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Building District Capacity for Scaling up Instructional Improvement in High Poverty Schools: Leadership, Designs and Environments

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Improving instruction and achievement in many high poverty schools has long been an intractable social problem in America (Elmore & McLaughlin, 1988) with strong implications for equitable opportunities among our nation's youth. State standards-based reforms (SBR) and accountability systems are one significant recent effort to address this challenge (Smith & O'Day, 1991; Furhman, 1999). Since state content standards are often intentionally 'large-grained' to allow for local control, district managers have had to fill-in or otherwise operationalize the guidance presented by the state (Author, 1997; Spillane, 2004).

But while these professionals have been pressed to coordinate and more or less elaborate instructional guidance from a central position, researchers and policymakers have also encouraged a more decentralized location for instructional improvement. From this view, *schools* should be the principal authority over instructional practice, bypassing district bureaucracies that have often been seen as obstacles to creative reforms rather than guides for positive change (Chubb & Moe, 1990; Finn, 1997). Comprehensive school reform (CSR) designs developed by independent, non-governmental organizations for schools complement this perspective (Berends, 2004). Recent studies show that some research-based CSR designs can improve instruction and achievement, even in schools where students are challenged by economic or other disadvantages (Borman, Hewes, Overman & Brown, 2003; May, Supovich, & Perda, 2004; Rowan, Camburn, Correnti, & Miller, 2007). At the same time, emerging literature also suggests that districts can be effective in improving student achievement if they centralize instructional management by developing coherent guidance policies, providing resources for teachers' learning aligned to

those policies, and holding schools accountable for outcomes (Author, 2000; Elmore & Burney, 2000; Fink & Resnick, 2001).

These developments in research and policy have tacitly delegated a complex task to district managers: one that requires them to negotiate potentially competing 'bottom up' and 'top down' impulses (Author, 2002; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Slavin, 2003). Given the current call for school districts to improve schools, this article explores the management strategies used by districts struggling with poor, low achieving students, as they attempt to scale up and make lasting ambitious instruction in the complex environments of American education. More specifically, we ask:

1. How do school districts manage CSR designs for improving instruction within varying policy environments?
2. How do the conditions created by district management efforts, different school improvement designs, and policy environments influence school professionals perceptions of coherent guidance and their learning experiences?
3. How do district management strategies, CSR designs, and policy environments influence district managers' own leadership capacity for improving instruction?

In what follows we provide an overview of the literature that informed our framing ideas.

Conceptual Frame: Coherence and Capacity

The perspectives in our frame elaborate on key challenges for district managers. These perspectives hold that scaling-up school improvement requires changing "the core of schooling in ways that result in most students receiving engaging instruction in challenging academic content" (Elmore, 1996; p. 6). Therefore "how *deeply* an innovation permeates practice" is as crucial as "how many sites adopt it" (Cohen & Ball, 2007, p. 20, emphasis

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added). Most studies have found that reforms rarely change classroom instruction in more than just a few schools. The scale-up literature argues that specific conditions are needed to produce substantial change in classroom instruction, improvement across a significant number of classrooms and schools, and improvement that lasts (Blumenfeld, Fishman, Krajcik, Marx, & Soloway, 2000; Coburn, 2003; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Desimone, 2002; Elmore, 1996). One such condition raised across all the 'scale up' work we cite here is coherence among the instructional guidance messages that educators receive, a characteristic often lacking in the disjointed American system. That recent work, along with decades of research, also shows that "all change involves coming to understand and to be good at something new" (Fullan & Miles, 1992, cited in Elmore, 1996, pg. 15). Thus, scaling up instructional improvement requires capacity; that is, conventional resources and system incentives alone are necessary but not sufficient to produce instructional improvement. Professionals in organizations enacting complex change—collectively as well as individually—also need to be committed to those changes and learn how to use innovative guidance or other kinds of resources productively in order to sustain them after the initial influx of external resources diminishes (Cohen, Raudenbush, & Ball, 2003; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001).

Coherence

The scale-up literature argues that school improvement is often thwarted by competing and conflicting messages. School and district organizations operate in an institutional "sector" that stretches from local to national actors and that is characterized by "fragmented or federalized programmatic decision-making," exhibiting both "multiplicity and variety" (Scott & Meyer 1991, p. 133-134). In this kind of sector, programs and agencies sometimes supplement each

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other, but more often compete, duplicate or overlap in terms of authority over guidance, resources and incentives for instructional improvement. Such institutional arrangements can be "rife with conflict, contradiction and ambiguity" (DiMaggio & Powell 1991, p. 28).

Thus scaling up instructional improvement by external policies or programs may be possible, but the potential for incoherent, confusing guidance messages that could confuse educators in schools and therefore block such improvement, is also probable (Cohen & Spillane, 1993). Research on the district role in scaling-up school improvement confirms this point and has shown that when district guidance messages or mandates are inconsistent with school reforms, implementation is less effective (Datnow & Stringfield, 2000; Desimone, 2002).

Some scholars have argued convincingly that coherence is most productively understood not as stable, objective or technical alignment among multiple guiding rules or resources across the education sector, but as a dynamic problem to be managed jointly by agents in schools and districts (Honig & Hatch, 2004; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000). From this perspective, because the educational sector remains so fragmented, individuals, groups, or organizations can to some extent ignore, select, negotiate, or learn to use environmental guides to instructional practice in ways that enhance or lessen the potential for productive, coherent action (Blumenfeld, Fishman, et al., 2000; Cohen & Ball, 2007; Stein & D'amico, 2002; Weick, 1995).

Capacity

Therefore, we turn to a second important idea in the scale-up literature: the importance of professional practitioners' capacity; that is, the commitment, understanding, and knowledge they deploy in large-scale change efforts (author, 2002; Berends, Bodily & Kirby, 2002; Cohen & Ball, 2007; Knapp, 1997). Here, organizations are not simply impersonal entities that respond to institutional forces (Argyris & Schön, 1996). Rather,

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they are collections of interpersonal groups that develop new patterns of behavior, renewed motivation, and understanding as a result of collective learning—especially when it is work embedded (Dutton & Heaphy, 2003; Sykes, King & Patrick, 2002; Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002). These perspectives argue that practitioners' learning is a key lever for building system capacity, and resources supporting such learning over time are crucial for improving instruction at scale (Author, 2002; Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996; Cohen, Raudenbush & Ball, 2003; Knapp, 1997; Stein & D'amico, 2002).

In terms of reform 'depth', scale up studies have found that implementation of school improvement programs tends to be low in districts where teachers report they do not understand the design (Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002). Other studies show that teachers' learning experiences are associated with substantial instructional change toward reform goals, even improved achievement, when such experiences are sustained and coherently focused on reform oriented content or instructional practice (Cohen & Hill, 2001; Correnti, 2007; Desimone, Porter, Garet, Yoon & Birman, 2002). We therefore investigate how district management influenced the nature and quality of educators' learning in case district schools as one indicator of capacity for improvement.

District Leadership

While much research has looked at teacher capacity as a key determinant of change, less attention has focused on the capacity and strategies required for *instructional* leadership on the part of district managers. Studies that have examined this topic have focused primarily on single improvement programs, or standards-based reforms that are loosely specified for guiding instruction (Coburn, 2003; Elmore & Burney, 2000; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Stein & Nelson, 2003). We bring that scholarship together with scale up research suggesting districts

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should devolve improvement to school-design teams, then support and 'protect' more specified instructional designs from conflicting guidance (Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002; Desimone, 2002). Building on these lines of work we examine district level instructional leadership for multiple research-based designs for improving instruction. This is a pressing, potentially productive, but relatively new role for district managers.

