how to give team members targeted opportunities for skill development and reflection. If a leadership team aims to be part of improving the school's instructional practices, the principal might need to spend time building the team's ability to facilitate this work with teacher teams—especially when the work is grounded in specific inquiry skills around analyzing and disaggregating data to inform instructional shifts.

Exhibit 2.2 shows a sample plan for a meeting in which the principal and members of the school leadership team will analyze data and plan next steps

Principals can also help team members collect and analyze a range of data to assess the team's impact and determine next steps using tools such as the After Action Reviews (AAR). Originally developed by the United States Army, the AAR is a simple process used by a team to capture the lessons learned from past successes and failures, with the goal of improving future

performance.[15] Questions considered in the review include:

- What did we intend?

- What actually happened?

- What can we do better next time?

Opportunities to reflect allow the team members to collectively determine the areas in which they need to grow, develop plans for that growth, and provide opportunities to practice new ways of working.

Adopting a systems-thinking approach

Effective school leaders and team members understand how their work fits into that of their departments, their schools, and their districts, how the different elements of a school fit together and affect one another. This systems thinking approach, as organizational learning expert Peter Senge has described it, enables school and teacher leaders to align their decision making process to their action plans and to understand the intended and unintended consequences for change.[16] Principals and team leaders take this approach by:

- Intentionally checking for understanding with each other and with other teams

- Explicitly naming and discussing intended and unintended consequences of their actions

- Using data to assess the system from multiple perspectives in order to resist jumping to conclusions

- Using data to monitor results and make changes to the action plan as needed

For example, this work could enable a leader to analyze links between attendance and student achievement, or between discipline policies and student learning, so that they can then determine how and at what points to intervene to influence change. This is an ongoing and iterative process that requires dedication from all members of the team.

In our years of training coaches, we have found that when coaches use the following practices, they are best able to help principals evolve from leaders who might believe that they have to do it all, to leaders who not only recognize and value the power of the team but believe in the ability of their team members to grow into leaders:[17]

- Draw out the principal's sense-making and build principal's reflective practice around her actions

- Ask questions, give feedback, and reflect evidence back to the principal that build's her self-awareness of what is underneath her actions and what the intended and unintended consequences of her decisions and actions might be

- Explore the evidence the principal uses to assess success and make decisions

- Observe team meetings in action

- Surface and revisit learning needs for the principal and team based on patterns, trends and low-inference evidence of school improvement and capacity for distributive leadership

- Build principal capacity to identify her mental models regarding staff, collaboration, the need for distributive leadership, the principal role, and change

- Capture how administrators and teachers are talking about change

- Model team development skills

- Fortify a principal's coaching skills through modeling strategies (such as through role play and feedback) and metacognitive discussions where the coach shares her coaching process and thinking (decision points, coaching moves, intentions)

These coaching practices, coupled with efforts around building trust with the coachee, will help a coach identify skills that the principal needs to continue working on. A coach can also play an integral role in the diagnostic process.

Diagnosing a school's culture of teaming

One of the coach's first steps to build the principal's capacity to lead teams is to help the principal assess the culture of teaming across the school. What aspects of the teaming work have enabled success? What has inhibited success? This assessment helps uncover the culture of teaming as well as the needs of team leaders before planning for next steps.

In addition to reflecting on the current state, an overall diagnosis uncovers valuable action steps by taking a systems-thinking approach to the initial assessment and goal setting process. This process is especially helpful at the start of a new year to help principals and teams ground their focused work based on multiple stakeholders' perspectives. By the end of the data gathering phase, leaders and their coaches will have surfaced important connections and interdependencies among the data, the observed patterns and behaviors, corresponding systems and structures and the underlying mental models at play in the school. A school leader and her team can then use this information to identify critical areas for improvement as well as areas of moderate to high performance that can be leveraged. The process helps school leaders to both identify "quick wins," or simple but significant changes that set the foundation for long-term improvement, and consider structures for continuing school-wide data collection and analysis.

The diagnostic tool in Exhibit 3.1 outlines a range of guiding questions the coach and principal can discuss together to assess the culture of teaming.

