

# FOUR POINT LEADERSHIP:

The Necessary Bridge Between  
Policy and Educational Equity

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& Human Development

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WORKING PAPER

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## THE FINANCE AND POLICY CONTEXT

*On August 7, 2017, Waukegan Public Schools (WPS) superintendent Theresa Plascensia told all 21 principals in the district that unless the State of Illinois passed a budget (which was already more than two years late), schools in the district would need to close on October 23, 2017, because the district would run out of funds.<sup>1</sup> WPS, a district just outside Chicago, serves 17,000 students, of whom 55% are from low-income families, 78% are Hispanic, and 32% are English language learners. In 2016, only 17% of students were proficient in English language arts according to state test results. Planning for the school closures was taking time and energy from her leadership team, Plascensia added.*

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*In 1990, the State of Kentucky passed legislation that required the creation of School-Based Decision Making (SBDM) councils in every school. These councils—which must include three parents, two teachers, and the school principal—have the authority to hire the principal and determine all the curriculum and programming for the school.<sup>2</sup>*

*The law plays out differently in every district in Kentucky. In Fayette County Public Schools, the state’s second biggest district, which includes the city of Lexington, the SBDM councils—and therefore parents, teachers, and the principal—have a very strong role in shaping the type and quality of education provided by each school and ensuring that the school’s environment and educational program best meet the needs of its students.*

*During a review conducted in Spring 2016, FCPS staff and stakeholders reported that the effectiveness of school councils varies, resulting in uneven quality of principal hiring and school policies, as well as educational programming, curriculum, and instructional management. Although this unevenness can and does occur in more centralized systems where school-level stakeholders have less decision-making authority, most stakeholders in FCPS agreed that their district’s central office has few tools to address issues of inadequate or inconsistent school quality. According to district staff and stakeholders, this widespread belief has resulted in fragmentation, frustration, and acceptance of the status quo, which includes low student achievement and large gaps in achievement among schools and student subgroups.*

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These two examples highlight the critical role that finance, governance, and policy play in American schooling. Indeed, significant bodies of research point to the inequitable opportunities and outcomes generated by the policies for funding and governing schools in the United States. Just recently, the *New York Times Magazine* (2016) published a number of

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<sup>1</sup> Personal communication.

<sup>2</sup> The information about Fayette County Public Schools is from Jofus et al., 2016, an unpublished report prepared by FourPoint Education Partners (Cross & Jofus at the time) and paid for by and submitted to the school district.

articles about the persistent inequalities in American schools that stem from “the country’s cruel history of racial prejudice and exclusion, in particular for black Americans.”

Clearly, effective policies and school finance strategies are necessary to ensure that all students in the U.S. meet their full potential and are prepared to participate fully in our democracy. This paper argues, however, that while, a high-quality policy and finance context is necessary, it is not sufficient to ensure excellent schooling. What is needed is a model of leadership that links an imperfect policy and finance context with the realities of teaching and learning in schools and classrooms. I call this the Four Point Model of Leadership.

## THE FOUR POINT MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

The Four Point Model starts with the premise that school system<sup>3</sup> leadership must first account for its policy context and other environmental factors, “make sense” of that context (Coburn, 2004), and then establish a philosophy for managing schools that drives strategy and actions at the local level. In a sense, the system leader creates a bridge between a policy context that is disconnected from the realities of teaching and learning and the educators, parents, and students who live those realities every day. With this bridge or philosophy—often referred to as a theory of action (Childress et al., 2007)—the district leader defines the extent to which schools have autonomy or are controlled by the central office.

The theory of action will and should look very different in a district like Fayette County with its SBDM councils than in a district like Waukegan Public Schools. It would make no sense, for example, if Fayette County leadership created a theory of action that relied on strong central office control of curriculum since state law would prevent this. On the other hand, if Waukegan granted all its schools total control over curriculum and programming, the central office would be losing economies of scale and exacerbating the deleterious impacts of mobile students’ transition from school to school.