We use these perspectives from the scale up literature—coherence, capacity, and the district role in developing such conditions—to describe management strategies in a sample of struggling districts, and their implications for instructional improvement at scale. We focus our study on system-wide domains that could most directly help or hinder the kind of instructional improvement each of the CSRs in our study attempt to nurture: coherent guidance, incentives for sustaining improvement work, and high quality resources for supporting change in educators' practice.

Data and Methods

We sampled three CSR designs that represent different instructional and organizational approaches to improving instruction: Accelerated Schools Project (ASP), America's Choice (AC), and Success For All (SFA). Their instructional designs emphasized different approaches to instruction. Both AC and SFA provided schools with detailed curriculum materials, methods for assessment, and relatively specified, research-based professional practice 'routines' to guide transactions among teachers, students and English Language Arts (ELA) content. ASP asked teachers and students to engage in what the design called 'powerful learning' based on a set of principles about instruction, but did not target these to particular content. All three designs supported their improvement goals with professional development, new coaching roles, and new

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collaborative work routines for orchestrating connections between teachers, leaders and ELA or other content.

Nested Case Studies of Districts: Sample and Data Collection

The data for this article are from a longitudinal quasi-experimental study conducted in 115 mainly high poverty public elementary schools, 90 of which were implementing one of the three CSR designs. *1* The analyses presented in this manuscript draw primarily from nested case studies of reform implementation in a set of 5 states, 6 districts and 38 schools, 14 of which we studied in depth. We used a purposeful sampling process (Denzin, 1989; Miles & Huberman, 1994) to select six case study districts, from the larger survey pool. First, we located all possible districts that had potential case study schools with a high or moderate Community Disadvantage Index (CDI) rating and more than one CSR model operating within it. *2* From that pool we then selected districts in a variety of states so we could also compare how district management interacted with different state policy environments to influence implementation of the same CSR models. The final case sample contained districts in five state policy environments that varied in terms of the complexity of instructional guidance and incentives for improvement, across levels of governance. These policy environments ranged from New York state where New York City schools operated in the most complex environment in terms of the amount of guidance and high stake testing, to Washington State where local control held sway and elementary assessments or other guidance instruments were few. The other states, Florida, New Jersey and Minnesota fell in-between Adderly to Palmsburg on the complexity continuum, in that order.

For the 6 district cases, we used data from semi-structured interviews with state and district respondents, as well as from structured principal interviews and a teacher questionnaire in each of the 38 schools across these case study districts (see Appendix A). In 14 of those 38

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schools nested within the 6 district cases we also conducted interviews with teachers, the CSR coaches, vice principals, and other instructional leaders in ELA. Our study was primarily qualitative and we make inferences typical of that tradition, but we also mixed our methods in the implications section using descriptive quantitative data to extend our view beyond what we could learn from interviewing district and case school respondents alone.

Data Analysis

Analyses for this article draw primarily on data collected in the first two years of the study from winter of 2001 to winter and spring of 2002. We asked all respondents about their views on: the coherence of guidance; the stability and use of resources, including resources supporting high quality learning opportunities for practitioners; and finally system incentives, including those that mobilized or maintained the commitment of educators in the difficult CSR improvement work.

We developed a coding system for the interview data, based on key constructs: coherence (consistency of vertical or horizontal guidance) and capacity (incentives and resources for building the will and skill of educators). After developing a glossary, piloting the coding process, and developing inter-rater reliability rates of at least 70%, researchers coded the transcripts independently, 'double coding' a fraction to confirm agreement rates. The data were then entered into NUD*IST or NVivo databases. *3* For each of our six case districts, the field research team also completed standard analytic district-level write-ups to focus their field notes and judgments derived from state and district interviews. With these data, the authors used qualitative typology development to categorize districts' approaches in various state policy environments (Tashakkori and Teddlie, 1998).

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For the implications sections, the authors compared interview text from principals in the 38 schools with rank ordered school means on a spring 2002 teacher questionnaire in the same 38 schools. We also used interview data from the above-mentioned school leaders and a sample of teachers working in 14 case schools for triangulation purposes (Author, 2004; Denzin, 1989; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). We compared respondents' views on the extent to which guidance for instruction was inconsistent under the different district management types. Likewise, capacity indicators reflect principals' and teachers' characterizations of incentives and the resources they received or used from multiple sources. The teacher survey includes an inconsistency measure and captures the features of high quality learning we reviewed in our frame, including the extent to which teachers reported that their learning: 1) focused on the elements of instruction; and 2) focused especially on ELA content, the targeted area for improvement (see Appendix A for all survey measures).

Limitations

Our bias entering this study was that improving instruction is a key leverage point for improving the education of low achieving students (Cohen, Raudenbush & Ball 2003; Raudenbush, 2008). We thus focused our data collection and analyses on domains or variables that could influence instruction. We should also note that some of the data we used for this study were collected just prior to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed into law in January, 2002 and thus do not reflect the strongest influence of testing and accountability on districts, schools, or instruction (though our respondents showed a heightened awareness of state tests due to the pending accountability measures in NCLB at that time). As with most qualitative studies, our presence in districts and schools as well as the focus of our questions could have influenced respondents' reports and our results.

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Results

How Did Districts Manage External Designs and Instructional Improvement in Environments?

We found that district professionals varied in their approach to managing instructional improvement models within the different state policy environments in which they were situated. Based on the patterns in our data, the typology below describes variation in district management on two critical dimensions: 1) the extent to which leaders used one CSR design as a district-wide school improvement strategy; and 2) the extent to which district leaders sought to centralize and actively manage instructional improvement (see Table 1 below). We define 'jurisdictional' management as a district leadership approach that uses *one* design for organizing school improvement district-wide. We use the term 'non-jurisdictional' management to describe districts where multiple CSR models operated and no one design was preferred. Likewise, we situate district management approaches on a continuum ranging from centralized, active management to decentralized, passive management of instructional improvement. These management dimensions interacted with different CSR designs and different state policy environments. We sketch the key features of policy environments in the table below at the top of each cell within parentheses.

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Table 1

Typology of District Management Within State Environments

Centralized vs. decentralized district management	**Jurisdictional** One CSR model central to district management	**Non-jurisdictional** Multiple CSR models No one model central to district management
Highly Centralized Active, centralized district management of instructional improvement	**Coverdale, FL** (Strong state accountability, more complex governance and instructional guidance system from state and region) ▪ Centralized district press for AC adoption and Standards Based Reform (SBR) ▪ Active involvement in coordinating CSR improvement process (incentives, district leadership practice, PD, and other resources aligned with AC) ▪ High-moderate centralized guidance for instruction from district and AC consistent with CSR instructional design ▪ High effort to centrally coordinate state or district curriculum and assessments with preferred CSR	**Sunnyside, NJ** (Moderate state accountability, moderate system complexity. State mandate for CSR adoption from approved list and resources) ▪ District centrally constrained schools' CSR choice to create three cohorts using three different models ▪ Although non-jurisdictional, CSR central to district management of instructional improvement. Active district involvement in improvement process including direct leadership support to schools, additional PD to support CSR, and directing state resources ▪ High effort to centrally coordinate instructional designs, curriculum and multiple CSRs through 'bundling' model components or otherwise 'filling in gaps' between state standards and CSRs
Mixed Includes both centralized and decentralized management of instructional improvement	**Markham, MN** (Weaker state accountability. Decentralized state guidance over instruction) ▪ Centralized district preference for adoption of AC and press for AC-like components district-wide (ELA) ▪ Moderate involvement in managing CSR improvement process: Mandates CSR in low-performing schools, and provides resources/incentives for AC, including PD ▪ Expands accountability, AC curriculum initiatives district wide, but also launches school-	**Adderly, NY** (Stronger state and city accountability in a complex multi-level system. Profuse/complex instructional guidance from state, city) ▪ CSR *not* central to district instructional management ▪ Laissez faire, decentralized district approach to adoption and management of multiple CSR designs ▪ Minimal involvement in managing CSR schools through meetings to share ideas & expertise across models, funding ▪ District issued profuse