To assess the inquiry work taking place across the school, principals can also work with their coaches using the Inquiry Capacity Rubric (see Appendix A). This tool pushes principals to consider how well staff understand and value the inquiry process; how effectively

Exhibit 3.1 Diagnosing Teaming Culture

In our work with principals, we have identified several key areas for teaming culture diagnosis:

- **Observable patterns:** How are staff and community members interacting with school leaders? How are decisions made throughout the school? Who is, and is not, included in decisions? To what extent does the racial composition of the staff and leadership reflect that of the students, and are people of color involved in efforts to understand and address the needs of students of color?

- **Systems and structures:** Who is considered part of the cabinet and/or the leadership team? What is the purpose of their meetings, how often do they occur? How are decisions made and communicated? How does the cabinet/leadership team distribute roles, responsibilities, and tasks? What is the accountability structure for the team? What kind of data do the teams collect and monitor?

- **Formal and informal power structures:** What official and unofficial power structures can be discerned within the school community? Are they racially diverse? Who holds positional and/or informal authority?

- **Communication structures:** How does school leadership communicate with staff about student data, values and beliefs, equity, expectations, events, policies, and practices? Who composes the communication? Who has input? How does school leadership receive both formal and informal feedback? Are there mechanisms/ structures/ opportunities to ensure equity of voice?

- **Teacher leadership:** Who are the teacher leaders in the school? What is their sphere of influence? Are roles formal or informal? What is the process for naming teacher leaders in formal roles, and how are they supported to grow into their roles?

- **Mental models:** What are unspoken expectations for and about leadership and the role of the principal? What about other formal leadership roles: Assistant principals? Teacher leaders? What are the school's beliefs about change? What are the school's beliefs about equity?[18]

teachers are collaborating (how frequently they meet, whether collaboration protocols are in place) and whether students are a part of the inquiry process; and how they use data to inform instruction.

Following these bigger picture diagnoses, the principal is better equipped to build a team that complements her skillset as well as the needs of the school. Moving people to the right seats and being transparent about the direction of the school increases the capacity of the team to engage in and move critical work forward.

A more experienced principal who has already assessed the bigger picture at her school can add other layers or elements of reflection such as determining what she should be doing more or less of to ensure her team leaders take ownership of sustaining the work. One of the best ways to dig deeper into this process is by analyzing the cultural elements of teaming. Exhibit 3.2 offers a worksheet for this work.

Exhibit 3.2 Cultural Analysis of Teaming Worksheet

	Cultural Element	Do More Of...	Do Less Of...	Continue	STOP	What will be hard about making this change – for you and for others?	When will you re-assess if you made desired change? Impact of change?
+							
	Cultural Element	Do More Of...	Do Less Of...	Continue	STOP	What will be hard about making this change – for you and for others?	When will you re-assess if you made desired change? Impact of change?
−							

New York City teams diagnose school practices

NYCLA is working with principals in their first three years as school leaders in New York City to develop effective teams in their schools. As part of the Targeted Intensive School Support program, funded by a U.S. Department of Education i3 grant, coaches engage principals and their teams in a school diagnostic process that helps them develop a rich, data-informed understanding of the school's state. That data can then be used to inform all strategic planning and leadership decisions. The teams gather and examine data across several categories: family and community; student behavior and support; students with different learning needs; instruction; teacher and staff development; and culture of leadership and collaboration. Data points include student performance and progress, artifacts, and observations of school practices and behaviors.

In a series of formal planning meetings, the teams then examine the data to identify patterns and key findings. They determine priorities, set short- and long-term goals, and identify strategies for meeting those goals.

The teams are then tasked with monitoring progress towards goals.

Through this diagnostic process, the teams not only determine the work that needs to be done to improve student learning. The teaming work also typically surfaces underlying relationships, connections, patterns, trends, and systemic structures that may be constraining or enabling desired change. Principals then execute against the strategic plans, which are developed with their coaches, and receive ongoing support in assessing progress and making tactical adjustments throughout the school year—with the end goal of seeing improvements in student achievement.

Principals and their school leadership teams emerge from the diagnostic process prepared to 1) articulate a realistic "desired state" of where they want the school to be at the end of the year and, 2) identify a set of priorities around which to focus their efforts in order to achieve that desired state. These then serve as the context and goals that will inform the coaching that leaders and their teams receive, as well as form the basis for the strategies that leaders use to drive the work of their schools moving forward.