One way of making the idea of theory of action a bit more concrete is to ask the following question: What initiative—or “non-negotiables”—must all schools in the system implement? To oversimplify, the list of non-negotiables in Fayette County will be shorter than that in Waukegan Public Schools.

Once a clear theory of action is established, the Four Point Model posits that the school system leader should empower the administrator or administrators responsible for supervising principals. Although the system leader herself might play this role in smaller districts, the Four Point Model assumes that another professional will take on this role. This distribution of leadership highlights the critical importance of supporting principals as

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<sup>3</sup> In this paper, the term “school system” refers to any number of schools under common management. The examples used are U.S. school districts, although “school system” could also refer to a network of charter schools run by a charter management organization or a group of private schools run or overseen by a single organization.

instructional leaders (Knapp et al., 2006) regardless of which theory of action is selected, while acknowledging the need for the system leader to manage the political context in which the district is operating.

Next, the Four Point Model requires the system leader, principal supervisors, and other key administrators to strengthen the capacity of educators through effective coaching and network building (Fullan & Quinn, 2016). Creating an organizational structure that includes principal supervisors means little unless the people in these and related positions “coach to the redline.” As explained by my colleague Steve Gering (2017), this term means finding the sweet spot in coaching that provides enough guidance to achieve maximum benefit, but not so much guidance that the principal becomes overwhelmed and shuts down.

Finally, although the Four Point Model deemphasizes the type of accountability typically applied in the U.S., it highlights the importance of performance management by asking school systems to track implementation of key initiatives derived from the theory of action. Performance management need not and should not be punitive, as many accountability policies in the U.S. typically are, but rather should be an opportunity for educators and administrators to reflect on implementation and student outcomes and to make changes in practice that improve the probability of success.

In sum, then, the Four Point Model consists of these elements:

- 1) Define a clear theory of action for school improvement by defining a discrete number of “non-negotiables” for all schools.
- 2) Support schools by leveraging the district’s principal supervisors to enhance principals’ instructional leadership and hold principals accountable for continuous improvement.
- 3) Build capacity of administrators and educators by “coaching on the redline.”
- 4) Manage performance of schools, by defining and tracking valid measures of implementation of defined non-negotiables.

Before going into greater detail about the four points of the model, I will illustrate some of the key concepts in a short case study.

## GRAND ISLAND, NEBRASKA MOVES TOWARD THE FOUR POINT MODEL<sup>4</sup>

With an estimated population of 50,000, Grand Island is the fourth largest city in Nebraska. In addition to serving as a retail hub for the state's central region, Grand Island is home to several sizable manufacturing plants. The manufacturing sector has contributed to continued population growth in the community and its schools and has attracted a significant number of immigrants.

In 2016-17, Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS) enrolled 9,896 students, an increase of 20% from 2005-06. The district is projecting that enrollment will continue to grow at a comparable rate of about 200 students per year. The district has also become increasingly diverse. GIPS already serves a majority-minority student population: Hispanic students make up the largest portion of its population. About 67% of GIPS students qualify for free or reduced-priced lunches.

Dr. Tawana Grover became the superintendent of GIPS in the summer of 2016. This shift of leadership provided a natural opportunity for the district to consider what it is doing well and how it might readjust strategies to more fully meet the changing needs of its students. Dr. Grover contracted with FourPoint Education Partners (called Cross & Joftus at the time) to help her better understand the district's strengths and challenges and to consider how the district could better deploy its resources to support its students.

FourPoint Education Partners found that by many measures, GIPS is very accomplished. Most students are meeting or exceeding state standards, and the district provides a variety of high-quality academic programs and resources. Student achievement, however, trails state averages, and sizable gaps in performance persist among student subgroups and among the district's schools.

