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District-Level Instructional Leaders' Perceptions of Obstacles When Implementing District-Wide Change Initiatives—A Delphi Study

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District-Wide Change Initiatives—A Delphi Study

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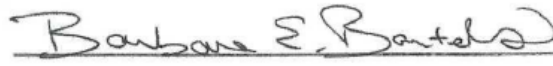
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ABSTRACT

District-Level Instructional Leaders' Perceptions of Obstacles When Implementing

District-Wide Change Initiatives—A Delphi Study

by Ashley Fulmer

Purpose: The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, to rate the degree of importance of the identified obstacles, and to describe the most effective strategies to overcome the highest rated obstacles identified.

Methodology: This study used the Delphi methodology to collect data from expert district-level administrative instructional leaders through three rounds of survey questionnaires. The expert panel was selected through purposive, convenience, and expert nomination sampling methods. In Round 1, the expert panel was asked to identify obstacles for implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. In Round 2, experts rated the obstacles identified in Round 1 using a 6-point Likert scale. In Round 3, experts identified no more than three strategies that could be used to overcome the top three rated obstacles from Round 2.

Findings: In Round 1, the expert panel of district-level administrative instructional leaders identified 21 obstacles for implementing district-wide change initiatives. In Round 2, the panel rated the 21 obstacles and the top-three were identified. In Round 3, the panel provided strategies to overcome the top-three rated obstacles.

Conclusions: This study's findings support the need for districts to consider obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face as they may impact the effectiveness of implementing a district-wide change initiative. To these leaders, districts need to provide multiple ongoing collaborative opportunities for them to build their capacity and develop as leaders. Districts need to develop a communication plan specific to the initiative. Districts should consider minimizing or eliminating initiatives that do not positively impact student achievement and well-being.

Recommendations: It is recommended to continue to explore the obstacles faced when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach with different populations of participants including principals and teacher leaders. It is recommended to look specifically at districts that are successfully implementing change initiatives and the strategies they use to overcome obstacles with district-level administrative instructional leaders.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Change initiatives and school reforms have been prevalent in education for decades. These reforms call for school districts to implement innovative change initiatives that will positively impact student learning and well-being. School reforms have been a feature of the educational landscape since the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983 (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This eventually led to the passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 followed by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in 2015. These acts called for sweeping reforms in education that included new content standards and increased accountability through mandated standardized assessments.

Recent studies have suggested the need to include behavioral and social-emotional aspects in school reforms and change initiatives as well. The National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development (2019) found that learning happens best when social, emotional, and cognitive growth occurs simultaneously. That is, students need to build academic, behavioral, and social-emotional skills in a balanced approach. Reforms will continue to evolve and be part of the educational improvement conversation. It is now up to the individuals within the school districts to address these reforms by implementing district-wide change initiatives.

One way to successfully implement these initiatives is through a shared leadership approach. Shared leadership is a system used by teams or organizations to broadly distribute leadership among individuals that provides opportunities for individuals to collaborate around a shared focus and develop supportive culture with widespread communication (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Poff & Parks, 2010). In education, shared

leadership provides a system for distributing the leadership responsibilities of the principal to individuals throughout the organization, including district-level administrative instructional leaders. School site principals need support to meet the ever-changing and growing demands of the position. The expanding role of the principal now includes oversight of curriculum and instruction, health and wellness, school safety, student performance, and staff oversight (Pechota & Scott, 2021). Schools are complex organizations, and one person cannot be an expert in all aspects of the various operations (Poff & Parks, 2010). Principals need the support of specialists, such as district-level administrative instructional leaders, to meet the demands of the position.

Instructional leaders can be district-level employees who facilitate and coordinate various aspects of curriculum and instruction including textbook adoptions, curriculum development, professional learning, and instructional coaching (Arrington, 2014; Domina et al., 2015). In addition, instructional leaders can work with principals to provide content-focused support and model the skills necessary to lead the changes at their school sites (Hamm, 1994). With a shared leadership approach, more districts are employing these instructional leaders to support change initiatives that will meet the demands of educational reforms.

Although the various roles of the instructional leader in supporting school districts, school sites, and classrooms have been identified throughout the literature for decades, the obstacles these leaders may face while implementing district-wide change initiatives have not been adequately researched.

Background

Background

Educational Reforms

The publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* in 1983 sparked a call to action to look at how the United States was educating its students (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). This led to demands from the national, state, and local levels for an increase in student learning outcomes through innovative and effective teaching practices (Hamm, 1994). Some of the demands called for more thoughtful and intellectually ambitious instruction rooted in the academic disciplines that promoted independent thinkers and problem solvers (Cohen & Spillane, 1992).

This call to action led to the passing of the NCLB Act in 2001 by the Bush administration. NCLB called for mandated standardized testing in all public schools as a way to increase accountability and measure effectiveness (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). NCLB led to policy discourse that focused on holding schools and districts accountable for the academic achievement of all students (Elmore, 2004). This led to high-stakes testing with consequences for schools and districts that did not meet the standards of performance. Low-performing schools were subject to district-led restructuring or closing and, in some cases, state takeover.

Although the goal of these assessments was to provide accountability and ensure equitable educational outcomes for all students, this was not always the case. Schools with larger populations of students from low-income households had more difficulty meeting the standards of performance (W. G. Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002). In addition,

the results of high-stakes assessments led to reactive and even counterproductive pedagogy including test preparation and targeting student groups (Gibbs et al., 2023).

In 2015, the Obama administration passed the ESSA, updating and replacing NCLB. ESSA required that all students receive instruction aligned to high academic standards designed to prepare them to be college and career-ready (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). These standards became known as the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). ESSA still required the annual high-stakes testing for accountability purposes that aligned with these new standards (Gibbs et al., 2023). In addition, ESSA shifted authority and power from the federal to state and local levels (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

ESSA provided opportunities for states and local education agencies to make direct decisions to support student learning and well-being. These decisions included the use of instructional leaders. For example, California allocated large funding to the implementation of the CCSS in 2010 and by 2015 led the nation in instructional leader staffing (Domina et al., 2015).

This trend to employ instructional leaders is not a novel concept. Instructional leaders have been added to district administrative staff since as early as the 1920s with the purpose of facilitating, developing, and implementing educational programs (Allen, 1966). The term instructional leader has been used interchangeably in the literature with other terms such as curriculum director, curriculum worker, curriculum specialist, curriculum leader, supervisor, and consultant (Carlson, 1965). These are individuals "who, either through working with teachers at the classroom level or through working with supervisors, principals or others at a central office level, contribute to the

improvement of teaching and/or the implementation and development of curriculum"
(Carlson, 1965, pp. 2–3).

In the 1980s, the idea of instructional coaching developed as a way to support teachers in meeting the mandated standards for student learning (Neumerski, 2013). Instructional coaching is a strategy used by instructional leaders to support district-wide change. Coaching helps teachers interpret change initiatives and develop instructional strategies that align with mandates and reforms (Domina et al., 2015).

This broad spectrum of work comes with a number of challenges. The challenges instructional leaders face include role confusion, taking on new or additional responsibilities, resolving conflicts, changing teachers' attitudes, identifying effective approaches, and lack of training for the position (Allen, 1966). In addition, the local variations of instructional leaders' responsibilities create a diverse yet global role, which makes it difficult to develop a measure of productivity and effectiveness (Pajak, 1989).