Building feedback skills

To be able to truly distribute leadership, school leaders need to learn how to tolerate vulnerability and seek out feedback. It's ideal to support leaders in developing these skills before they enter the principalship. For example, we have seen aspiring principals benefit from hands-on practice working in teams and giving each other honest, direct, and detailed feedback about each other's leadership moves. During NYCLA's 6-week summer intensive principal preparation program, participants work in teams on weekly projects around relevant problems of practice. Each week, a new team leader is selected. At the end of the week, a coach facilitates a 360-degree evaluation of the team leader's leadership practice to assess her contributions to the team and outcome of the project (in a district, a formal or informal principal coach could facilitate these feedback sessions). The aspiring school leaders get the opportunity to practice vulnerability and model learning by asking specific questions about how to improve their leadership practice, engaging in public feedback and reflecting and building the skills they need to lead teams.

Facilitating a 360-degree feedback session

As a final step in a team project on selecting a professional development topic for the team, team members in NYCLA's principal preparation program met as a group, with a coach facilitating, to discuss their feedback on how the team leader that week handled the team's professional development discussion. The conversation was intended to give the leader time to reflect on and discuss next steps. Having already reviewed each team member's low inference feedback notes, the team leader asked the group, "How can I be more proactive in seeking others' points of view to get more collaboration?" One team member noted that when the leader focused on expressing her own opinions, it might have monopolized the time allotted and prevented her from seeing who in the group was not participating, thereby discouraging others from sharing their ideas.

The coach facilitator pushed the team member to be more specific: "Can you give a low-inference example of where expressing her opinion got into someone's way of hearing everybody?" The team member noted that by presenting her own suggestion about the type of professional development they should have early on in the group discussion, the team leader "might have cast a shadow on others' opinions.... Consider when you might want to hold off on expressing your opinion." Advised another team member, "Take a breath and wait to see if others will participate."

The facilitator also pushed all the team members to reflect on how they might conduct themselves differently in the group. When a team member said that at a point in the PD discussion, he felt the conversation had gotten ahead of him, the facilitator asked, "In that moment, what is the leader's responsibility and what is your responsibility?"

"My responsibility is to make myself heard, to speak up," the team member said. "The leader's responsibility is to provide a means of having that honored."

Toward the end of the feedback discussion, the facilitator asked, if the leader were to become a principal tomorrow, where would she be vulnerable?

"Being able to step back," a team member said. "You can be felt in a room, but to get the subtleties of your staff, perhaps that prominent role is not where you want to be. Go in the background if necessary."

When the team leader noted that would be hard for her, the facilitator asked her why, and pushed her after a couple of responses to get to the essence of why that is hard. "If you give me a task, I immediately start to work on it," the team leader said. "To not do anything, I feel like I'm not being productive, I am wasting time ... We need to change things, and they won't change with me sitting and watching things go by."

"So if the framing is moving to the background," the coach facilitator said, "then you are seeing this as not productive, not contributing, not working. What your team member is suggesting is strategic work. But the framing of what looks like work for you is a very specific mental model of work. You are talking about active work, but the spotlight is not on you when you are doing it.

"We tend to work to our strengths. If the bigger challenge for you is stepping back and getting the lay of the land so you can move strategically, that is the skill area to work on and start to develop."

After these sessions, the other aspiring principals in the group held each other accountable for working on the skills the group identified need work.

Building facilitation skills

An often missed step to supporting principals' team leadership is to support their development of facilitation skills aligned to the principles of adult learning. Principal coaches can often start this work by observing the school leader in action at weekly leadership team meetings and providing feedback on the leader's adherence to adult learning best practices.

1. Adults learn most deeply from experience and reflection

2. Learning is a social process

3. Adults have a high capacity to learn from the discomfort inherent in moving from the known to the unknown and in taking risks

4. Adults learn by creating and revising stories in order to make meaning

5. Adults learn best in an environment of structured freedom

Another appropriate place for a principal coach to observe and provide feedback is during a retreat. Retreats, whether during the summer or the school year, give school leaders and their teams time to focus on capacity building, to reflect, assess their team's activities, adjust priorities, and develop or revise action plans. Doing this work away from daily work and responsibilities creates an environment that is comfortable and free of distraction, where all participants understand the power of their active involvement in the retreat and feel respected and safe to learn.