To understand these student achievement challenges, FourPoint started by looking at the district's theory of action. We found that GIPS had a "centrally managed" approach to improving teacher quality. The district had mandated several system-wide initiatives, including curriculum implementation, Response to Intervention, lesson planning, and teacher evaluation.

The problem was that the GIPS administration—while talented and hard-working—lacked the capacity to help schools effectively implement and monitor these mandates, which led to frustration and low morale among teachers and principals, uneven implementation of initiatives, and disappointing results. FourPoint recommended shifting the theory of action to

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<sup>4</sup> Information about Grand Island in this section is adapted from Joftus et al., 2017, a report prepared by FourPoint Education Partners (Cross & Joftus at the time) and paid for by and submitted to the school district.

give schools greater autonomy and minimize district mandates while building the capacity of principals to be effective instructional leaders.

To implement the new theory of action, FourPoint recommended a number of steps to develop principals' instructional leadership. For example, we recommended that the chief of leadership and human resources—a position recently created by Superintendent Grover—focus on coaching and evaluating the district's 21 principals and that other administrators assume her responsibilities for human resources and other areas. FourPoint is now helping GIPS implement this recommendation through coaching and professional development. Similarly, we recommended that the district grant principals greater authority to hire staff and manage their schools' budgets, another approach that is consistent with a movement toward school autonomy.

Finally, FourPoint helped GIPS create and implement a performance management system, which the district calls Data Rounds. As GIPS has defined the Data Rounds process, principals and their teams work collaboratively with central office administrators to establish indicators for school improvement, collect data demonstrating progress towards those indicators, and regularly analyze and discuss the data to celebrate short-term successes and address challenges. Rather than waiting for end-of-year student assessment data to determine progress (when it is too late to make changes), the Data Rounds approach considers “short-cycle” data that will enable principals and their staffs to make quick adjustments. These data include classroom and formative assessment scores, student attendance and suspensions, principals' classroom observations of the teaching and learning process, and information about implementation of professional learning communities.

GIPS is in the early stages of implementing these changes so it is too soon to assess impact. But feedback from principals and central office administrators suggests that the system is heading in the right direction.

## DEFINING THE FOUR POINT MODEL OF LEADERSHIP

Grand Island Public Schools is on a journey defined by the Four Point Model of Leadership outlined above. In this section, I provide additional details about each point.

### **1) Define a clear theory of action for school improvement by defining a discrete number of “non-negotiables” for all schools.**

Theory of action<sup>5</sup> sounds like jargon, but it is simply a set of beliefs for how schools will improve. A school system's theory of action often exists on a continuum of possible school

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<sup>5</sup> This content was adapted from an article I wrote that appeared in the Fall 2016 issue of *Southeast Education Network (SEEN) Magazine*.

management approaches. At one end of the continuum is a “centrally managed” approach—the central office controls many inputs required for an excellent education, including hiring of staff, resource allocation, curriculum and assessment, and professional development. At the other end of the continuum is a “school-based management” approach—the central office empowers schools to make most decisions related to how and by whom an excellent education<sup>6</sup> is delivered to students.

Research has found challenges and benefits to both the centrally managed and the school-based management approach (see Table 1). In reality, most districts fall somewhere between the two far ends of the continuum. As illustrated by the Fayette County, Kentucky, example, a drawback of a school-based management approach is that the central office has fewer tools at its disposal to ensure that all students are receiving an excellent education regardless of neighborhood, family income, ethnicity, primary language spoken, or disability. These tools become increasingly important as student mobility increases and student achievement levels off in some schools. For a centrally managed approach, a drawback is a reduction in principal autonomy, which can reduce a school leader’s ownership over the school improvement process.