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was shared leadership. Shared leadership occurs when leadership roles and responsibilities are broadly distributed among individuals in an organization or on a team (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Shared leadership stems from the need for organizations to rapidly adapt and compete in an ever-changing and advancing world. By distributing authority, influence, and managerial responsibilities through shared leadership, organizations are able to remain competitive in technologically driven or customer service-based marketplaces (Houghton et al., 2003). Shared leadership allows leaders and employees to work collaboratively on innovative projects and tasks. Shared leadership is a leadership style in which leadership emanates

from the various members of the team, not just the leader (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Implementing a shared leadership system allows more individuals across various departments or teams to contribute to achieving the organization's goals.

Shared leadership focuses on the strengths of the team and is likely to enhance the efficiency of the team. Pearce and Sims (2002) found that a conscious strategy of implementing shared leadership was an important predictor of team effectiveness. In a shared leadership system, leaders are not expected to be the experts in every field but to rely on the knowledge, skills, and expertise of individuals within the teams and distribute leadership accordingly. Team members engage in a variety of leadership roles by sharing the responsibility for the team's outcomes and providing influence and guidance to one another (Houghton et al., 2003). This model can be applied to the field of education with school and district-level leaders.

Shared Leadership in Education

Shared leadership is of interest to leaders within school districts because of the complex, evolving demands of the education system. School districts are faced with integrating new standards and curricula as well as supporting the mental health and behavioral needs of students through initiatives like multitiered systems of support and social-emotional learning. The changes taking place in schools and districts to meet the needs of the students indicate the need for strong site and district leadership (Miller, 2020).

Shared leadership creates a system for individuals throughout the district to work collaboratively in finding ways to effectively integrate these changes. District-wide shared leadership can be used for planning and implementing the district's mission and

goals as well as ensuring authentic collaboration among leaders throughout the district

(Poff & Parks, 2010). Shared leadership allows district leaders and principals to work

collaboratively toward the common goal of increasing student learning and well-being.

Principals

Principals, or school site leaders, are charged with a variety of roles,

responsibilities, and tasks when leading their sites. They must develop a vision and

school plan, promote a student-centered culture, create a sense of community with

stakeholders, and much more. In addition, they are called to be instructional leaders who

oversee the implementation of change initiatives to improve student learning outcomes at

their school sites. Principals focus on developing teachers' knowledge and skills, creating

professional learning communities, ensuring program coherence, and providing technical

resources (Fullan, 2002). In addition, principals must be attuned to the happenings within

the district and any change initiatives occurring. Principals attend district meetings,

receive directives from the district and state, and participate in meetings where they learn

about new materials, pedagogical approaches, and ideas associated with change (Coburn,

2005). They must then determine what they bring back to their site and what items they

save for later or even filter out. The decisions and responsibilities of school site principals

are never-ending and require a distributive approach.

Principals need the support of the other leaders in the district to do their jobs well.

School districts might consider creating a culture of shared leadership with a collective

goal of improving student learning and well-being. Districts need leaders who can create

a fundamental transformation in the cultures of teaching and learning in schools (Fullan,

2002). This responsibility does not live with the principal alone. All leaders within the

district are called to support teaching and learning. Thus, principals can lean on the knowledge and skills of the experts within the district through a shared leadership approach.

District Leadership

Implementing change initiatives to improve student learning and well-being cannot be accomplished at the school site alone. It requires district leaders to support the change process. Strong site and district leadership are rising factors of success in schools across the country (Miller, 2020). District-level administrative instructional leaders are needed to support a variety of individuals at the school sites including principals and teachers. Instructional leaders can provide essential leadership and systems of support with these stakeholders to build their capacity to support teaching and learning (Honig et al., 2010). In particular, principals need greater professional development focused on specific content. School leaders are often the forgotten element in plans for professional development associated with changes in instructional policy (Coburn, 2005). Instructional leaders are the individuals who can be called upon to support these needs.

Instructional Leaders

Instructional leaders are administrators who work at the district level and coordinate a variety of tasks, generally in curriculum and instruction. Hamm (1994) found the work of exemplary curriculum directors to be grouped into four main categories: communication, curriculum and instruction, program responsibility, and technical expertise. This includes communicating with a variety of stakeholders such as superiors, site leaders, and teachers; facilitating textbook adoptions and curriculum development; and providing professional learning and coaching. Instructional leaders are

generally expected to focus their work on implementing research-based instructional practices (Lewis, 2019). They do this by providing professional development and coaching for teachers and principals.

The need for individuals responsible for improving teacher and principal knowledge and skills has led to an increase in the number of instructional leaders over time. Domina et al. (2015) reported that the number of instructional specialists per 1,000 students grew by 107% from 1998 to 2013. In comparison, the number of teachers per 1,000 students grew by less than 5% and the number of administrators by approximately 20%. However, not all districts use the leaders within their districts to support educational change initiatives. Some districts continue to contract external groups to provide instruction-based support for school districts (Honig et al., 2010). This may indicate there are potential obstacles for instructional leaders within the district that impede the successful implementation of change initiatives.

Obstacles for Instructional Leaders

District-level administrative instructional leaders are called to provide professional learning, coaching, and modeling; facilitate resource development; and support districts as they implement change initiatives (Ausband, 2006; Doll et al., 1958; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994). These responsibilities as well as others have been defined in the literature. However, there is a need to examine the obstacles instructional leaders face as they support district-wide change initiatives. It is crucial to identify obstacles, issues, and conflicts that may stand in the way of transformational change (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010).

Instructional leaders may face a variety of obstacles through their various roles and responsibilities. Obstacles directly related to coaching teachers can include a lack of initiative buy-in and administrative support, resistance to being coached, lack of time to collaborate limited resources including funding and time, and addressing the needs of teachers at all levels (Jacobs et al., 2017; Pajak, 1989; Range et al., 2014).

Obstacles may be caused by the gaps between the expectations of the district office and the realities of the classroom (Pajak, 1989). This can lead to a lack of communication, understanding, and trust. Trust building between instructional leaders and principals takes time to achieve and occurs when both sets of individuals understand their roles, support each other, and do not interfere with each other's responsibilities (Range et al., 2014). These obstacles are only a few instructional leaders face. However, they do not fully embody the role instructional leaders play when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives.

Summary

Educational reforms and initiatives consistently call for an increased focus on improving student learning and well-being. This includes providing academic, behavioral, and social-emotional support for all students. To make these changes, school districts have considered a shared leadership approach that distributes responsibilities to site and district leaders. Shared leadership is an active, cooperative process among a group of individuals who take and grant leadership roles, and it derives from the idea of employees contributing more to the organization and to leadership than the leader alone (Pearce & Conger, 2003). District-level leaders can be used to provide the curriculum and instructional support for principals and teachers. The aim of this study was to identify the

obstacles instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives and how effective instructional leaders address these obstacles and achieve district outcomes including improving student learning and well-being.

Statement of the Research Problem

To improve student achievement and well-being, many school districts are implementing multiple district-wide change initiatives or reforms simultaneously. One example of an initiative supported by the California Department of Education is multitiered systems of support (MTSS). MTSS work includes systematically addressing the needs of all students by aligning district initiatives, instructional strategies, supports, and resources (California Department of Education, 2021b). This initiative is being implemented alongside new instructional materials adoptions, health and safety measures, technology integration, and more. The oversaturation of initiatives and changes in education have added new responsibilities and pressures to school site personnel, particularly principals.