By observing and, when needed, stepping in to ask questions that guide discussion, principal coaches push the principal and team members to be receptive and reflective, to value other voices, to think through how to be able to effectively get the best out of their team by helping them understand psychological safety, and helping them think through how to bring people together

around issues. Retreats provide the opportunity to hold up a mirror by practicing metacognition through observation and reflection. In the process, coaches can be invited to help the team diagnose areas of potential growth. The retreat is also a place where a principal can work through projects while playing different team roles, and observing and learning from different leadership, communication and work styles. Through this work, the principal can gain insight into different ways to lead, manage, or participate in a team and reflect on the different styles that can be used in teamwork. Teams have found retreats most effective when they are held at regular intervals.

Exhibit 3.4 offers a set of questions principals can use as they plan a retreat, with an eye toward building the principal's capacity to lead teams. In our experience, we have found that principals are best able to think through and implement this guide with support from a non-evaluative coach. If that option is not financially feasible, a principal supervisor can support this work.

Exhibit 3.4 RETREAT PLANNING GUIDE [19]

Set Retreat Goals:

- What are your goals for the retreat? Consider three levels – goals for your school, your retreat team, and yourself as a leader.

- What do you want the outcome(s) of the retreat to be? (For example, will the team create something, come to a decision on something, etc.?)

- What are the challenges affiliated with achieving these goals/outcomes?

- What is the relationship between the goals you have set for the retreat and the team members who will participate?

- Are the goals/outcomes for the retreat consistent with your on-going work in moving the school?

- How will the retreat agenda be determined? Who will have input? What criteria are you using to decide what the team will focus on at the retreat?

- How and what will you communicate about the retreat when the team returns to school?

- What will be hard about this work?

Set Retreat Roles:

- How will retreat participants be chosen?

- Based on the goals you outlined above, do you have the balance you want on the team?

- What will be the role of each team member, including the principal? How will each team member's participation impact on the achievement of the targeted goals?

- Who will facilitate at the retreat? Will there be more than one facilitator?

- Who will record?

- Who will ensure the team stays on track at the retreat? How?

- How will participants serve as levers for change back at school? Will there be follow up on these roles once the team returns from the retreat?

Set Retreat Process:

- How will the agenda be determined? Who will have input?

- What steps will you need to take your team through in order to achieve your goals? What is the significance of each step?

- How much time will each step take? What flexibility will you exert if an item needs more or less time than you allotted?

- What materials/resources need to be created/brought for the team to accomplish its goals?

- What advance work needs to be done? Who will do it?

- How will the work at the retreat be documented/disseminated? What will be the follow up work to the retreat back at school? What will the communication be to the rest of the school community?

- How much decision making power will the retreat participants have and how will that be communicated to them?

- What icebreakers or protocols will you use? What do you need in preparation?

- How will the team keep its energy up?

- When will the team take breaks?

- How will you know if the retreat has been successful? What evaluation tools will the team use? Will you ask for feedback from the participants?

Pay Attention to the Interpersonal:

- Knowing what you know about yourself, what about your style might encourage success in this retreat? What might impede success? Think back to the goals outlined earlier.

- What do you want to convey by tone and style during the retreat and how will you do so?

- How will your tone and style support the achievement of your goals?

- How will you use your school wide norms to establish retreat norms?

- How will you handle dissention should it arise?

Coaching for a systems-thinking approach

NYCLA has developed many practices that support team members' abilities to engage in systems-thinking and to build school-wide systems and structures necessary to further their work. Principal coaches team together to conduct systems-thinking visits to schools. First, the principal and a team of coaches trained in systems-thinking together define a focus for the visit. Principals early in their career are often more likely to focus on a broader topic, such as how grade-level teams are functioning across different grade levels.

In advance of the visit, the principal develops a schedule and shares information with the school community about the visit, emphasizing that the coaches are there in a supportive role. The coaches then spend a day examining the systems and structures related to that focus to determine what is functioning well and where there might be opportunities for improvement.