School districts operate—in some cases purposefully and strategically and in other cases not—along the entire school-management continuum. For example, as noted, Kentucky law requires Fayette County and other districts in the state to take a school-based approach. On the other hand, the District of Columbia Public Schools over the last few years has ratcheted up the requirements that schools must implement, suggesting a more centrally managed approach.<sup>7</sup>

Again, neither of these approaches is wrong or right. What is critical is that school systems carefully consider their context—for example, it would make no sense for Fayette County to take a centrally managed approach. It is also critical that school systems communicate clearly about their approach, and that they create systems and structures and leverage resources and stakeholders in ways that are consistent with their purposefully selected theory of action.

School systems, I have found, often make one of two mistakes. First, some school systems implement programs and initiatives without considering, let alone communicating, their theory of action. This approach results in incoherence, confusion, anxiety, and poor results.

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<sup>6</sup> “Excellent education” will mean different things to different people. I define excellence as providing all students what they need to meet their full potential related to a common set of rigorous academic standards.

<sup>7</sup> The author has worked closely with the D.C. Public Schools for the last three years.

**Table 1. School Management Approaches: Potential Benefits and Challenges**

School Management Approach	Potential Benefits	Potential Challenges
Centrally managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consistent curriculum and educational practices across schools</li> <li>• Increased accountability for school implementation of processes and programs</li> <li>• Increased ability of central office to drive school reform and ensure equity</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Less emphasis on school innovation</li> <li>• Reduction in principals' autonomy</li> <li>• Central office bureaucracy and fewer resources for schools</li> </ul>
School-based management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Greater autonomy for schools to drive innovation</li> <li>• Reduced need for a large central office, leaving more resources to be allocated equitably to schools</li> <li>• Accountability for schools based on outcomes, not processes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of consistency across schools, which is especially problematic for students who change schools</li> <li>• Uneven school quality, depending on effectiveness of principal and SBDM council</li> <li>• Delays in school accountability and fewer options for central office to ensure school quality</li> </ul>

Second, some school systems believe that they are pursuing a particular theory of action but act in a way that is inconsistent with that theory. For example, I have worked with school systems that say they are about “empowering principals to be instructional leaders,” another way of saying school-based management. These systems, however, place numerous mandates on principals that are much more indicative of a centrally managed approach. This leads to confusion and frustration among principals, who either stop trying to innovate or serve as effective instructional leaders or who resist implementing the mandates as intended. They implement initiatives to meet the system’s requirements, rather than to improve student outcomes; some refer to this behavior as “malicious compliance.”

Although there is no “correct” position, research finds that systems must be purposeful in identifying where they are on the school-management continuum. Then they must make

decisions about central-office organizational structure, staffing, systems, use of resources, and school-improvement strategies that are consistent with their selected approach.

Table 2 outlines the key areas of emphasis that systems should take for each school management approach.

**Table 2. Ideal Points of Emphasis for School Management Approaches**

School Management Approach	Areas of Central Office Emphasis to Ensure Outstanding Student Performance
Centrally managed	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Determine school needs, and then allocate resources and assign staff equitably to ensure that students receive the support they need to be successful.</li> <li>• Create a guaranteed and viable curriculum and ensure effective delivery through analysis of formative and summative assessment data and school and classroom observations.</li> <li>• Build capacity of educators by providing high-quality professional development and coaching for a select number of district initiatives.</li> <li>• Provide additional resources, support, and—if necessary—interventions to underachieving schools.</li> <li>• Administer all operations, including purchasing, human resources, maintenance, and information technology.</li> </ul>
School-based management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Allocate dollars to schools based on student population and demographics and allow schools to hire staff and purchase resources based on schools' perception of their own needs.</li> <li>• Assess the quality of schools through analysis of student outcomes and intervene in underperforming schools.</li> <li>• Facilitate the sharing of information about best practices across schools.</li> <li>• Build capacity of educators by helping schools to purchase professional development and coaching from central office or vendor.</li> <li>• Administer some operations depending on school and community preferences and cost-saving opportunities.</li> </ul>

## 2) Support schools by leveraging the district's principal supervisors to enhance principals' instructional leadership and hold principals accountable for continuous improvement.