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Centralized vs. decentralized district management	**Jurisdictional** One CSR model central to district management	**Non-jurisdictional** Multiple CSR models No one model central to district management
	based decision-making initiative ▪ Moderate effort to centrally coordinate instruction, curriculum and CSR (curriculum initiatives consistent w/AC, but inconsistent test)	instructional guidance profuse, but often weakly specified ▪ Low district effort to centrally coordinate profuse instructional guidance, curriculum, PD with CSR
Highly Decentralized, passive district management of instructional improvement	**Palmsburg, WA** (Weaker state accountability. Decentralized state guidance over instruction, thus little guidance) ▪ District supported one model (ASP) as central improvement process (incentives to adopt, sustain, and stable resources) ▪ Decentralized district management over instruction due in part to ASP design ▪ Low effort to centrally coordinate instructional improvement or teacher PD	**Freightville, NJ (**Moderate state accountability, moderate system complexity/state control over instructional guidance. State mandate for CSR adoption and resources) ▪ Decentralized LEA control of schools' CSR choice—very little involvement ▪ Decentralized district management of instructional improvement, including outsourcing PD to private vendors, narrowing central office role in curriculum & instruction ▪ Low effort to centrally coordinate instructional improvement or teacher PD

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Table 1 shows that the local management of instructional improvement through CSR designs in our district cases ranged from Coverdale, Florida in the upper left corner of the table, where the leadership actively managed implementation of one model (AC) as a centralized strategy for district-wide reform, to Freightville, New Jersey in the bottom right corner of the table. Freightville schools selected the model of their choice and the central office devolved much of the improvement work to school teams and their many different model providers. Our other districts illustrate different combinations of these dimensions. For example, central office staff in Sunnyside, New Jersey took an active role in managing instructional improvement by centrally 'bundling' three different CSR models in their schools to fill in gaps between state standards and different designs. Adderly, New York embraced a 'laissez-faire' philosophy for managing instructional improvement using the CSR models in their district, but staff was much more actively involved in developing its own centralized instructional guidance for schools, aside from CSR designs. In Palmsburg, Washington the leadership pressed and supported one CSR model as its primary strategy for district-wide school improvement, but did so with an unspecified design for instruction that tended to decentralize instructional decisions to teachers and schools, in a state that did likewise. Markham, Minnesota central office staff allowed schools to select from multiple models, due in part to a strong culture of local control both at the state and district level, but leadership clearly signaled its preference for and coordinated its resources around AC.

In what follows, we briefly describe each district 'type' summarized within the cells in Table 1, including how the salient features of state policy environments or designs interacted with district managers' approaches. We then take up the conditions created by different

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management types, CSR designs, and policy environments in terms of their implications for scaling up instructional improvement.

Jurisdictional Management

Coverdale, Florida: centralized instructional improvement, jurisdictional management of CSR. This was our strongest case of district leaders using one CSR model (AC) with an accompanying AC-compatible framework for centrally guiding instructional improvement district-wide. Coverdale is a large, urban county with 178 schools, situated in a centralized state policy culture with a long tradition of guidance, testing and strong accountability. Coverdale managers sought to centrally align its own policies with the AC design and address vertical alignment with the state. Working with the National Center for Education and the Economy (NCEE), AC's parent organization, they used AC as the central reform strategy district-wide. These leaders mobilized an array of resources, incentives, and professional learning strategies to congruently support AC implementation, thus also addressing horizontal coherence within the district.

The superintendent had arrived in Coverdale with a clear understanding of AC tenets, and used that philosophy to inform his action. He modeled AC leadership practices and focused administrative meetings with his five regional superintendents on research related to AC-like instruction and leadership practice. These local superintendents then developed study groups for principals who in turn did the same for teachers. The superintendent also engaged in a scale up strategy based on persuasion and strategic human resource development. He used AC to coordinate professional development and curriculum within the district, and encouraged school-based educators to visit model AC schools, where test scores were rising, as a strategy to 'sell'

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other Coverdale school staffs on AC. As a result, 63 schools adopted the AC design within two years.

Palmsburg, Washington: decentralized instructional improvement, jurisdictional management of CSR. We categorize Palmsburg as jurisdictional but highly decentralized in terms of managing instructional improvement (see Table 1). While Coverdale is the largest of the case study districts, and Palmsburg is the smallest, both superintendents similarly pressed one CSR model as a central feature of district reform. Both also embraced a philosophy of school renewal consistent with the CSR models they favored. In Palmsburg, the superintendent organized the district-wide change process from the top by pressuring schools to continue voting until they selected his preferred model: He incentivized its continued use by providing schools with substantial resources. But the Palmsburg superintendent selected the ASP design because it was consistent with his much more 'bottom up' philosophy of school renewal. Both his view and the design reflected a state policy culture that similarly delegated the details of instructional content to local educators. In sum, Palmsburg organized the district-wide change process using one model as an 'overarching strategy,' but district managers and the design left instructional improvement and its guidance for the most part unspecified, in a state that did likewise.

Markham, Minnesota: mixed (centralized and decentralized instructional improvement), jurisdictional management of CSR. We categorized this district as jurisdictional, but moderately active or 'mixed' in terms of centralized management of instructional improvement. Though the Markham School District was located in a larger, more urban setting than Palmsburg, it was similarly situated in a relatively weak accountability state with a strong tradition of local control. In 2001, one respondent commented, 'Influencing instruction is difficult because [Markham] has a culture of ignoring the district offices and each school going about its own business.' Thus,

while the superintendent came to the district with an agenda for shifting authority over instructional management to the central office, she was met by a local cultural imperative to accommodate site-based decision-making.

Nevertheless, the superintendent initiated a local accountability system, and required schools on academic probation to adopt a CSR. Though she allowed schools to choose from multiple designs and gave them budgetary authority, the superintendent signaled her preference for AC. She encouraged an AC brand of standards-based instructional reform district-wide. In her knowledge and use of AC ideas, professional development strategies, incentives and leadership practices, the Markham superintendent was similar to the superintendent in Coverdale.

Non-Jurisdictional (Multiple-Model) Approach to Management

Freightville, New Jersey: decentralized instructional improvement, non-jurisdictional management of CSR. Freightville typifies a 'non-jurisdictional' approach to CSR, with a highly decentralized, more 'passive' approach to managing multiple instructional designs. In keeping with the theory of action underlying CSR, Freightville devolved most instructional improvement decisions, including much of the instructional coordination and professional development, to different CSR models, their liaisons, and school teams. Freightville's leadership explained this approach as an outgrowth of New Jersey's site-based management initiatives, especially the state Supreme Court's Abbott Consent Decree, which had conferred substantial budgetary and decision-making authority to schools, but required them to adopt a CSR.