To support the effective implementation of change initiatives and reform efforts, districts might consider a shared leadership approach. Shared leadership is one way to distribute the many roles and responsibilities educational change initiatives and reforms require of various leaders throughout the organization. Such approaches allow the most knowledgeable or skilled individuals in the organization to take on leadership roles to support the necessary change (Amels et al., 2021; Diamond & Spillane, 2016). A shared leadership approach provides opportunities for district-level administrators to support school site personnel with improving student learning and well-being in an initiative-rich educational environment.

Principals can benefit from a shared leadership approach to support them with the ever-changing and evolving responsibilities of their positions. Principals are called to use instructional leadership to develop teachers' knowledge and skills, build communities of practice, and ensure program coherence (Fullan, 2002). In the current educational climate, however, principals have additional pressures and responsibilities because of shifts in policies, an increased focus on equity, and multiple measures of evaluation (Pechota & Scott, 2021). The additional responsibilities of the principal make it difficult to focus solely on student learning and well-being. Lewis (2019) found that there is a need for principals to distribute leadership to others, especially when faced with a new initiative. Principals can rely on the support of district-level administrative instructional leaders with curriculum and instruction expertise when implementing a district-wide change.

Although instructional leaders can be used to support the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being, often these leaders are met with obstacles that can impact their work. Obstacles can include internal factors such as the structure and goals of the organization, external factors such as federal laws and mandates, intrinsic factors such as mindset and motivation for a change to occur, and time factors such as the amount of time to plan and provide professional development (Allen, 1966). These obstacles can impede the progress of district-wide initiatives without strategic approaches to mitigate these challenges.

The literature has defined the roles of instructional leaders for decades, however, their ability to execute these responsibilities through shared leadership has not been researched. Neumerski (2013) found that the literature on instructional leaders in relation

to teaching and learning is still in its infancy. The literature has discussed how instructional leaders can create conditions for teachers and students to learn. Still, there is a lack of knowledge of effective district practices with district personnel such as administrative instructional leaders and the types of interactions that facilitate moments of learning (E. Anderson & Young, 2018; Neumerski, 2013) and thus what moments create obstacles.

In addition, there is a lack of attention in the literature on the implications of district office practices on school-level reforms (Honig et al., 2010). Instructional leaders are hired and then asked to support a range of change initiatives and reforms. The research lacks information about the implementation process, particularly the obstacles that instructional leaders face and strategies to overcome these obstacles as they attempt to support the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student learning and well-being through shared leadership.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles they face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The second purpose of this Delphi study was to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The third purpose of this Delphi study was to

identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being when implementing district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach.

Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

2. What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

3. What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

Significance of the Study

The focus on improving student academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs no longer falls on the school site and principal alone. Districts are taking a more centralized approach in an effort to create coherence among the schools. According to Newmann et al. (2001), program coherence occurs when there is strategic and direct coordination of vital educational supports for curriculum and instruction. This includes

pedagogical strategies, student support programs, teaching performance expectations, and professional learning opportunities. Program coherence impacts school districts.

Murphy and Hallinger (1988) found that instructionally effective school districts established consistency and coordination of instructional activities, including their pedagogical approaches and expectations for student learning. To create this level of coherence, districts must make critical decisions about the use of resources (Leithwood, 2010). These resources include personnel. Districts are asking instructional leaders to support program coherence by becoming more involved in the implementation of district-wide initiatives and reforms.

During the last major time period of educational reforms, which included the NCLB Act in 2001 and CCSS in 2010, there was an increase in the number of instructional leaders hired in school districts (Domina et al., 2015). This trend is likely to continue with the increased number of initiatives in the current educational landscape. District budgets have to mitigate learning loss and improve student well-being. For example, the Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief Fund, allocated approximately $13.2 billion to school districts to address the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic (California Department of Education, 2022). Many school districts may be using this funding to employ instructional leaders to support their mitigation efforts. Instructional leaders can provide knowledge and skills in the necessary areas, including curriculum, instruction, pedagogy, communication, and program coherence.

The literature on instructional leaders has tended to focus on their roles and responsibilities (Allen, 1966; Ausband, 2006; Doll et al., 1958; Domina et al., 2015). There is limited research in the area of district-wide instructional leadership, particularly

when it comes to supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership system. The gap in the literature is identifying the obstacles that district-level administrative instructional leaders face as they support district-wide change initiatives and what expert leaders identify as strategies to achieve intended outcomes in spite of the obstacles they encounter.

The results of this study are essential to school districts that employ or seek to employ district-level administrative instructional leaders. Change initiatives and reforms will continue to impact the educational system. Principals cannot address the multiple initiatives impacting their school sites alone. To support principals, districts will likely continue to use instructional leaders to support the implementation of these changes.

This study is significant in understanding the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face in supporting the implementation of new initiatives as well as identifying potential solutions to these obstacles, particularly from the instructional leaders themselves. These leaders were able to provide first-hand accounts of the greatest challenges they face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives. In knowing about these types of obstacles and potential solutions, districts can plan accordingly to minimize or overcome them. This will ensure coherence and the successful implementation of the changes or reforms.

Definitions

Theoretical Definitions

Instructional leadership. According to DeMatthews (2014), instructional leadership is "the leadership functions associated with teaching and learning, or, more

specifically, as the duties and responsibilities principals perform each day to support teachers and students in the work toward educational excellence" (p. 193).

Shared leadership. Pearce and Conger defined shared leadership as "A dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (p. 1).

Operational Definitions

Administrator. In education, an individual with an administrative services credential and can include the position of superintendent, assistant superintendent, director, coordinator, and so forth. This position does not include teachers or teachers on special assignment.

District-level instructional leader. An administrator who supports schools, principals, and teachers across the district and has expertise in curriculum and/or instruction.

District-wide change initiative. A strategy designed to change educational systems and implemented across all school sites within a school district.

Obstacle. Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defined an obstacle as "Something that impedes progress or achievement" (para. 1).

Student achievement. The measurement of a student's overall academic performance and learning over a particular period of time.

Student well-being. The physical, psychological, emotional, and intellectual wellness of a student.

Delimitations

This study was delimited to district-level administrative instructional leaders in Southern California with experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative that were intended to improve student achievement and student well-being through a shared leadership approach. In addition, this study was limited to instructional leaders who served in a district-level role at the time of data collection and who were nominated as experts for the Delphi panel in this research study.

Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters, references, and appendices. Chapter I introduced the study and provided background information and context. Chapter II consists of a review of the literature that focuses on educational reforms and change initiatives, shared leadership, principal leadership, the role of the instructional leader, and obstacles instructional leaders face. Chapter III describes the Delphi methodology and data collection process used in this study. Chapter IV presents the data and analyzes the key findings. Chapter V provides a summary, findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future action and research.

CHAPTER II: REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Overview

This chapter provides a detailed review of the literature relevant to this study. This study is about the role of district-level instructional leaders and the obstacles they may face in supporting district-wide change initiatives. Appendix A includes the synthesis matrix, which identifies the themes found in the references used for the literature review. The review begins by describing the history of educational reforms that have molded the education system into what it is today and how instructional leaders have become an important component of district-wide instructional leadership. After a brief description of the many educational reforms throughout history, the review focuses on new reforms and change initiatives that have become widespread in the 21st century.