Once the superintendent and leadership team have articulated the district's theory of action, the superintendent faces myriad questions, including the following key questions:<sup>8</sup>

- Given our theory of action, what should we require from our schools? Another way to frame this question is, What do we "hold tightly" or what are our non-negotiables?
- In what areas do we want to encourage innovation? Another way to frame this question is, What do we "hold loosely" or where do we provide schools with autonomy?
- How can we best structure the central office to ensure support and accountability for schools?
- How do we ensure that schools are continuously improving the instruction and supports delivered to students, especially those most at risk of school failure?

Answering these questions carefully is critical, and, in my opinion, requires a central office position responsible for supporting and evaluating principals. Of course, many, if not most, districts have one or more staff who perform the role of principal supervisors. Frequently, however, the potential of this role is not realized (Jerald, 2012) for at least three reasons.

First, in smaller school systems, the person or people who play this role typically have other responsibilities (in some cases, being the superintendent). In many large and small school systems, the position is not clearly defined. The people serving as principal supervisors find themselves "fighting fires," responding to community or parent concerns, or serving as a conduit between the schools and the rest of the central office.

Second, while individuals serving as principal supervisors were likely excellent principals and/or outstanding leaders in schools or the central office, many new principal supervisors need support themselves to become effective in this role. There is debate as to whether or not principal supervisors should have served in the principalship and either approach brings challenges. On the one hand, supervisors who were principals themselves often want to "take over" struggling schools. This leaves little time for principal supervisors to manage all schools in their portfolio and fails to build capacity of the actual principal leading the school. On the other hand, principal supervisors who were not principals themselves often face a credibility gap. The principals being supervised wonder how the supervisor can know what they are

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<sup>8</sup> This content was adapted from an article I wrote that appeared in the Winter/Spring 2017 issue of the *Southeast Education Network (SEEN) Magazine*.

going through and how to help them if the supervisor was never in their shoes? In reality, there are outstanding principal supervisors who have never been principals themselves, but they must overcome the skepticism of the principals they supervise.

The third reason why districts may have difficulty leveraging the principal supervision position has to do with structure of and personalities in the central office. What department is responsible for principal induction and professional development? Who supports principals with special education compliance issues? With angry parents? What happens when a principal struggles to develop and manage a budget? The answer to these and similar questions depend on the specific district context and the way in which the principal supervisor position is structured relative to other central office positions.

There are a number of ways to structure this role. My team and I have learned seven lessons about effectively leveraging this role from research and from working with principal supervisors in districts as diverse as Hawaii, Omaha and Grand Island (NE), Waukegan (IL), Hillsborough County (FL), and Washington, DC:

- 1) Principal supervisors need to be responsible for a reasonable number of schools—probably not much more than 20 (Jerald, 2012).
- 2) Principal supervisors need not be on the superintendent's cabinet, but they must have a voice on the cabinet to ensure that principals' needs are well understood and that supervisors understand and can communicate the district vision effectively.
- 3) Principal supervisors should be held accountable for student outcomes and principal development in the schools they are supervising.
- 4) Cabinet members must have a clear understanding of what principal supervisors are held accountable for and what their responsibilities do and do not entail. Cabinet members must also understand how their own role dovetails with that of the principal supervisor.
- 5) Principal supervisors should spend at least half their time in schools. Principal supervisors and other central office leaders must work extremely hard to protect this time.
- 6) Principal supervisors should focus on helping principals grow as instructional leaders. This requires a clear definition of instructional leadership.
- 7) Other central office departments—HR, budget, curriculum, etc.—should be organized to help principal supervisors focus predominantly on principals' instructional leadership.

The role of principal supervisor will and should look different in every district. But every district should work carefully and strategically to not only define the position but support it as well. That is why, for example, FourPoint Education Partners has worked closely with Omaha Public Schools (OPS) to define the responsibilities for the six principal supervisors and coach them in carrying out those responsibilities. In addition, we have worked with the superintendent's leadership team to ensure that all staff understand the role of the principal supervisor and how to complement it to promote school success.