The superintendent interpreted state initiatives as sharply constraining districts' role in guiding instructional improvement or managing schools' use of CSRs. Freightville schools selected their designs without interference from the district, and adopted a multiplicity of

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models. The superintendent narrowed the role of the district's curriculum and instruction office by moving the district content area supervisors into schools, and by reducing the responsibilities of the director. Freightville largely 'outsourced' its professional development, but offered workshops on topics not covered by the CSRs and negotiated time for teachers' development. The district did not try to align or otherwise coordinate influences on instruction from the models and other policies in the environment.

Sunnyside, New Jersey: centralized instructional improvement, non-jurisdictional management of CSR. Sunnyside management of improvement was both non-jurisdictional, thus allowing multiple designs, and highly centralized. Despite being in the same state policy environment and having a similar student population, Sunnyside's leadership took a much more active role in centrally managing instructional improvement using multiple CSR models than did Freightville. Like Freightville, all the schools in Sunnyside were using one of the eight CSR models approved by the state. But Sunnyside developed a 'constrained choice' adoption system that created cohorts of schools implementing the same CSR models—SFA the first year, ASP the second year, and AC the third year. Given these organizational structures, strong networks of model schools developed to provide support for school leaders.

The Sunnyside central office staff also evaluated the consistency between state instructional guidance and the CSR designs, then 'filled in' perceived gaps between the different models and state or district standards. The district managers' informal theory of instructional improvement allowed for a flexible, modular view of CSR designs. They 'bundled' instructional components from different CSR models based on state standards and the perceived value of those components. For example, the district planned to implement AC Writers Workshop in SFA and ASP schools.

Adderly Community School District, New York: mixed (centralized and decentralized) instructional improvement, non-jurisdictional management of CSR. We categorized Adderly as non-jurisdictional with a mixed management approach—centralized and decentralized—to instruction and its improvement. Some in Adderly's central office embraced a very decentralized, bottom-up philosophy of instructional improvement—especially related to CSR. But others, especially those in the curriculum office, held a more centralized philosophy of instructional management that favored elements in the AC design in part because of work AC had already done in the next level of governance, New York City.

Like Sunnyside, Adderly's managers remained active in centrally managing instruction by urging or requiring some standard ELA guidance. However, they followed a much more 'laissez faire,' decentralized approach to CSR implementation than Sunnyside. Schools were largely free to select their own CSR models without district constraint, using state and federal grants. As a result, the district housed seven designs, more than any other district in New York City. Moreover, Adderly's 38 schools were under the governing authority not only of their community school district office and its elected school board, but also of the amply staffed New York City Board of Education and the State of New York. Schools here operated in the 'thickest,' most complex environment in our sample and were subject to episodic shifts in guidance for instructional improvement.

Implications for Scaling Up Instructional Improvement

Here we analyze the ways in which these different management dimensions interacted with CSR designs and policy environments to influence the incentives, resources, and consistency of guidance for educators in schools. A jurisdictional approach, for example, could create program stability and a supportive environment for CSR implementation more easily than

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could multiple-model approaches. We then take up the second dimension in our typology: centralized versus decentralized district management in terms of teachers' and principals' characterizations of coherent guidance and capacity-building learning. Where salient we identify the overlap and synergy of the two dimensions for district level instructional leadership as they are logically linked. For example, both of the dimensions, as well as the extent of design specification, influenced the extent to which district leaders could develop a degree of horizontal, conceptual coherence in district guidance for improving instruction. Finally, we consider how management strategies could also affect district managers' own capacity that in turn could affect the quality of instructional leadership they provided.

Jurisdictional Management: Motivating Change While Building Capacity

From an organizational learning perspective, jurisdictional leaders, especially those who centralized resource management, used resources strategically to encourage learning efforts aligned to specific reform-oriented content for CSR implementers within and across organizations. They also developed a shared understanding of the reform across schools and district offices. From an open systems institutional perspective, school principals are 'boundary spanners' who interact frequently with their district offices to secure the resources they need, and they are thus acutely attuned to leadership signals in their environment (Lam, 1997). In all of our jurisdictional districts, leaders' preferences for one model was a strong incentive for implementers to adopt and sustain CSR designs because it signaled a commitment to reform and the promise of stable, added resources for enactors.

This was true even in Markham, where the prized tradition of local control led the superintendent to be cautious about overtly pressing for AC. School leaders were nevertheless quite cognizant of her preference. The head of the teachers' union said, for example, "You know,

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Superintendent Byng . . . didn't come out and say 'You're all going to do America's Choice.' But there was a feeling among some of the principals that this was a good model and should be selected." In fact six out of the eight schools identified as low performing and thus required to select a CSR model ultimately chose AC. Similarly, all 9 Coverdale principals and all 3 Palmsburg principals we interviewed pointed to the superintendent's leadership, or district leadership more generally, as key in their selection of the preferred designs.

Jurisdictional leaders also expanded resources for schools in their favored design and this too was an incentive for educators to sustain their efforts. Palmsburg's superintendent sought out and pieced together financial support for ASP even in the face of large budget cuts overall. Teachers were aware of district support. Said one, "This is the first time that I have ever seen a district be passionate and follow through. And they support it [the ASP model] financially which really tells you that the district is committed." Coverdale reallocated resources from diverse, funding streams to pay the cost of implementing AC in 63 schools. School leaders were well aware of these resource shifts. For example, all 9 of the Coverdale AC principals we interviewed reported receiving ample support for design implementation from the district office. This principal is typical in her report: "They have given us support never-ending, financially, and support from district personnel." But 2 sample schools that were not implementing AC complained of resource problems. A principal in one noted: "I would like to see more professional development going on in the schools that aren't America's Choice. That's my big thing." Similarly, even in a time of fiscal constraint in Markham, the district superintendent focused available resources on the preferred AC design, a fact not lost on the 2 SFA principals we interviewed who perceived less support.

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While central office management in the jurisdictional districts used their positional authority and funding to enlist and encourage schools to sustain the preferred designs' improvement work, all 3 districts stopped short of mandating dramatic controls over instruction. Instead, these leaders, especially in our more centralized jurisdictional sites, also used their resources strategically to develop a horizontal, district-wide press for engaging with the design. In Coverdale and Markum for example, leaders began to incorporate ideas or components of the preferred model into district instructional guidance policies and leadership practices. In all three of our jurisdictional districts, leaders used resources for enactors' learning that were conceptually congruent with the philosophy of learning informing the favored design.

Improvement work in the more centralized jurisdictional districts—across both local control and more hierarchical state policy environments—not only offers concrete images of instructional leadership for improving schools, but also shows how incentives can be "intensified" and reform principles "spread" (Coburn, 2003; Elmore, 1996). In Coverdale, recall that the superintendent modeled AC leadership practices; centrally coordinated teachers' professional development and standards documents in accordance with AC; and marshaled all manner of other methods for representing or otherwise 'teaching' the AC instructional design to enactors. For example, in partnership with NCEE, the superintendent developed study groups that crossed organizations, developed an ongoing teacher institute aligned with AC instructional practices and put AC coaches in schools. Markham used similar strategies.

Both Coverdale and Markum used model classrooms and model schools to demonstrate AC pedagogical principles 'in action', and to convince teachers of the instructional design's value. The superintendent in Coverdale said:

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> I created a massive migration program of teachers visiting other teachers' classrooms. I told people, 'Go see what's happening in these 14 schools who are trying America's Choice. I want you to believe in it by seeing it.' And that's what they did.