During the visit, the coaches meet with stakeholders individually and in groups and observe classes, staff meetings, or other relevant school structures. The coaches then debrief with each other, discussing patterns and trends in the data, understanding implications for the systems and structures within the school and identifying leverage points and feedback to share with the principal. At the end of the day, the team of principal coaches meets with the principal and key staff members (usually members of the school leadership team) to discuss their observations, share ideas, and talk through potential next steps. In a recent visit to a school with a more veteran principal, the coach team found that while the school leadership team's initial work with grade level teams on using data had resulted in initial growth in student achievement, the progress had plateaued. The coach planned

to work with the team to identify concrete next steps to move forward.

Coaching to recognize mental models

Mental models are the images, assumptions, and stories that we carry in our minds of ourselves, other people, institutions, and every aspect of the world. A principal's beliefs about how a school should run, what a school leader's work should look like, biases toward people of color– these mental models all have a tremendous effect on how a principal leads. A principal coach can help a school leader recognize those mental models and their impact, and develop strategies for shifting practice so that mental models do not inhibit school improvement.

To do their work effectively, coaches must first recognize their own mental models and what triggers those models. They can examine how their mental models affect their relationship with the principal. Finally, coaches can benefit from exploring how their approach to leadership differs from that of the principal they are coaching. All of these steps together help a coach become aware of her mental models and, in turn, be better equipped to help a principal with her own self-reflection.

This work is part of the coach's efforts to continuously learn and apply a range of coaching strategies based on the needs of the principal, her team, and the school. Principal coaches can support teaming by observing teamwork in schools,

giving detailed feedback, asking targeted questions, and pushing school leaders to

EXHIBIT 3.5 QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER ON COACHING AROUND MENTAL MODELS

- How has coaching you have received (personally or professionally) revealed your coach's mental models about you or your abilities?

- How do your own mental models show up in your coaching practice?

- When you are engaged in coaching, what strategies do you use to identify your mental models?

- How do you set aside your own mental models to create a true learning experience for principals?

consider their mental models around the distribution of their leadership.

By working with a principal in her school, a principal coach can provide immediate feedback and reflection on the teamwork in the building and support them in solving challenges. The vignette on this page shows how one coach, by surfacing and sharing observations and asking reflective questions, guided the principal in developing an effective working relationship with his administrative team. As you review the vignette, consider how the coach helps the leader think about and adjust her leadership perspective. Principal coaches can support leaders to understand and recognize their own mental models around power and authority—understanding how to move beyond formal teaming structures to authentic relationships and the distribution of leadership. Although a principal coach can't change mental models, she can help principals see the implications of their mental models in the way they engage with their team.

Negotiating power and authority

To establish his cabinet, an elementary school principal in the Bronx met with a NYCLA coach over the summer to talk about which school goals his two assistant principals (AP) could lead. The coach and principal discussed each AP's strengths and values, then met with the APs to talk about which school goals they felt they could most effectively tackle and why. One AP, whom the principal identified as a data guru, would take on data and inquiry; the other assistant principal would tackle school culture. The coach then observed the team as they created action plans and a timeline for the work around their focus areas. They set goals and scheduled regular check-in times with the principal to discuss their progress. Following the meeting, the coach shared his observations with the principal and asked probing questions about the meeting, and in particular around what the principal will do when goals are not met. The coach specifically pushed on the principal's mental models: "You continue to talk about what you would do if you were the assistant principals, but you are not. How can you get out of your own way and past your mental models to truly support their growth?" The coach and the principal together determined the need to spend time fleshing out how to support the assistant principals without taking work away from them, and how to give them effective critical feedback to increase performance. The coach advised the principal to always connect feedback to the values of the APs so that the feedback did not sound like a reprimand and to ensure that the focus remained on the growth and learning trajectory. The coach and principal then drafted a feedback letter to one of the assistant principals, noting the accomplishments the AP had achieved, as well as the benchmarks that had not yet been met. The letter offered guidance on how to proceed to work toward those unmet goals, with a sense of urgency, and with the assurance of support.