FourPoint has also worked with OPS to create the Leaders Leading Leaders (3L) Network, a community of practice for principal supervisors from about 15 districts. The 3L Network, now in its fourth year, enables principal supervisors to share ideas, challenges, and tools across district lines in a way that empowers the supervisors to support their principals on the journey toward instructional leadership. We encourage all districts to set aside resources and time to enable principal supervisors to grow and evolve in this critical position.

### **3) Build capacity of administrators and educators by “coaching on the redline.”**

Having a well-defined principal supervisor role facilitates but does not ensure that principals and educators receive effective coaching that helps them to improve outcomes for students. Principal supervisors, instructional coaches, and other administrators must become effective coaches and use their skills to produce changes in adult behavior that result in more student learning.

My colleague at FourPoint, Steve Gering, likens finding the right coaching “stance” or approach to racing a car.<sup>9</sup> The car dashboard has a collection of gauges that enable us to monitor the car's systems and engine. One of these gauges, the tachometer, monitors the engine's revolutions per minute. Typically we ignore the tachometer, but auto racers watch it closely. The redline marks the beginning of the tachometer's red zone, the area that indicates that the engine is churning so fast it is in danger of breaking.

Experienced auto racers push the tachometer's needle as close to the red zone as possible because this is where they achieve the car's maximum performance. They can even dip into the red zone for a quick burst, but they can't stay there due to risk of engine failure. This approach of staying as close as possible to the red zone, occasionally dipping into the red zone when needed, and getting back to the outer edge of the red zone is known as “riding the redline.”

Effective leadership coaching is similar to riding the redline in racing. If a principal supervisor is coaching on the redline, she takes a coaching stance that causes the principal to reflect

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<sup>9</sup> The content in this section was adapted with permission from Gering, 2017.

deeply about his work. If the supervisor takes a stance that is too far from the principal's redline, the result may be a lack of reflection and a waste of time. If the supervisor overshoots the redline, the principal may be overwhelmed and confused. Effective leadership coaching is all about finding just the right level of coaching to maximize the coaching impact.

Over the years, Gering has used a variety of popular leadership frameworks—cognitive coaching, balanced coaching, leadership coaching, and learning-focused coaching, among others (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2012; Bloom et al., 2005; Costa & Garmston, 2016; Lipton & Wellman, 2013; Reiss, 2007; Scott, 2015). But none of these frameworks fully captured his interpretation of effective coaching—something always seemed to be missing. As an athletic coach, Gering notes, he sometimes needed to be directive and commanding to get the athletes to perform in a certain way, while at other times he needed to “shake someone up” by being brutally direct.

Neither of these two athletic coaching stances—candor and command—seemed to be captured in current coaching models for leaders. Without using these coaching stances, Gering felt that he could not get many leaders to the coaching redline. So he expanded his leadership development repertoire to include candor and command. By using these coaching stances, principal supervisors have a better opportunity to coach principals on the redline and help them achieve to their highest potential.

According to Gering, redline coaching includes the following continuum of coaching stances: cognitive, collaborative, consultant, calibrate, candid, and command. No stance works in isolation. Rather, an effective principal supervisor leverages each stance to provide principals with what they need when they need it, and often shifts from one stance to another depending on the circumstances. Let's unpack each of the coaching stances.