A principal illustrates the motivating aspects of these concrete, practice-based learning experiences: "Other teachers using AC sold the program. Actually seeing the class. . .and the written results, and the enthusiasm of other teachers, convinced us." Leaders in both these districts were using interpersonal, practice-based, capacity building strategies to motivate organizational and instructional change focused on content consistent with the CSR design over a sustained period of time.

Overall, across a range of different state policy environments, a jurisdictional resource management approach provided incentives for enactors to adopt and sustain the favored model; the stability and opportunity for making sense of the core ideas in that model; and in districts with more centralized instructional improvement strategies, the potential for deploying coherent district-wide messages about reform. Thus, they were able to address several critical problems of scale-up (Cohen, Raudenbush & Ball, 2003; Elmore, 1996).

Non-jurisdictional Sites

In non-jurisdictional sites where there was less commitment to any one design, we found less district capacity (willingness or ability) for developing shared knowledge of CSRs within the central office, and less effort to intentionally provide resources compatible with particular schools' CSR designs. Though Sunnyside, New Jersey, our most centralized non-jurisdictional site did seek to develop a district-wide approach to guidance, doing so was difficult. Even there, as in the other non-jurisdictional sites, the lack of district commitment to a single design could undermine enactors' expectations for stable resources.

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Adderly, New York was the non-jurisdictional management site where schools faced the most challenges. In Adderly, district commitment to CSR reform was very weak, state and city accountability was strong, and governance over instruction complex. The absence of dedicated district resources and commitment ultimately confused and dampened the motivation of school staff as it contributed to a very unstable, episodic environment for implementing any CSR in Adderly. After three years of implementing AC for example, staff in Westwood Elementary, one of our case sites, had moved more students out of the lowest level on the state and city assessments than any other school in the borough. Despite the improvement and citywide recognition, Westwood did not meet all 'adequate yearly progress' criteria. The district consequently mandated a different reading program (Voyager) for all designated low-performing schools. This action considerably undermined staff motivation and their work in developing capacity for AC instruction. A teacher in Westwood illustrates the pattern of responses to this mandate.

> It seems like a lot of money is invested in [AC] . . . . But they keep changing these programs, and you really need to stick with a program for a while to see if it's successful. From what I've seen it's [AC has] been successful.

The AC literacy coach for this school said, "We are extremely unhappy. . . . This is three years into America's Choice. We're just getting a handle on the reading. We're just beginning to see it, and next year we think we'll be doing Voyager." The situation was similar in our SFA case site where the facilitator had purchased thousands of SFA books and then the district mandated a new program. She said, "If you look around this room all this material that was bought…now what happens?"

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Even in a much more stable state environment for resources like New Jersey where the New Jersey Supreme Court ensured CSR implementers would have stable state funding, the lack of district commitment to a single design could create uncertainty about resource stability for these educators. Managers in Freightville, our most decentralized, non-jurisdictional site for example, granted waivers from district policies and advocated for greater funding from the state. But these managers did not provide additional resources or incentives to signal a preference for any particular model. Moreover, the superintendent planned to evaluate each CSR. He said, "We are in the early stages of a deep critique of each of the models." In this regard, the long-term stability of any one particular model was not ensured.

Centralized Versus Decentralized Management of Instructional Improvement: The Relationship Between Coherence and Capacity

Below we analyze the implications of centralized management versus decentralized management for developing coherence and capacity from the view of principals and teachers in 38 sample schools within our 6 districts. Throughout the sections we triangulate percentile rank ordered school means from a teacher survey administered in spring 2002 (Appendix A) with findings from principal interviews, supplemented with more in-depth school level interviews in case sites. We again consider the advantage in the synergy of the two management dimensions where salient.

We discuss three findings summarized below in Table 2: First, in more centralized sites where managers were active in trying to coordinate incentives, resources, and guidance around one or more designs for instructional improvement educators in our sample schools could still report inconsistencies in their guidance (for example, Coverdale and Sunnyside).

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In fact less district management was more conducive to implementers' *perceptions* of consistency in guidance for instruction (for example, Freightville).

Second, the more centralized, active district management did matter for extending CSR learning resources and intensifying incentives for improvement, thus confirming findings described in the jurisdictional section above. This finding held, even in a non-jurisdictional site. Teachers in these districts (for example, Coverdale and Sunnyside) generally reported high levels of quality learning on the survey, the kind associated with improved instruction. Interviews confirmed that these schools engaged with district level instructional leaders and used district-sponsored content-focused development resources. In the more decentralized management sites such as Freightville and Palmsburg, the CSRs alone did not appear to be sufficient for sustaining teachers' learning for continuous improvement in schools.

Finally, indicators for high quality learning in schools were often accompanied by educators' perceptions of inconsistent guidance in these same schools. Patterns in our interview data and the perspectives in our frame suggest several potential reasons for these findings. We discuss the details of our results and what they imply for district level instructional leadership aimed at scaling up improvement in the next sections.

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Table 2

Summary of Teachers' Reports of High Quality Learning Experiences and Perceptions of Inconsistent Guidance by Schools Within Case Districts

District/School	Instruction Focused PD	ELA Focused Learning/Effort	Inconsistency
Coverdale, Florida: centralized, jurisdictional			
09-AC-46	+	++	++
09-AC-47	+	-	++
09-AC-48	+	+	- -
09-AC-65	++	++	-
09-AC-66	+	-	-
09-AC-03	++	++	++
09-AC-04	+	+	++
09-AC-70	++	-	++
09-AC-76	++	++	++
09-COMP-22	- -	+	- -
09-COMP-23	-	+	++
Sunnyside, New Jersey: centralized, non-jurisdictional			
18-ASP -75	-	++	+
18-AC-14	++	+	+
18-AC-36	+	+	++
18-AC-37	+	-	-
18-SFA-73	-	+	+
18-SFA-89	-	+	+
18-SFA-90	-	-	- -
Freightville, New Jersey: decentralized, non-jurisdictional			
ASP-18	-	+	-
ASP-19	+	+	+
ASP-15	+	-	-
SFA-23	- -	- -	-
SFA-24	- -	-	-
SFA-25	- -	- -	-

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SFA-77	-	-	- -
COMP-14	-	+	-
Adderly, New York: mixed, non-jurisdictional			
AC-09	-	- -	++
AC-60	-	++	+
SFA-02	-	-	++
COMP-09	-	+	+
Markum, Minnesota: mixed, jurisdictional			
AC-02 (preferred model)	++	++	-
SFA-06	-	- -	+
COMP-57	+	-	- -
COMP-59	- -	-	+
Palmsburg, Washington: decentralized, jurisdictional			
ASP-39	- -	- -	-
ASP-40	- -	- -	+
ASP-41	-	-	-

Key: **(++)** Top 20 % of 110 survey schools based on percentile rank ordered means; **(+)** above the 50th percentile; **(-)** below the 50th percentile; **(- -)** Bottom 20 %.

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Centralized Versus Decentralized Management and Educators' Perceptions of Consistency in Guidance.

Given our framing perspectives showing the importance of district 'protection' for CSR, we found what we had expected in Adderly, New York where complex governance, profuse guidance in the environment and a laissez-faire management approach to CSRs created conflicting signals about priorities for instructional improvement. In all 4 Adderly schools, means on indicators of teachers' perceptions of inconsistent guidance ranked in the top half of our sample. In 2 of those schools, teachers' ranked very high on the inconsistency measure, at the 97th and 81st percentiles. As one SFA principal explained, 'We have to implement many different initiatives including Writers' Workshop. . . . There are too many [instructional initiatives], and when that happens you lose your focus." Another typical principal compared district guidance to the guidance from the schools' CSR:

> Write from Beginning [the district program]? No, we are not all on the same page. Teachers come back confused. They say, 'This is what our [district] manual says, but you say we should be doing [America's Choice] Writer's Workshop. What should I do?'