Transforming schools takes a village. Principals are most successful when they share and distribute leadership. Adults learn best and improve their craft when they collaborate with colleagues, when they are motivated and in charge of their learning, and when they receive regular support from mentors and peers.[21] All of that can be built into effective school-based teams. Whether they are analyzing school data to better understand how they should change curriculum or discussing how students did on the week's lessons to determine how to revise instruction for the following week, teams can come up with solutions and can find their own identity to contribute to the school's and principal's vision for success.

A teaming culture also creates a leadership pipeline. Developing and supporting principals who are collaborative and who invest in the development of their assistant principals and teachers has a multiplier effect and is an important investment for school districts. As these individuals grow into their roles in a distributive leadership environment, they become a leadership pipeline for the school district. They are the future principal supervisors, principals and assistant principals.

We cannot, however, expect principals to come to their jobs knowing how to do the work of building teams expertly. They need support in understanding what their mental models are around teamwork – is their leadership style to do it all themselves, do they see asking others to share in the work as a weakness? Do they have systems in place to encourage collaboration, or does the school schedule make it nearly impossible for teacher leaders to meet on a regular basis?

With effective coaching, principals can learn to do this work well. **Having an expert educator bring a fresh perspective, ask pointed questions and offer feedback on what they observe in the school can help the principal to reflect on her work and identify where changes can be made to create a more collaborative working culture.**

Coaches play a critical role in helping principals develop their capacity to lead teams.

This white paper, *Power in Numbers,* is intended to support principal coaches, whether non-evaluative principal coaches or formal principal supervisors take a coaching stance when building principals' capacity, acknowledging that in order to transform schools, a principal must know and be able to lead teams effectively. This paper enables the coach and principal to engage in dialogue about their shared work and the leader's progress, to:

- Identify and prioritize leadership behaviors on which the pair has mutually agreed to focus their work around teaming

- Capture observations and notes about the principal's progress
- Document progress updates, areas for improvement, and next steps
- Work with a learning orientation as opposed to an evaluative one

We recommend that the principal coach and school leader work together to unpack *Power in Numbers* and choose two-three focus areas to improve the culture of teaming across the principal's school.

Sample Agenda

Pre-work: Read Power in Numbers in advance of meeting/session
Assumption: Principal coach with group of at least 5 principals

- *Why teaming?*
  - Frame conversation by sharing coach's thoughts on the importance of teaming, including one example of building a team successfully and one example of being unsuccessful (Bonus: Discuss it from your experience as a former principal)
  - Talk about why teaming matters (feel free to cite research or examples from Power in Numbers) and why the principal will need his/her team to move the work forward
  - Share purpose of discussion/meeting and outcomes

- *Debrief Power in Numbers*
  - Use the following prompts to engage participants in small group discussions. After reviewing Power in Numbers,
    - What do you agree with?
    - What do you argue with?
    - What do you aspire to?
  - Bring groups back to share insights with whole group. Chart.

- *Engage in a Current/Desired State Analysis* (if helpful, use t-chart or Venn diagram)
  - What is the current state of teaming at your school?
  - What is your desired state?

- *Identify Next Steps to Fill Gaps*
  - What do you need to do to move from your current state to your desired state?
  - What else do you need to learn? How will you learn it?
  - What team will you configure in order to get the work done?
  - What is one actionable next step?

Inquiry Capacity Rubric[22]

Beginning A school at this level…	Emerging A school at this level…	Applying A school at this level…	Integrating A school at this level…
PURPOSE & PROCESS			
• Has limited understanding of the inquiry process and its value • Has one or more teams that is stuck in Phase I of the process • Inquiry work does not have a clearly defined academic focus for its inquiry work • Inquiry work is not rooted in student academic achievement • Limits its inquiry work to a small group of students and teachers • Has a principal who is actively resistant to the inquiry work	• Has basic understanding of the inquiry process and believes that it is somewhat valuable • Has one or more teams that has assessed the conditions of learning and developed a change strategy • Inquiry work is focused on student behavioral challenges and not focused on academic needs • Limits its inquiry work to a small group of students and teachers • Has a principal who is open to inquiry work for teachers, but is not an active participant of the process	• Has an understanding of the inquiry process and believes that it is valuable to goals of the school • Inquiry work has a clearly defined academic focus • Has rooted its inquiry work in student academic achievement • Inquiry work is focused on a small group of students and teachers, but learnings will expand to the larger school community • Has a principal who participates in the process and has established time for groups to convene regularly to engage in inquiry work.	• Fully understands the inquiry process and views this work as valuable and important • Views the process as cyclical and iterative • Has one or more teams that has moved into Phase III of the process • Embeds the process in various areas of the school, beyond the inquiry team • Has a principal and administrators who strongly believe in the inquiry process and use core concepts to guide teachers/staff interactions (ie, teachers, SLT mtgs, etc…)