**Cognitive coaching.** In cognitive coaching, the principal supervisor provides no scaffolding beyond the open-ended questions posed. The principal is in charge of her own learning and the supervisor's role is to listen, paraphrase, and ask questions that extend the principal's thinking without bringing forward outside content or knowledge. The ideas and actions generated by the principal are owned by the principal and are not influenced by the supervisor. This is the highest level of reflective coaching, a sort of coaching nirvana where the real learning happens. Examples of coaching questions for this stance include the following: *What is on your mind? What do you think? How might you approach this? What might be some next steps?*

**Collaborative coaching.** This coaching stance provides an opportunity for the supervisor and principal to think together. The supervisor works alongside the principal to encourage a collaborative discussion, which will likely generate some new thinking and possible actions the principal might take. Once ideas and/or actions are identified, the supervisor should shift to a cognitive coaching stance and pose a question that causes the principal to reflect on

how the ideas or actions might play out. This shift is essential to ensure the actions are owned by the principal and not the supervisor. Examples of statement stems for collaborative coaching include the following: *Let's think about this together. What if we look at some possible options together? Let's brainstorm some possible actions.*

**Consultant coaching.** Consultant coaching allows coaches to tap into their knowledge, expertise, and experiences to support and deepen the coaching conversation. In this stance, the supervisor strategically shares ideas, examples, and experiences that are pertinent to the situation. The idea is not to tell the principal what to do, but give specific examples to encourage thinking and reflection. The best consultant coaching does not result in the principal copying an idea verbatim, but instead adapting what was discussed during the coaching session to act in an appropriate way for the principal's specific context. It is important that the supervisor shift from consultant coaching to a collaborative or cognitive stance, so the principal is able to reflect on the new idea and make it his or her own. Coaching stems for this stance include the following: *Here is something I have tried... I read about a school that... My experience tells me...*

**Calibration coaching.** In calibration coaching, the coach uses data to help identify and clarify the issue being discussed. This stance is helpful when the person being coached does not fully appreciate or understand the relevance or use of meaningful data. The data could be quantitative, such as student achievement scores, or qualitative, such as the coach's observations of the principal at work. The coach and principal look at the data together; the coach explicitly points out a perspective on the data and allows the principal to process it. Supervisors should not use this stance as their first coaching move. They should first allow the principal to reflect and explore through cognitive, collaborative, and consultant stances before moving to the calibration stance. It is tempting to skip the earlier stances in the continuum to force the issue, but doing so removes the opportunity for the principal to discover the learning with less scaffolding. The most powerful learning comes when one is close to the redline but not past it. As with the earlier stances, it is important, once the issue is clarified, for the supervisor to support the principal in owning the issue and reflecting on possible actions that would leverage the prior coaching stances. Calibration coaching include these kinds of stems: *This data shows... I observed you ... The due date for the report was....*

**Candid coaching.** A key component of effective coaching is for the principal to own the issue being discussed; otherwise it becomes a mandate without true responsibility and accountability. There are critical times when a coach/supervisor must have a candid conversation with the principal. A candid coaching stance is intended to call out a specific behavior or issue that is getting in the way of the principal being as successful as possible, and to stun or shake up the principal into seeing what others see in her practice. A candid conversation is meant to be a jump start that allows the supervisor and principal to move forward and enable the other coaching stances. This stance should be used very infrequently

and only when the supervisor has made a great deal of efforts to support the principal in thinking reflectively and identifying the issue on his own. Candid coaching includes stems like these: *Let me be clear, when you... The gossip about you is... You are hurting the team when you...*

**Command coaching.** Gering had reservations about including this stance. After all, if you have to command someone to do something, are you really coaching? Gering tells leaders that if you are constantly in the command stance with an employee, you might as well fire the employee and take over their role, because you are no longer coaching and developing—you are essentially doing that person’s job. That said, Gering at times has used the command stance because something had to be done immediately and in a certain way. For example, if a new principal is not moving quickly and effectively during an emergency, the supervisor should step in and give clear direction for the principal to follow. The situation can be unpacked through a reflective coaching conversation that draws on the rest of the coaching continuum at a later date. Command coaching is used when something is critical and time sensitive, and the principal has not demonstrated the skills and knowledge to take the appropriate actions. Command coaching stems include the following: *It is expected that you will... You need to do this, in this way, now. This is not a request...*

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Of course, none of the coaching stances work without a respectful and caring relationship between the supervisor and principal. A supervisor may be able to support a superficial level of reflection in the principal without a relationship, but to support deep reflection and induce real change in leadership practice by the principal, the coaching conversation must be nested in a strong, professional relationship.