An important aspect of change and reform is leadership. This review continues by comparing the traditional leadership style with shared leadership and then shows how shared leadership can be used in education, which includes incorporating district-level administrative instructional leaders such as directors of curriculum and instruction or curriculum coordinators with knowledge and expertise in curriculum and instruction into the shared leadership system. The various roles of instructional leaders are then summarized to provide information about how these individuals are currently used in school districts, many of whom have a variety of educational experiences and skills to support principals with instructional leadership responsibilities such as providing professional development and coaching. The research included in this literature review also provides information about how the varying roles and backgrounds of instructional leaders can lead to obstacles in supporting district-wide change initiatives. Finally, this

review discusses the theoretical foundations of shared leadership and leadership approaches from researchers to resolving shared leadership obstacles.

History of Educational Reforms

The U.S. education system is founded upon reforms and change initiatives with the goal of increasing opportunities for all students. The theme of educational reforms throughout history is to ensure the system is improved over time to provide better options and access for more diverse groups of students. These reforms and changes also caused shifts in the roles and responsibilities of educational leaders, particularly school site principals. Educational policymakers have embraced well-meaning reform efforts throughout history since the time of Horace Mann (Hunt, 2005).

In the 1850s, Horace Mann led the charge to help establish a statewide education system in Massachusetts, passing a law requiring all children to attend school and mandating the school year to be at least 6 months long (Encyclopedia.com, n.d.). The purpose of this law was to provide equal education for children of farming families and manual laborers in low-income towns. In addition, Mann promoted teacher training and conferences and pushed the use of a structured, systematized curriculum (Ellis, 2023). Mann became known as the "father of the common school" because he encouraged citizens to support the common schools and embrace various educational innovations (Hunt, 2005; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This helped to lay the groundwork for the public education system and the series of educational reforms that followed.

The period between the 1860s and the 1890s became known as the period of modernization with the establishment of the national government, the development of a political system, and significant economic changes (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). In this

post-Civil War period, states passed laws requiring children to attend free public primary school and established mandatory attendance laws (Goldin, 1999; Kleinberg, 1999). In addition, there were assimilation efforts for Native American students and the development of the urban school systems with basic attempts at bureaucracy to accommodate large student enrollment numbers (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). With these efforts, more students were provided access to free public education and at higher levels including high school and university. These reforms increased the number of female students attending schools and diversified the student population.

In addition to increasing enrollment of students, the school site principal was developed. This role began in the 1850s as a supervising teacher or teaching principal, who acted as the administrator of the building by helping to organize curriculum, monitoring discipline, and overseeing all classes (Rousmaniere, 2013). This role later shifted to a school principal who had the responsibility of supervising teachers, registering students, and monitoring attendance. At that time, the principal had no instructional leadership responsibilities and served as a middle manager. The supervisory role of the principal continued to evolve during the Progressive Era.

Progressive Era

The education system continued to modernize and systematize over time. In the Progressive Era (1890s-1920s), educational reforms included modifying the curriculum, developing innovative educational practices, and organizing the administrative structure (Reese, 2003). Curricular reforms included the idea of a child-centered education, testing and tracking based on IQ, and vocational opportunities in high school (Hunt, 2005; Reese, 2003). Many of these reforms were driven by the potential economic outcomes

that a quality education could provide students and their families. Schools, particularly high schools, were preparing students for the jobs and careers they would have in the future (Hunt, 2005; Urban & Wagoner, 2009). Thus, the curriculum had to mirror the knowledge and skills students needed to be successful in entering the workplace and shift from memorizing passages to hands-on, experiential learning.

In addition to curricular reforms, political groups sought to reorganize school systems to place them under the management of a professionally trained administrator such as a school superintendent (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). By 1895, the position of the superintendent was firmly established. Schools needed a local leader to manage the rapid increase in student population and lack of financial resources. Very quickly, superintendents felt the pressure to educate the growing number of students better with the limited resources provided to do the job (Callahan, 1966). Superintendents often experienced role confusion, particularly with principals in areas of supervision as both felt they had the authority to oversee teachers (Rousmaniere, 2013).

During this time, the role of the principal broadened. Principals still maintained the role of a school site supervisor, overseeing classroom teachers to improve instruction, but they were also responsible for building a culture around higher-level instructional responsibilities (Rousmaniere, 2013). This shifted the principal's role from solely focusing on administrative, managerial tasks to an early form of instructional leadership.

Midcentury School Reform Movement

After the Progressive Era, a series of laws and bills were passed from the 1950s to the 1970s to continue to increase opportunities and expand rights for all students in American schools. The pursuit of equality was at the forefront of these reforms. Prior to

these laws and bills, females, students of color, and students with disabilities were

discriminated against and provided limited opportunities in public education. Table 1

shows a series of instrumental laws and bills from 1954 to 1975, the year they were

enacted, and a brief description of how they changed the education system.

Table 1

Educational Reforms from 1954-1975

Year	Act	Information
1954	Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka, Kansas	Ended segregation in schools. This decision was made by the U.S. Supreme Court, effectively overturning the 1896 ruling of "separate but equal" in *Plessy v. Ferguson*.
1958	National Defense Education Act	Provided federal funding to improve schools by focusing on developing advanced math and science classes to better prepare students for global competition. This was done in response to the launch of Sputnik by the Soviet Union.
1964	Civil Rights Act	Prohibited discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. Denied federal funds to any institution that practiced racial discrimination and forced schools to offer educational opportunities to all students.
1964	Economic Opportunity Act	Created programs to bring educational opportunities to the economically disadvantaged such as Head Start preschool programs.
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act	Set aside federal funds for school districts in low-income areas for professional development, instructional materials, resources, and increasing parental involvement.
1972	Title IX of the Educational Amendments	Prohibited schools from excluding or discriminating against any student on the basis of sex.
1975	Education for All Handicapped Children Act	Required schools to provide students with mental and physical disabilities equal access to educational services. Later renamed the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Note. Adapted from "The Education Reform Movement," by Encyclopedia.com, n.d. (https://www.encyclopedia.com/social-sciences/news-wires-white-papers-and-books/education-reform-movement).

These major changes in the educational environment took time to implement and

impacted schools and districts across the country. School districts did not have the

knowledge or capacity to respond to these changes in policy (Gamson et al., 2015). In addition, the role of the principal was impacted by these educational policies and the subsequent cultural changes in the student populations. According to Rousmaniere (2013), "Principals juggled administrative and legal requirements around issues of employment, transportation, facility construction, curriculum development, community engagement, field trips, racial integration, standardized testing, traffic safety, sex education, and insurance policies" (p. 86). The number of administrative tasks assigned to the role of principal seemed to increase exponentially with the addition of each new educational law shifting the focus away from instructional leadership. These responsibilities evolved again in the 1980s when the focus of education became student academic achievement.

Nation at Risk

In 1983, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* was released (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report was written by a panel of experts convened by the U.S. Department of Education who criticized the eroding quality of the American public school system. The National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) wrote in their report, "Our nation is at risk. Our once unchallenged preeminence in commerce, industry, science, and technological innovation is being overtaken by competitors throughout the world" (p. 5). The report called to light the declining test scores in reading, math, and science, lower academic requirements for high school graduation and college admission, and the oversimplification of the core content curricula and textbooks (Urban & Wagoner, 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2008). Many felt that this produced citizens who were unable to compete in a

global economy. The report stated, "The educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 5).