Adderly's decentralized approach to instructional improvement, combined with its more active approach to instructional guidance more generally, did little to coordinate profuse guidance with the multiple CSR designs that schools selected, and even less to buffer CSR schools from it.

Centralized districts. But even in sites where managers were most active in trying to centrally coordinate guidance congruent with CSR designs, educators in our sample schools could still perceive inconsistencies. In Coverdale for example, results from the survey show

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teachers' perceptions of inconsistent guidance remained high in 6 of the 9 AC sample schools (see Table 2). One reason, discussed by principals in 5 of these 6 schools, was the state FCAT and its incongruence with AC instruction or AC's National Standards Reference Exam (NSRE). Here the source of the problem was *vertical* alignment as the performance items more compatible with AC were neither scored nor included in the state's accountability index that year. While Coverdale managers had little control over this technical alignment problem, Coverdale principals readily recognized the dissonance. A typical principal explained:

> The state exam does not really correlate well with 'think, reason and explain', which is more of what America's Choice is doing. [Nor does it correlate with] working towards expressive problem solving, children who are doing long open-ended questions. . . . But politically we cannot let doing well on the FCAT go away.

Such remarks indicate that the state assessment was a strong contributor to the coherence problems perceived by staff, in comments that also reflect a strong understanding of the AC design.

A second important source of incoherence as reported by school level enactors in our most centralized non-jurisdictional district, Sunnyside New Jersey, was managers' attempts to 'fill in the gaps' between different CSR instructional designs and the state standards reform. Recall that the Sunnyside central office 'bundled' SFA reading into the early elementary grades in ASP schools. The AC writing component was spread to ASP and SFA schools, then monitored with a district developed writing test based on that AC component and aligned with the state assessment. While AC principals found the district's emphasis on Writers Workshop consistent with their AC writing design, sampled SFA principals found such guidance to be

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inconsistent. Said one, for example: "We have found that it's contradictory. The SFA program is a reading program . . . now how the kids are being tested is basically writing. . . and open-ended questions and SFA program doesn't address that a lot."

Teachers in Sunnyside's sample schools reported high levels of inconsistency and uncertainty about guidance for instruction. This was so in 5 of our 7 schools across all three designs, where means of teachers' inconsistency reports ranked in the top half of our entire sample (see Table 2). Interviews confirm and elaborate on the survey results. When asked, for example, if SFA reading in the lower grades was compatible with ASP, a leader in our case site where teachers ranked high on the inconsistency measure said: "No. It's [SFA is] very scripted, which limits the students' ability to express their thinking" (an important aspect of ASP's principles of powerful learning). A fourth grade ASP teacher responded to the districts' 'bundling' strategy this way: "The intent and the motives [improved student achievement] are the same but the process that both entities [district and ASP] are espousing are diametrically opposed."

Moreover, AC writing and reading are closely integrated, but the SFA reading component does not allow for that kind of integration. An SFA case teacher illustrates the nuanced differences between SFA reading and the districts' performance assessment in which AC writing was integrated with reading (as well as aligned with the state assessment):

> I think the biggest problem is the ESPA and the district assessment [ask students to] really dissect that text. They ask you to talk about the author's purpose, and to figure out the figurative language. There's nothing like that in SFA.

In this case school, teachers ranked high on the inconsistency measure, in the 70th percentile.

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In summary, Sunnyside's more active central managers were supplementing SFA and ASP to align with state performance standards and their own writing assessment. They were also supplementing perceived gaps in the AC reading program in an attempt to centrally coordinate reading across the district. But the lack of 'fit' among AC, SFA and ASP could create important inconsistencies at the fine-grained level of instructional decision making *within* each particular CSR design.

Decentralized districts. In contrast, less central office management activity was more conducive to implementers' *perceptions* of consistent guidance within schools. Freightville, demonstrates this point well because it is located in the same state policy context as Sunnyside New Jersey, but managers there used a much more decentralized approach to guiding instruction and CSRs. In stark contrast to Sunnyside, survey results show that Freightville teachers in 7 out of 8 schools across different models perceived the guidance they received to be consistent (Table 2). Though some of the school leaders we interviewed complained about testing, most assumed that the decentralized nature of the district empowered them to buffer inconsistencies. When asked about conflicts with the district, for example, a principal typical of others in schools where teachers ranked low on the inconsistency measure said: "What they [the district staff] have done is allowed us to utilize the curriculum and the textbook materials that's called for in our model." In their interviews, case study teachers *did not* report inconsistencies between their design and the district curriculum or the state test, even when probed on this issue. As one, fourth grade teacher told us: "The ESPA is reasonably compatible with SFA."

Centralized Versus Decentralized Management of Instructional Improvement, Teachers' Learning and District Capacity Building

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But centralized management activity did matter in terms of district, instructional leadership and strategically extending CSR resources. While teachers in the more centralized districts often reported inconsistent guidance, they could also report more high quality learning experiences than teachers in our more decentralized districts. Our analyses suggest that CSRs alone were not sufficient for sustaining teachers' learning and a cycle of improvement in schools. Whether districts actively coordinated and focused additional professional development or other resources around the content in CSR designs also seemed to matter in whether teachers reported high levels of learning focused on instruction and/or ELA content. Again, the combination of the centralized and jurisdictional dimensions of management was important here.

Recall that leaders in Coverdale had not only worked with the CSR umbrella organization to create one central teacher development institute that was well coordinated with AC-ELA instructional practice, but had also supported teacher study groups and AC coaching. In all 9 Coverdale AC schools, teachers' mean scores ranked very high on professional development focused on instruction, and in 6 of those schools teachers also reported very high learning effort focused on ELA content (see Table 2). All sampled principals reported strong district instructional leadership and support for AC teacher development.

Similarly, in Markham, where managers centrally coordinated available professional development resources around AC, teachers in the sample AC school ranked very high on the learning measures, while those in the other schools not implementing AC ranked lower or very low. This was not the case in Palmsburg, a site that dedicated stable resources to its favored ASP design, but decentralized instructional improvement and professional development to schools. Teachers in sampled Palmsburg schools ranked very low on the learning measures, and 2 were at or below the 15th percentile.

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Centralized versus decentralized instructional improvement. The New Jersey sites show the contrast between these two approaches to leadership in districts with multiple CSR designs. In Sunnyside, where district staff sought to centrally manage and support its three CSRs, teachers ranked consistently high on professional learning measures. Teachers in 6 of our 7 schools ranked well above the 50th percentile on at least one measure, and sometimes both, including older schools in their third or fourth year of working with the CSR. In one school, teachers ranked above the 90th percentile, and in another above the 80th on indicators.

In interviews, all 7 Sunnyside principals reported that their staff received direct instructional leadership support from the district, attended district sponsored ELA workshops and used district supported after school 'in-services' aligned to their respective CSRs. When asked what resources the district provided to support CSR, a typical principal explained: "Human resources, to give us a better understanding of how to implement the program." Another principal said: "District supervisors come into the buildings and work with teachers directly." Noting such human resources another said, "It's really a collaborative effort [with the district] in terms of improving student achievement." Finally, teachers here frequently found their respective CSR designs' collaborative work sessions helpful in learning to change their instruction, many of which occurred in district sponsored after school in-services.