Beginning	Emerging	Applying	Integrating
A school at this level...	A school at this level...	A school at this level...	A school at this level...

COLLABORATION AND COMMUNICATION

Beginning	Emerging	Applying	Integrating
• Inconsistently or rarely convenes groups around inquiry • Inquiry work is not shared at staff meetings • Parents and students are not active members of the process • Provides little to no opportunity for inquiry work to be shared with larger school community • Provides little to no opportunity for teachers to collaborate to learn from one another	• Convenes groups to engage in inquiry work at least once a month • Provides rare or inconsistent opportunities for inquiry work to be shared with larger school community • Sees the need for teachers to collaborate to learn from one another, but have not engaged in doing so	• Convenes groups to engage in inquiry work at least twice a month • Has provided several opportunities for inquiry work to be shared with larger school community • Encourages teachers and staff to collaborate to learn from one another • Actively engages and involves students in the process (ie, goal setting, assessing the effectiveness of the change strategy, etc)	• Convenes groups to engage in inquiry work at least twice a mon • Has developed systems and protocols for regular and ongoing teacher collaboration • Has encouraged parent participation in the inquiry process • Frequently and systematically shares key learnings from the inquiry process with parents/guardians and other key stakeholders from the community • Students are actively engaged in the inquiry process • Students actively inform various steps of the process

Beginning A school at this level…	Emerging A school at this level…	Applying A school at this level…	Integrating A school at this level…
RIGOR			
• Does not actively engage and involve students in the process (ie, goal setting, assessing the effectiveness of the change strategy, etc) • Only uses one or two sources of data • Has limited data analysis capacity • Does not use data to assess conditions of learning • Has limited to no understanding of the use of various types of assessments • Has not developed change strategies that effectively meet the needs of the student population • Has not set a long-term goal for its target population students	• Rarely or inconsistently engages and involves students in the process (ie, goal setting, assessing the effectiveness of the change strategy, etc) • Uses limited sources of data to identify target groups and monitor their progress • Has limited data analysis skills and getting training to expand capacity • Uses one form of data to assess conditions of learning • Uses assessments to evaluate student learning • Is using outside research to develop change strategies and determine their potential impact • Has set a long-term goal for its target population students that is not "SMART"	• Has one or more teams that are implementing and using data to evaluate the effectiveness of its change strategy • Uses a variety of data sources to identify target groups and monitor their progress • Analyzes data effectively and is able to drill down to determine specific student learning challenges • Uses multiple sources of data to assess conditions of learning • Understands the difference between assessments for learning and assessment of learning. • There are multiple groups engaged in inquiry • Recognizes the need to revise its June goal and is actively working toward making it "SMART"	• Effectively and appropriately uses multiple sources of data, including both formative and summative assessments • Teachers and administrators believe the process is very valuable to pushing the goals of the school • Focuses inquiry work on various topics, which are all rooted in student academic achievement • Has set appropriate "SMART" goals for its target population students

Beginning A school at this level...	Emerging A school at this level...	Applying A school at this level...	Integrating A school at this level...
		LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT	
• Has an inquiry team consisting solely or primarily of a data specialist and administrators • Does not include teachers in making key decisions about teaching and learning	• Includes data specialist and administrators as key members of each team	• Teachers take ownership of most of the inquiry work • Administrators and teachers collaboratively engage in decisions about teaching and learning	• Engages teachers in decision making • Teachers and administrators use learning from inquiry work to inform curriculum design and professional development • Encourages teachers in self-guided inquiry to develop strategies and approaches for struggling students • Expects teachers to work with colleagues to discuss classroom challenges and steps they will take to address them • Has developed a culture where teachers and staff voluntarily visit each others' classrooms and give constructive feedback on teaching strategies and approaches