The report's recommendations included strengthening graduation requirements, implementing rigorous and measurable standards with higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct, more time devoted to learning, and improved teacher preparation programs (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The authors hoped that the report would spark support and interest in improving the educational system across the nation. Political, educational, and business leaders became concerned about the report and the condition of education (Urban & Wagoner, 2009). This led to a wave of new educational reforms and school improvement measures that would need to be led by district and site leaders.

An important component the commission addressed in the report was the need to develop educational leaders. Principals and superintendents have taken on the role of managers and instructional leaders who must be able to complete the managerial and supervisory duties of the position and improve student learning outcomes through goal-setting and community consensus (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The responsibilities of these positions seemed to grow with the added pressures of the publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* and the subsequent reforms that followed.

No Child Left Behind

In 2001, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed and signed into law by President George W. Bush. NCLB strived to improve public education by developing

content standards and mandated standardized testing with the results of the assessments available for stakeholders to see how students are performing (U.S. Department of Education, 2008). The public results aimed to increase accountability and allow stakeholders to judge the effectiveness of schools and districts. These assessments were required to show that students were making adequate yearly progress with a nationwide goal of all students scoring proficient or higher by 2014 (Murname & Papay, 2010; Nolen & Duignan, 2023).

Schools were required to use the data from the assessments to make decisions related to improving student learning outcomes (Coburn & Talbert, 2006). This included whether the school should spend its funding on materials, resources, instructional programs, or staffing. Schools that failed to make growth and meet their yearly goals would be subject to sanctions, which could eventually lead to the replacement of the staff or school closure (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016; Murname & Papay, 2010; Mitani, 2018; Nolen & Duignan, 2023). Many educators were concerned with the incentives provided to schools that performed well and the sanctions for schools that did not. Some principals responded by shifting their instructional leadership focus toward test preparation (Rousmaniere, 2013). The unintended consequences of these actions may have reduced the quality of education for some students (Murname & Papay, 2010; Nolen & Duignan, 2023).

Although the goals of NCLB were to increase student learning outcomes for all, the accountability measures often led to inequitable, substandard teaching practices. Educators and schools promoted "teaching to the test." Teaching to the test was a practice in which teachers focused on questions that would likely appear on the end-of-year

standardized assessment (Murname & Papay, 2010). This led to memorization of facts

and test preparation instead of deep, meaningful learning of concepts. In addition, this led

to teachers focusing solely on subjects that were tested and neglecting subjects such as

history, social science, and visual and performing arts (Nolen & Duignan, 2023).

Principals also encouraged teachers to focus on the "bubble kids." Bubble kids

were students who scored close to the proficiency threshold on standardized assessments

and could make a large impact on the adequate yearly progress scores if they improved to

the next proficiency level (Murname & Papay, 2010). Students who scored far below

were often not targeted for intervention support because they would have to improve far

more to make a difference on adequate yearly progress.

In addition to poor teaching practices, the accountability measures exposed the

growing achievement gaps among student populations, particularly socioeconomic status.

One of the main objectives of NCLB was to close the achievement gap in math and

reading for students in underrepresented subgroups (Adler-Greene, 2019; U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.). This was not the case. Instead, the gaps between student

groups only increased during the times of high-stakes assessments. Reardon (2011) found

that the achievement gap between students from high-income and low-income families in

2011 was 30 to 40% greater than for those born 25 years earlier.

In addition, principals were faced with additional levels of stress because of the

added tasks, budget cuts, and longer work hours required to raise student achievement

scores and avoid sanctions (Murname & Papay, 2010; Mitani, 2018). Principals were

held responsible when students at their school were not making adequate yearly progress

(Finkel, 2012). To support principals and reduce job stress, Mitani (2018) recommended

providing additional staffing support to distribute the instructional leadership

responsibilities.

Up until this point educational policies like NCLB enforced a test-based, vertical,

prescriptive, narrow, and punitive system in which the federal government's capacity to

support struggling schools faded over time (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). After years of

implementing NCLB focusing solely on standardized assessments, a new act was on the

horizon that sought to include a variety of factors to measure a school's performance.

Every Student Succeeds Act

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was signed by President Obama in

2015. ESSA updated and replaced NCLB (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). ESSA is

the primary federal law that authorized federal spending to support K-12 education and

represents the nation's commitment to providing education that is equitable and

accessible for all students regardless of race, ethnicity, gender, disability, English

proficiency, or socioeconomic status (Darrow, 2016; Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017; U.S.

Department of Education, n.d.).

ESSA moved the authority of the educational institutions away from the federal

government to the states and local education agencies. According to the Office of

Elementary and Secondary Education (2020), ESSA promotes flexibility at the state level

and transparency for stakeholders by having the expectation that states measure student

performance in reading, math, and science and create a state report card or dashboard that

reports these scores online. ESSA allowed schools and districts to incorporate

nonacademic indicators in this dashboard to bring attention to the nation's broader

educational purpose (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016), which is to ensure students who graduate

from high school are college, career, and world ready (Darrow, 2016; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019).

The state's annual dashboard reported each school's and district's effectiveness in multiple areas of the educational environment. This included academic achievement, access to advanced placement classes, attendance, school climate, student growth, graduation rates, and English proficiency levels (Adler-Greene, 2019; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016; Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). This allowed states to examine a variety of factors to be considered successful beyond high-stakes, standardized tests.

ESSA encouraged schools to focus on a variety of factors in the educational setting to ensure students had access to high-quality learning environments. For example, ESSA requires states to include improving English language acquisition as part of their accountability (Adler-Greene, 2019; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). Sharp (2016) showed that ESSA ensured that states

- Have standards for college and career
- Provide necessary resources to schools that require improvement
- Use research-based intervention strategies
- Use annual assessments as a tool to inform teaching and learning
- Increase accessibility to preschool programs

In addition, ESSA provided federal funding for recruiting, preparing, and training principals. Leithwood et al. (2004) found principals to be the second most important school-based factor to impact student achievement. In addition, principals can have a larger impact on student learning through other school-based data metrics such as

attendance, discipline, and teacher turnover (Grissom et al., 2021). Given this level of importance in improving schools and student learning outcomes, states were provided with the opportunity to use federal funds to invest in school leadership. Prior to ESSA, investing in principals and school leaders was traditionally overlooked and not considered as a factor to consider for improving student achievement (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017).

High Stakes Testing

High-stakes tests serve two purposes: first, to serve as a means of accountability for Title I funding and second, to provide a means of encouraging a culture of continual educational improvement (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Gibbs et al., 2023). However, year after year, researchers, teachers, school administrators, and parents express concerns about mandated, high-stakes, standardized assessments. These concerns include the high costs and time to administer and the fact that the results of the assessments are available after students have moved on to the next grade (Gibbs et al., 2023). This does not provide opportunities for teachers and schools to support the students who took the assessments. In addition, these assessments do not measure a student's effort or improvement from one year to the next (W. G. Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002).

Although the goal of the NCLB Act was to close the achievement gap, this did not happen in all areas. Black students performed significantly lower than their White counterparts, and in schools where most of the student population was from low-income households, the achievement gap widened for Black students (Adler-Greene, 2019). This impact was consistent for many students from low-income families as well. W. G. Cunningham and Sanzo (2002) found there was a significant relationship between

socioeconomic status and success on state standardized tests. The achievement gap

caused by different household incomes is nearly twice as large as the achievement gap

caused by race (Reardon, 2011). Students from low-income families tend to be at a

disadvantage when it comes to taking high-stakes tests. Students may not be able to

connect or understand questions about places or activities they have not experienced.