As supervisors work toward coaching on the redline, the key is providing enough coaching support to move principals’ practice forward, but not so much that they are overwhelmed and shut down. Effective coaching is all about finding the right level of coaching to maximize its impact.

#### **4) Manage performance of schools by defining and tracking valid measures of implementation of defined non-negotiables.**

One of the responsibilities for principal supervisors is to help principals foster continuous improvement in their schools. Continuous improvement in education is the ongoing effort to improve services or processes that ultimately result in better outcomes for students. The keys to continuous improvement include the following:

1. Setting clear goals for student outcomes with indicators of success (e.g., this year, reading proficiency in third grade will increase from 56% to 72% as measured by the Measures of Academic Progress test).

2. Defining the processes that educators and other stakeholders believe will lead to achievement of those goals (e.g., reading achievement will increase as a result of effective implementation of Tier 2 Response to Intervention strategies).
3. Establishing process measures that enable educators and administrators to assess progress towards implementation of the defined processes (e.g., implementation of Tier 2 strategies will be measured by percentage of students below standard who are served in Tier 2, students' time on task for the intervention, and students' academic progress during the intervention).
4. Delineating clear strategies—complete with timelines and responsibilities—that will result in effective implementation of the processes (e.g., creation of an action plan for implementing Tier 2 in classrooms).
5. Collecting data related to the process measures (3 above) and making adjustments to strategy and implementation (4) as appropriate.

It is my experience that educators are quite good at key 1 and pretty good at key 4, but they often skip or hurry keys 2, 3, and 5. In other words, schools and systems frequently set clear student outcome goals but then grasp at programs or initiatives without thinking carefully about how they will help to attain student achievement goals (key 2). Moreover, administrators rarely define clear measures of implementation (key 3), let alone track and report the data that will enable them to assess implementation (key 5).

School systems would benefit greatly from selecting a smaller number of programs and initiatives, focusing only on those for which they can measure implementation and provide feedback to the educators responsible for implementation. Systems would also benefit from creating regular meetings of teachers with principals, and of principals with their supervisors. At these meetings the participants would discuss outcome data, the processes they believe (based on data) are contributing to improvements, and the hypotheses (also supported by data) for why certain goals are not being met, or are not being met as quickly as intended. The leadership literature would describe this as an “integration” strategy that enables leaders (principals or school district administrators) to differentiate their treatment of those they are supervising but still create an underlying common structure (for more on this idea, see Harvard University's Public Education Leadership Project).

An effective performance management routine successfully ties together the three other elements of the Four Point Model: it makes it possible to assess the implementation and impact of the theory of action (which, after all, is only a **theory** for improvement) by having principal supervisors systematically coach principals and their educators in a structured, data-based way. Done effectively, student achievement will increase. Moreover, equity will be fostered as school systems gain a better understanding of what schools, student subgroups,

and individual students need to be successful. With this understanding, school systems can ensure that students are receiving the needed resources and support.

## CONCLUSION

Achieving equity in education requires a sound framework of policy, governance, and resources. Even a perfect framework—still strongly debated—requires a bridge to the students who ultimately determine the extent of equity in that system. Moreover, most school systems' policy, governance, and resource frameworks are inarguably far from perfect, placing greater pressure on the bridge.

I have argued that this bridge exists in the form of system leadership that creates a theory of action for translating the contextual framework into effective educational practice; empowers principal supervisors to support the development of instructional leadership through effective coaching; and manages performance through a systematic focus on both outcomes and processes. This Four Point Model of leadership has the potential to transform the quality of schools in almost any system and to promote equitable outcomes for all students.

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