In Freightville, a district that intentionally devolved the core of instructional improvement to multiple CSR designers and schools, all sampled principals reported that the district did not provide instructional resources or support for their CSRs. Said one SFA principal, "[They] leave us alone. If we want anything, we're going to get it from SFA, or we're going to identify what we need." Compared to Sunnyside and other more centralized districts, teachers here ranked low or varied dramatically by school on the learning measures, depending

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on the strength of school leadership and CSR supports. For example, teachers in our SFA case site ranked higher on the learning measures than teachers in the other 3 SFA schools where they ranked at the very bottom of the 115, SII school sample. The SFA coach was a strong influence on teachers' learning in the case site—for example, "Our component meeting is a teachable, knowledgeable hour" [fourth grade teacher]—even in the fourth year of implementation. In the lowest ranking school (first percentile) the principal told us the coach had taken a leave, and professional development consisted of a few teachers attending one of three national SFA conferences.

These findings challenge some of the conceptions of scale up that were built into the Federal and state CSR program that operated at the time of our study. While CSR designs aimed to "institutionalize" strong on-site coaching and/or other capacity-building organizational arrangements in schools to maintain a continuous learning and improvement cycle, the generally lower and varying reports of high quality learning in decentralized districts where schools were left on their own with CSRs suggests that this strategy is not necessarily self-sustaining. This is especially demonstrated in 'older' schools that were in the forth year of implementation. School-based policies that focus on building capacity and coherence from the inside of schools out may be expecting too little of districts. At the same time asking district professionals in multiple-model sites to serve as strong instructional leaders and actively 'fill in' all that is needed after resources from multiple CSR designs diminish, may be expecting too much. We take up the second point below.

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Building District Knowledge and Commitment for Scaling-up Instructional Improvement

Research on the capacity needed for district level instructional leadership is limited, and generally confined to the implementation of standards based reform or single programs. But it suggests that when district staff understand and then develop ways to 'teach' or otherwise represent core ideas about a reform's content to school staff, school-level implementation of those ideas are stronger (Coburn, 2003; Elmore & Burney, 2000; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Stein & D'amico, 2002). We assumed that to gain such understanding of instructional designs would require substantial learning about them. Evidence of learning would include district respondents' reports about their willingness and opportunities for making sense of the reforms, as well as an ability to articulate the designs' principles and practices. Our two large urban districts show differences between a centralized jurisdictional and a more decentralized, non-jurisdictional approach in terms of managing improvement through CSR instructional designs.

In Coverdale, personnel were able to articulate strong accounts of the preferred CSR (AC). They reported not only their willingness for learning about this design, but also described opportunities for doing so through study groups with assistant superintendents and principals, NCEE materials and so on. The Coverdale superintendent was no exception. He explained: "I spent a lot of time studying everything I could read on school reform, including books by Marc Tucker and Judy Codding from the NCEE, the sponsor of America's Choice." In interviews he and others in the central office were able to describe the nature of ACs organizational, leadership and instructional design, and to recreate its practices through a range of interactions with schools.

In contrast, district staff in multiple model, decentralized sites reported that it was exceptionally challenging to understand the complexities of many different designs. Adderly is

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the most definitive case as central office personnel, from assistant superintendents to federal programs directors, were charged with monitoring instruction in low performing schools by conducting on site, classroom 'walk-throughs.' But, Adderly personnel indicated that they had only very superficial understanding of the different designs. They understood even less about how these various designs might be integrated into their own instructional leadership efforts. An Assistant Superintendent pointed to the difficulty as it related to classroom walk-throughs:

> The struggle is supervising all of these . . . models. I may be accustomed to observing a literacy lesson one way, but Modern Red says, 'We do it like this.' America's Choice says, 'Oh no, they can't write using inventive spelling because . . . we do it like this.' The district says, 'No, we can use inventive spelling to grade one so we want to see this.'

In Freightville, a decentralized multiple-model district, respondents also reported a weak understanding of the different designs, and rarely even communicated with the providers because, "There's so many of them. What are we going to do?" While the more centralized managers in Sunnyside made a serious attempt to learn three different designs; still they tended to define surface features of components rather than deeper pedagogical differences when they bundled them into schools.

We found the decentralized nature of CSR and school based reform could work against the development of district level capacity for instructional leadership. Not only was it more challenging to understand and work effectively with multiple designs for improvement, but school based incentives for 'buying-in' to different instructional improvement designs also threatened the professional identity of district curriculum and development staff. These staff, the most likely 'instructional leaders' in districts, reported feeling responsible for a variety of curricular alignment or coordinating tasks due in part to the expectations of state standards-based

reforms and accountability. When schools used very different materials and instructional approaches embedded in many different designs, their use could affect the efficacy, commitment and authority of these central office staff. The Freightville curriculum director for example, is typical in expressing skepticism about a decentralized strategy in terms of horizontal coherence: "Is it all aligned? I don't know… What is the core value for the district? What will cut across the programs and models? There is no consistency with models." Ironically, these staff members, or 'instructional leaders' are often the ones who must help schools sustain and improve the reforms when the contracts with external providers end (and often before).

Conclusion

Education policy has a long and episodic history of incorporating the 'next best strategy' for improving struggling schools before the complete story from research on the previous reform is written and understood. As policymakers continue to shift more of the onus for school improvement on struggling districts, our study contributes to a line of ideas about developing district capacity for meeting this pressing challenge.

Prior research has described leadership principles for scaling up improvement consistent with the theory of CSR, suggesting district managers should devolve instructional improvement work to schools, 'protect' different CSR designs from inconsistent guidance, then provide enactors with conventional resources--funding, and staff for example (Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002; Desimone, 2002). Alternatively, research and theory focusing more specifically on district level *instructional* leadership have been confined primarily to studies of standards based reforms that intentionally lack specifics for instructional improvement, or single programs. This literature argues that district leaders need knowledge resources—substantial knowledge of reforms' "pedagogical principles" and "content"—to effectively

implement and sustain them (Coburn, 2003; Elmore & Burney; Spillane, 2004; Spillane & Thompson, 1997; Stein & Nelson, 2003).

Our study builds on these lines of research using key perspectives in the scale up literature that elaborate on the challenges district managers face. These perspectives emphasize not only the problem of coherent guidance across organizations within a fragmented institutional system, but also the problem of developing practitioners' and organizations' capacity for complex social change at different levels of the local system (Blumenfeld, Fishman, et al., 2000; McLaughlin & Mitra, 2001). Thus, we have looked closely and specifically at an underdeveloped area of the scale up literature; that is, the capacity needed for district level instructional leadership around multiple CSRs, especially their specific designs for improving instruction.

While standards based reform has provided frames or principles for creating a shared curricular vision and common performance goals, the CSRs in our study contributed new, quite specific procedural knowledge for addressing the problem of *how* to meet those goals. Consistent with some previous CSR studies, we found the district leadership could play a critical role in enhancing or hindering the kind of school and classroom-level changes that CSRs try to establish (Berends, 2004; Datnow & Stringfield, 2000).

But in unpacking the specifics of district-level instructional leadership for CSR that previous studies have found lacking (see e.g. Berends, Bodilly & Kirby, 2002), we found that such leadership was based on knowledge specific to the content in particular designs more than generic principles of effective CSR leadership. Building on Coburn's and others' conception of the district role in scale up, our evidence shows that deep knowledge of the instructional designs and strategic, content specific incentives linked to capacity building

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support for those designs created conditions most conducive to scaling up instructional improvement, including broad central office ownership.