Students from low-income families are less likely to have a variety of cultural or

academic experiences outside of school; to have less financial, academic, and

technological support; and less access to early childhood education programs than their

counterparts in middle and upper-class households (W. G. Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002;

Reardon, 2011).

Although ESSA was passed with great enthusiasm by many, the new system

remains primarily a test-based accountability system requiring interventions for schools

that score in the lowest 5%. The achievement gap still persists and may have become

wider, especially in low income households. Two-thirds of the variance in test scores can

be attributed to environmental conditions such as neighborhood (urban vs. suburban) and

income (W. G. Cunningham & Sanzo, 2002; Mathis & Trujillo, 2016).

One of the impacts of high-stakes testing is the negative portrayal of school

districts, district leadership, schools and their principals deemed as underperforming or

failing. Schools and districts with the lowest scores tend to have the largest social and

economic challenges (Mathis & Trujillo, 2016). In addition, the interventions and

supports to improve schools are not working. Gibs et al. (2023) analyzed 10 years of

assessment data from public schools in two states and found that the correlation of

schools' test scores from one year to the next was exceptionally high. This indicates that

the previous year's results are clear indicators of how schools will perform in the current year and schools learn little to no new information derived from annual testing to improve student learning outcomes.

High-stakes testing and accountability measures placed added pressures and responsibilities on district and school leaders to ensure students were succeeding. This factor changed the principal's working conditions and caused increased levels of stress and burnout (Mitani, 2018). As more and more initiatives unfolded, leaders became overwhelmed by the accountability measures and the shortage of leadership resources for implementation. Principals and superintendents were called to be instructional leaders to increase student learning outcomes without clearly understanding what that means (Leithwood et al., 2004).

Education in the 21st Century

Thirty years after *A Nation at Hope*, the educational environment is shifting to a new set of reforms and initiatives to improve schools (National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). These reforms and initiatives move the focus from a purely academic, knowledge-based system to incorporating skills and practices that target academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning. These areas allow students to learn a broad range of skills that should be included in education from the earliest ages and refined in adolescence (W. V. Cunningham & Villaseñor, 2016). Thus, by the time students graduate from high school, they have developed skills and practices throughout their K-12 educational experience to be college and career-ready. Countries invest in their education systems to prepare students to enter the workforce and contribute to its long-term economic well-being, growth, and sustainability (Chalkiadaki,

2018). Ensuring students have the skills to be successful in the workplace while they are in the K-12 educational setting provides opportunities for this to occur.

New reforms and change initiatives are inundating the education system with the goal of supporting the whole child. These reforms focus on supporting students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs and have become popular in the last decade. A few of these reforms include 21st century skills, social-emotional learning, multitiered systems of support, and positive behavioral interventions and supports.

21st Century Skills

For students to be successful in college, career, and life, 21st century skills are essential. According to Buckle (n.d.), "21st-century skills refer to the knowledge, life skills, career skills, habits, and traits that are critically important to student success in today's world, particularly as students move on to college, the workforce, and adult life" (What Are 21st Century Skills? section). These skills are sometimes called transferable competencies or soft skills and began to become part of educational conversations in the 2010s. Soft skills refer to a combination of interpersonal and intrapersonal skills including emotional characteristics, attitudes, and skills (Buckle, n.d.; Care et al., 2018; Chalkiadaki, 2018).

The focus on 21st century skills is visible in education and curricular reforms. There is a need for students to develop relevant skills and competencies to be prepared for the globalization and innovation of information and communication technologies, which is part of the larger global discussion regarding changing work and societal needs (Buckle, n.d.; Care et al., 2018; Chalkiadaki, 2018). In addition, in discussions about educational reforms, leaders in higher education and business state that 21st century skills

are the most important driver of success in coursework and the workplace (Buckle, n.d.).

Schools should provide educational experiences relevant to the 21st century world to

promote transferable skills and competencies that will help a student to be successful in

college, career, and life (Care et al., 2018). Districts are encouraged to embed these skills

in the Common Core curriculum which means they will need to build staff capacity and

support principals and teachers in delivering this instruction (Buckle, n.d.).

Social-Emotional Learning

There is also a growing movement in the 21st century dedicated to the social,

emotional, and academic well-being of students in America (Collaborative for Academic,

Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.; National Commission on Social, Emotional, and

Academic Development, 2019). Social and emotional learning (SEL) is the

> process through which all young people and adults acquire and apply the
>
> knowledge, skills, and attitudes to develop healthy identities, manage emotions,
>
> and achieve personal and collective goals, feel and show empathy for others,
>
> establish and maintain supportive relationships, and make responsible and caring
>
> decisions. (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning, n.d.,
>
> para. 1).

According to the National Commission on Social, Emotional, and Academic

Development (2019), students need access to various skills, attitudes, and values such as

motivation, perseverance, responsibility, honesty, and integrity to be successful in

college, career, and the world. When students learn about the characteristics of social,

emotional, and cognitive skills and habits of mind, they are better equipped to succeed in

school, perform at work, and flourish in life as contributing and productive members of
society.

SEL has a positive impact on academic achievement and prepares students to
enter the global workplace. SEL increases student engagement and academic
performance, impacts students' functioning in schools including grades, test scores,
attendance, and homework completion (Collaborative for Academic, Social, and
Emotional Learning, n.d.). In addition, employers across the globe seek employees with
social-emotional skills and higher-order cognitive skills. Over 50% of the top five skills
and 79% of the top-ranked skills identified by employers as priorities in hiring new
employees can be classified as social-emotional skills (W. V. Cunningham & Villaseñor,
2016).

Once again, this initiative requires an investment in capacity building and support
from the district. To successfully implement SEL in schools, it must be explicitly taught
to students and practiced in the classroom and throughout the day (National Commission
on Social, Emotional, and Academic Development, 2019). Principals and teachers need
support in delivering this instruction and implementing practices school-wide.

Multitiered Systems of Support

Multitiered systems of support (MTSS) is a framework used to ensure all
students' academic, behavioral, and social-emotional needs are met through increasingly
targeted interventions across three levels of support (California Department of Education,
2023; Fredrick, n.d.; Utley & Obiakor, 2015.). The framework provides a continuum of
supports including resources, strategies, structures, and evidence-based practices for
addressing barriers to student learning and behavior (Utley & Obiakor, 2015). The goals

of MTSS are to remove barriers to learning, use evidence-based practices, and make data-based decisions for targeted and intensive interventions (Fredrick, n.d.).

MTSS consists of three tiers of supports. Tier 1 supports are universal and consist of high-quality core instruction, embedded SEL, and cultivating a positive and inclusive school climate (Fredrick, n.d.). Tier 2 supports are additional, supplemental targeted interventions for a small group of individuals who are not successful with Tier 1 instruction alone (Averill & Rinaldi, 2011). Tier 3 supports are intensive services for 1-5% of the population who continue to struggle and need even more support than Tier 2 can offer (Fredrick, n.d.). The overarching goal of MTSS is to ensure that all students receive the specific academic, behavioral, and social-emotional supports they need to be successful in school.