Coaching to lead teams in Iowa

In 2013, the Iowa legislature passed the Teacher Leadership and Compensation Initiative's Administrative Support Program to reward effective teachers with leadership opportunities and give teacher leaders more responsibilities, including coaching colleagues around instructional strategies. The state education department hired NYCLA to develop a program that would support principals in forming cohesive leadership teams that could lead a collaborative process for improving student learning. In the first year of the program, NYCLA trained and supported 8 facilitators and 11 coaches who in turn worked with 84 Iowa principals.

All of the professional development revolved around six themes that NYCLA and Iowa staff determined principals would need to know and be able to do to lead effective teams: alignment of district and building vision; principal and school vision; systems-thinking; teaming and shared leadership; culture of collaboration; and coaching. The purpose of the program was to engage school leadership teams in relevant, engaging and action-oriented learning experiences that support implementation of their vision and would build their content knowledge around teaming.

NYCLA supported the delivery of professional development through a Summer Institute, half-day professional development sessions throughout the school year, and one-on-one leadership coaching. During the three-day Summer Institute, principals and superintendents from across Iowa worked together to articulate a vision, set expectations and roles, and develop action plans for maximizing the work of building teams and teacher leaders, creating alignment between district leadership and principals. Principals designed action plans for their teams and started to identify the systems and structures they would need to have in place to support teams. They also considered the skills they would need to develop to lead teams, and how they could leverage relationships with coaches, peers and others to support this work.

During the school year, principals and their school-based teams received three half-day sessions. In the first session in the fall, principals and team members practiced communicating the school vision; began to identify the technical and adaptive changes needed to move the school toward that vision; discussed how they would measure progress toward the action plan and the role the team would play in implementing and assessing progress; and building a community of trust. At the beginning of the meeting, each principal delivered a "passion" speech she had written during the summer institute outlining her focus for school improvement, why the goal is important, and what the team's role could be in helping reach that goal. The team members were then given time to ask the principal questions, suggest changes based on the needs of their school, and clarify the team's role.

The team then dug in to determining what the work would need to look like to reach the goal. In one instance in which teachers had been resistant to visiting each other's classrooms, so the team asked each teacher to focus on one practice they wanted to share with colleagues. As the team members grappled with what role each team member would play in the work, the coach facilitator asked, "What is the team accountable for in moving towards that vision of success? What will it take from your team to make this happen?"

The team then looked at multiple measure for diagnosing the state of the school: demographics, student learning, school process and perceptions. Based on the goal you want to meet in June, the coach asked, what evidence do you need to look at to assess if you have met that goal? What do you expect to see happening by February? Based on that, what evidence will you bring to the next PD session to check in on progress towards your school improvement goals?

As part of this work, coaches also met one-on-one with principals six hours a month in sessions organized around the principal's goals for the school. With an eye toward those goals and the principal's leadership skill needs, coaches observed leadership team meetings, one-on-one conversations between the principal and teacher leaders, and principal learning walks. In the debrief after each observation, the principal and coach connected what they saw to the school goals and the principal's leadership development needs, examining how the leader was grappling with challenges and trends in the context of school vision and sharing relevant resources like readings and tools. At the end of each meeting, they planned for their next meeting, determining what activities the coach should observe in the coming weeks connected to teams. Of course, sometimes plans needed to change if something urgent came up at the school, but the coaches observed those moments, too, and later talked with the principal about how his actions connected to the teaming culture in the school.

All of the principals who participated in the first year of the TLC program said that the coaching has helped them empower other staff in their school, to share responsibility and provide clear expectations to staff, build trust, meet regularly, plan PD together, and clarify roles and responsibilities. "My coach pushes me to think deeply and helps me to problem solve, does not solve problems for me," one principal said. "It has helped me to approach my interactions differently with my staff, using more questions to get to the answers through self-reflection," one principal said. Added another principal, "I allowed and encouraged others to participate in leadership goals and responsibilities, and I could see that initiatives would be better followed through if this happened, and it did."

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NYC
LEADERSHIP
ACADEMY