We also found an important factor previous studies or existing theories have tended to over-look: When districts used a decentralized, non-jurisdictional management approach to CSRs—the strategy most compatible with the original theory of CSR—such an approach worked against the growth of design specific knowledge, ownership, and strategic management of resources in district central offices. Lack of district level knowledge and commitment threatened the stability of improvement and could leave schools dependent on school leadership or the CSR organizations, both of which were not only highly variable in their capacity for deepening or sustaining schools' improvement efforts, but could also be unstable.

Given the mix of evidence, we argue that a more centralized jurisdictional approach using at least a somewhat specified design for instruction (for example, Coverdale and Markum), could more easily support coherent guidance and capacity-building for improvement, than could any combination of management that included either decentralized instructional improvement strategies within a jurisdiction (for example Palmsburg), or centralized instructional improvement efforts in a non-jurisdictional setting (Sunnyside).

This was so because district staff in a centralized jurisdictional setting could not only gain the knowledge and understanding of the instructional reform they needed more easily, but they also played a key role in the improvement process. In these sites, leaders were able to provide persuasive images of the reforms' instructional principles 'in-action' to teachers and principals, images that both educated and motivated these educators. Consistent with our framing perspectives, these sites illustrate how incentives for teachers to engage with

and sustain new practices can be "intensified" and pedagogical content knowledge "spread," not only within a central office, but also across district schools, and "deeply" within schools to classrooms (Coburn, 2003; Cohen & Ball, 2007; Elmore, 1996).

Our evidence shows that in more centralized sites (Coverdale, Markham, Sunnyside) active managers provided direct support to schools, strategically coordinated professional development and otherwise allocated capacity building resources around the specifics of one or more CSRs. In these districts, teachers' in the preferred models reported experiencing more high quality professional learning than teachers in the other districts, learning efforts that our framing research shows are associated with instructional improvement.

But the framing perspectives we use also argue that scaling up improvement requires both capacity and coherence in schools. Nevertheless, we found that while centralized management seemed to make a positive difference in teachers' reports of quality learning efforts, decentralized management appeared more conducive to teachers' perceptions of consistent instructional guidance. Our frame and evidence provide alternative, though not necessarily competing hypotheses that could account for these educators' views.

First, from an organizational learning perspective the conception of scale up we use requires "altering teachers' beliefs, norms of social interaction and pedagogical principles as enacted in the curriculum" (Coburn, 2003 p. 5). This kind of deep change necessarily engages teachers or school leaders with novel ideas many of which are inconsistent with prior policies and their prior practices. Thus in the more centralized districts where teachers in the same schools reported both inconsistent guidance *and* high learning effort, such reports may not always be an obstacle to reform. Rather, it is plausible that they could be an indicator of complex change taking place.

Second, from an institutional perspective, aligning guidance governing complex social action is a multi-faceted problem for district managers, policymakers, and researchers studying coherence. Centralized jurisdictional sites such as Coverdale for example, could face incongruence between the preferred model components and mandated high stakes state assessments. But the ease with which educators could identify this vertical inconsistency suggests that their reports may have come from a shared understanding of the instructional design across the district. This could indicate some horizontal coherence around a common reform vision. But centralized management activity in non-jurisdictional districts such as Sunnyside, New Jersey seemed to contribute to horizontal inconsistencies for teachers and principals as instructional components from different designs were bundled into schools, even as it produced more vertical alignment between designs and the state standards. Districts taking a more decentralized non-jurisdictional approach to instructional improvement (for example, Freightville) may indeed have enabled coherence to build from the 'inside out', but, the trade off here came in teachers' lower and highly variable reports of sustained quality learning experiences.

Given the evidence overall, we found it was easier for district leaders in the more centralized jurisdictional sites to forge interpersonal "communities of practice" (Wenger, McDermott & Snyder, 2002) among key actors across the local system, from classroom teachers and school leaders to district managers, and use the specified content of their CSR instructional design as the 'curriculum' around which these actors could collectively learn. In these cases, consistent with Coburn's (2003) conception of "normative spread" within districts, some design-specific shared professional knowledge among enactors in districts and schools could create a kind of horizontal, conceptual and behavioral coherence that to

some extent withstood misalignment elsewhere in the system. This strategy allowed school and district actors to manage coherence among guidance messages as a dynamic process, even though it did not necessarily produce a technically aligned end state across the education sector (Honig & Hatch, 2004). Moreover, because this approach used capacity building strategies to develop the horizontal coherence, it was able to help educators learn *how* to improve, rather than simply telling them that they must.

But our intent is not to generalize these conclusions to all districts, or to all functions within districts. Instead we aim to contribute to the existing ideas addressing the complex question of how to build capacity for extensive elementary school improvement in struggling districts. This study and framing perspectives have called into question the long-standing idea that district managers can provide strong, coherent, and effective instructional leadership for school improvement when many, different instructional designs are used by schools. On the other hand, the more centralized jurisdictional approach used by our districts was not an overt, hierarchical, control strategy that mandated a specified instructional design or removed school staffs' autonomy in assessing needs and selecting a CSR. But the approach did tend to influence educators' choice of designs, and to some extent guide instruction, as well as educate district staff about the content in the design/s.

Thus, an important question for reform designers and policymakers is, how to provide more explicit, design specific guides and social learning connections for staff in high need districts such that a "critical mass" of staff acquire more content specific knowledge in instructional improvement designs. This kind of capacity building intervention could provide leaders with some of the resources they need for institutionalizing a more strategic improvement process, one that might withstand leadership

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turnover, resource shortages, a fragmented system, and chronic technical misalignment in some portions of that system.

Endnotes

1. For more information on the quantitative design and sample see Rowan and Correnti (2006).

2. The community disadvantage index (CDI) is a measure created by researchers at the Institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan using 1990 census tract in which a school was located. For a more detailed description see, Camburn, Rowan,& Taylor (2003).

3. NUD*IST and NVivo are software programs for analyzing qualitative data. They are manufactured by Qualitative Solutions and Research (QSR) Pty Ltd.

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Appendix A.

Indicators on Teacher Questionnaire, Spring 2002 Measuring Perceptions of Inconsistency in Guidance and Qualities of Learning Experiences

Variables constructed by teachers' mean response within schools to the items in the following questions:

1. Indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements: mark each item. Scale: strongly disagree to strongly agree.

	Inconsistency in Guidance
	Policies about how I should teach are often contradictory
a	I often have difficulty choosing what to do in my classroom out of all the options I hear about
b	Out of all the information about teaching I receive, I am often unsure about how to prioritize things
c	Overall, the instructional policies I am supposed to follow in my classroom seem inconsistent

Note: high score means high perception of inconsistency/uncertainty on instructional guidance

2. Please indicate how many professional development sessions you participated in this year that focused on the following topics (Scale None; 1-2 sessions; 3-7 sessions; 8 or more sessions).

	Instructional Professional Development
a	Student Assessment
b	Curriculum material or frameworks
c	Content or performance standards
d	Teaching methods

Note: high score means high instructional PD

3. Considering formal and informal professional development opportunities you had in reading/language arts this year, how much time and effort did you devote to the following: (Scale: none-1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6-a great deal)

	ELA Content Aligned Learning Effort
a	Improving my knowledge of the writing process
b	Improving my skills at designing reading/language arts tasks for students
c	Analyzing or studying reading/language arts curriculum materials
d	Extending my knowledge about different comprehension strategies
e	Extending my knowledge about different ways to help students blend and segment sounds
f	Improving my knowledge of phonetics
g	Improving my skills at doing miscue analysis

Note: high score means high ELA content aligned learning effort