Districts that are able to successfully implement have a dedicated MTSS team who develop a long-term plan, determine how resources will be allocated to schools, and provide professional development. (Fredrick, 2023). MTSS is a system-wide practice and begins at the district office. District-level leadership teams support the implementation of MTSS by building the capacity of principals and teachers district-wide.

Positive Behavioral Interventions and Support

According to Center on Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports ([PBIS], n.d.), "Positive behavioral interventions and supports (PBIS) is an evidence-based tiered framework for supporting students' behavioral academic, social emotional, and mental health" (para. 1). PBIS provides a framework for teaching, supporting, strengthening, and expanding positive behavior in students (Carr et al., 2002; Center on PBIS, n.d.; Mitchell et al., 2018). PBIS has been shown to improve social-emotional awareness, student

learning outcomes, school climate, and educator health and well-being (Center on PBIS, n.d.). One of the important goals of PBIS is to help students with strategies that will minimize problem behaviors making them irrelevant and ineffective (Carr et al., 2002). One of the major focus areas in PBIS is prevention. PBIS uses and implements interventions and strategies proactively to minimize and reduce future instances of the unwanted behaviors (Carr et al., 2002; Mitchell et al., 2018).

Like MTSS, PBIS uses a three-tiered approach. Tier 1 includes universal, school-wide supports for students that create a learning environment encouraging appropriate social behavior (Mitchell et al., 2018). Tier 1 supports are universal and set the foundation for positive, proactive, differentiated support (Center on PBIS, n.d.; Mitchell et al., 2018). For students who need additional interventions beyond the universal supports, there is Tier 2. Tier 2 supports are for about 10-15% of the student population and are an added layer of systems, data, and resources targeted toward an individual's needs (Center on PBIS, n.d.). Tier 3 is for students who display chronic patterns of challenging behavior or sometimes severe, pervasive, and intensive behavior (Mitchell et al., 2018).

Twenty first century skills, SEL, MTSS, and positive behavior interventions and supports are just a few of the latest reforms and change initiatives that are inundating the educational system. The implementation of these efforts is recommended to begin at the district level to ensure a coherent approach to planning, program evaluation, professional development, and resource allocation (Averill et al., 2011; Utley & Obiakor, 2015). Schools, teachers, and principals rely on the leadership of district-level teams to implement these programs effectively and impact student learning and well-being.

Leadership

Leaders are an integral part of ensuring the success of any place of business or organization. A leader is an individual who

> selects, equips, trains, and influences one or more followers who have diverse gifts, abilities, and skills and focuses the followers on the organization's mission and objectives causing the followers to willingly and enthusiastically expend spiritual, emotional, and physical energy in a concerted coordinated effort to achieve the organizational mission and objective. (Winston & Patterson, 2006, p. 7)

Effective leaders support both the individual and the team to ensure success. Leaders influence individuals and teams in a manner that allows them to achieve the desired goals of the organization (Muijs, 2011; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014; Winston & Patterson, 2006). Effective leaders possess emotional and social intelligence, are self-aware, and are able to support and manage relationships. Leaders rally people and teams, inspire and motivate while creating a vision and purpose, and increase productivity by capitalizing on an individual's talents and strengths (McKee et al., 2008; Winston & Patterson, 2006). Leaders foster environments that promote healthy relationships among the members of their organization in addition to clients, customers, and all other stakeholders. Leaders provide a space for people to do what is required in the most efficient and effective way possible in an ever-changing work environment (De Pree, 2004; Nanjundeswaraswamy & Swamy, 2014).

In addition to ensuring they tend to the relational aspects of the position, leaders must also focus on the technical requirements of the role. Leaders are responsible for

ensuring the organization has the proper resources including services, products, tools, and equipment (De Pree, 2004; Hattie & Smith, 2021). Leaders provide training to build knowledge and skills that will allow employees to successfully complete tasks (Muijs, 2011; Winston & Patterson, 2006). Ultimately, leaders are responsible for the effectiveness of the organization.

How a leader approaches the technical and relational aspects of the position is influenced by their leadership style. A leadership style refers to the leader's mindset, behaviors, skills, knowledge, and approach to change (D. Anderson & Ackerman Anderson, 2010; Kozlowski et al., 2016; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). After conducting a literature review on different leadership styles, Nanjundeswaraswamy and Swamy (2014) found that an individual's style of leadership, commitment to the organization, and satisfaction at work are interrelated. There are various leadership styles including the traditional, top-down approach and a collaborative approach known as shared leadership.

Traditional Leadership

Traditional, top-down leadership contrasts with the shared leadership approach in which the responsibility is distributed among a variety of individuals within the organization. In the traditional leadership model, the influence and relationship between the leader and employees are provided in a vertical approach. Traditional leadership is a top-down model in which a single leader holds the power and authority over the team, and the employees are subject to his or her explicit direction (Houghton et al., 2003; O'Toole et al., 2002; Pearce & Sims, 2001). In this approach, leaders have hierarchical, positional power over subordinates.

During the Industrial Revolution, the concept of leadership became an important factor in economic endeavors. The primary roles of the leader were command, control, and oversight, which emphasized a vertical model of leading (Pearce & Conger, 2003). At that time, the idea that the leader and subordinate could work together collaboratively was nonexistent. Subordinates were expected to follow the directives of the leader, and the leaders were expected to assign directives and oversee progress to completion.

In 400 BCE, "Plato wrote that leadership is a rare trait, typically possessed by only one person in any society, an individual who has a unique lock on wisdom and truth" (O'Toole et al., 2002, p. 65). This idea was only reinforced throughout history in different industries as well. In the business world, the rise and development of some American corporations and organizations are portrayed as the accomplishments of a few great men.

With this approach, the traditional leader usually becomes the primary source of knowledge, direction, and guidance (Houghton et al., 2003; Seers et al., 2003). This approach to leadership led to a focus on the leader's behaviors, mindsets, and actions (Pearce & Conger, 2003). This occurred because in the traditional top-down approach, the leader must guarantee the success of the organization by ensuring employees work in alignment with the mission and vision of the company. In contrast, a shared leadership approach distributes leadership responsibilities to various individuals based on their knowledge, skills, and expertise.

Shared Leadership

Shared leadership shifts from a top-down system to a more horizontal approach in which the leader and employees share the responsibilities and work collaboratively.

Pearce and Conger (2003) defined shared leadership as a "dynamic, interactive influence process among individuals in groups for which the objective is to lead one another to the achievement of group or organizational goals or both" (p. 1). Shared leadership is also known as distributed leadership, team leadership, and democratic leadership in the literature (Spillane, 2005).

A shared leadership system consists of individuals having both formal and informal forms of leadership to complete tasks (A. Harris, 2014; Seers et al., 2003). Individuals in the system can take formal roles of leadership such as a team leader or manager and can also assume informal roles such as an expert on a project or task. At different times, individuals will serve as leaders or followers (Cox et al., 2003; Dresher et al., 2014). Shared leadership creates an environment that is democratic, collaborative, more mutual, and less hierarchical in nature (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Kozlowski et al., 2016).

Shared leadership focuses on the strengths of the team. Leaders are not expected to be the experts in every field but to rely on the knowledge, skills, and expertise of individuals within the teams and distribute leadership accordingly. In a shared leadership system, leadership is broadly distributed among individuals within the organization or team based on their strengths instead of at the hands of a centralized, superior individual (O'Toole et al., 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Interactions in a shared leadership system are more fluid and multidirectional instead of vertical or static, which is found in a traditional leadership model (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

Establishing shared leadership systems increases the team's effectiveness. There is a positive correlation between distributing leadership, trust, and performance (Dresher

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et al., 2014; Klasmeier & Rowold, 2020). That is, as groups increased the leadership shared, trust grew, and performance increased. Trust is an integral aspect of influential groups and teams (Dresher et al., 2014). In addition, Klasmeier and Rowold (2020) found a positive relationship between shared leadership, team performance, and team creativity. Teams that distribute leadership perform better and are able to develop innovative and creative ideas.

History of Shared Leadership

The idea of shared leadership has developed over time beginning in the 1920s when researchers started to recognize leadership does not solely lie with the leader. Historically, leadership consisted of one individual and his or her control and oversight over subordinates (Pearce & Conger, 2003; Seers et al., 2003). The idea of a single, hierarchical leader is described as the traditional leadership model. In this model, there is a downward or vertical influence on subordinates by the leader (Pearce & Sims, 2002). Much of the research during the Industrial Revolution focused on this traditional, vertical approach.

A shift in the research occurred in 1924 when Mary Parker Follett explained individuals should not just look to their designated leader for guidance. Follett introduced the "law of situation," which encouraged individuals to follow the person with the most knowledge regarding the situation at hand instead of the person with formal authority (Pearce & Conger, 2003). She continued by suggesting individuals seek out others with knowledge of the situation at hand regardless of their position within the organization (Pearce & Sims, 2001). This was contrary to the traditional, top-down leadership approach that was popularly studied years before and during the Industrial Revolution.

The idea of shared leadership continued to grow over time. Table 2 shows the history of research and theories that led to the idea of shared leadership.

Table 2

Advances in Shared Leadership from the 1930-1990s

Years	Theory	Key idea
1930s	Social systems perspectives	When leaders pay attention to the psychological needs of their employees.
1950s	Coleadership	Occurs when two individuals share one leadership position simultaneously.
1950s	Social exchange theory	Claims people enter social relationships expecting some type of social gain or cost. This theory showed that influence is not limited to a hierarchical leader, but is distributed among individuals throughout the organization.
1960s	Emergent leadership	Occurs when a leader is selected by the members of a group.
1970s	Participative decision making	When leaders involve subordinates in the decision-making process. Occurs when employees can contribute to quality decision making, have knowledge the leader does not, and there is a low potential for conflict regarding the decision.
1980s	Vertical dyad linkage	When the subordinates influence how the leader behaves.
1980s–1990s	Self-leadership	Alleviates supervision and control by the leader because the subordinates have the knowledge and skills needed and the motivation to do the work.
1980s–1990s	Self-managing work teams	Allows team members to take on roles previously reserved for leaders and managers.

Note. Adapted from "All Those Years Ago: The Historical Underpinnings of Shared Leadership," by C. L. Pearce and J. A. Conger, 2003, in C. L. Pearce and J. A. Conger (Eds.), *Shared Leadership: Reframing the Hows and Whys of Leadership*, pp. 1–18. SAGE Publication (https://doi.org/10.4135/9781452229539.n1).

The evolution of ideas over time led to the development of shared leadership in organizations. Shared leadership eventually found its way to the field of education and is frequently used throughout the system to support student learning and well-being.

Shared Leadership in Education

Shared leadership can be used in the education system to distribute the leadership of teaching and learning to a variety of individuals. School leaders, researchers, and policymakers should be interested in shared leadership, according to several researchers because it provides an opportunity for schools to face the everchanging, complex demands of society (Amels et al., 2021). Shared leadership expands leadership roles beyond formal, hierarchical management or administrative positions (DeMatthews, 2014; A. Harris, 2014; Spillane & Diamond, 2007) and creates opportunities for more staff members to be involved in the instructional leadership responsibilities. In the era of educational reforms, the principal does not bear this responsibility alone. Instructional leadership and improving student learning and well-being is a shared undertaking that includes various individuals associated with the schools (Lambert, 2002). Principals are encouraged to use the expertise of district-level leaders to supplement instructional leadership in their schools (Leithwood, 2010).

Shared leadership in education is accomplished through the collaboration of multiple individuals interacting with each other and their situations in schools, districts, and communities (Cobanoglu, 2020; Diamond & Spillane, 2016; Spillane, 2005). Shared leadership provides a model for team members to take leadership roles depending on their knowledge and skills with a particular focus area or experience (Amels et al., 2021). Leaders can share the responsibility of planning, monitoring, achieving, and communicating the district's mission and goals, which emphasizes the need for collaboration in the process (Cobanoglu, 2020; Poff & Parks, 2010).

Leaders can focus on a variety of shared leadership factors that will promote success. Poff and Parks (2010) conducted a Delphi study and found the essential elements of shared leadership in education to fit into five domains: collaboration, common focus, shared responsibility, supportive culture, and widespread communication. Shared leadership systems that effectively address these five domains can lead to positive outcomes for schools. High-performing schools have been shown to have a clear direction from the district and a high degree of shared leadership (A. Harris, 2014).

Shared leadership creates a system for multiple individuals throughout the school district, including teachers site principals and instructional leaders, to work collaboratively in finding ways to effectively integrate pedagogical and content-based changes (Amels et al., 2021; Cobanoglu, 2020; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). Sharing the responsibility for leadership allows schools to become strong organizations supporting student growth (Miles, 2018). Shared leadership allows teachers, principals and instructional leaders throughout the district to work collaboratively with each toward the common goal of increasing student learning and well-being.

Principals

The role of the principal has shifted and grown over the past few decades. Because of the evolutions in federal, state, and local policy, the role of the principal has changed to include topics like test-based accountability and student engagement (Grissom et al., 2021; Reid, 2021; Rogers, 2022). Principals also serve as the instructional leaders for their sites. In a review of the literature, Hallinger (2005) found that a principal who provides instructional leadership focuses on

- Developing and creating a shared sense of purpose around clear goals focused on student learning outcomes

- Fostering a culture of improvement through the use of continuous improvement cycles for school plans that include input from a wide range of stakeholders

- Promoting a climate and culture of high expectations and innovative teaching and learning practices

- Coordinating the curriculum and monitoring student outcomes

- Developing a reward system that reflects the school's mission

- Continuing to grow the staff's pedagogical practice through a wide range of professional learning activities

- Modeling the expected behaviors and values of the school's cultures and being highly present throughout the school.

In addition to the previously identified roles, shifts in policy have added increased demands for multiple means of measurement, equity, student health and wellness, school safety, and academic performance (Pechota & Scott, 2021). After interviewing principals on the future of the role, Reid (2021) found three prominent themes: safety and security, the social-emotional and mental health of students and teachers, and interactions with parents and guardians. These themes shift the primary role of the principal away from instructional leadership alone.

Districts are implementing new initiatives and reforms including 21st century skills, SEL, MTSS, and PBIS. Principals do not have unlimited time, energy, and resources (Hattie & Smith, 2021) to successfully implement all of these initiatives at their school sites alone. Many principals are focusing on building positive relationships and

managing the day-to-day activities such as budget and facilities. Principals often have to make decisions about where to spend their time, effort, and influence to make the greatest impact on student learning and well-being. One of the most difficult aspects of being a principal is finding this balance and carrying the burden alone (Hallinger, 2005).

In addition to the site responsibilities, principals are required to attend meetings about district-wide business. Principals attend various district leadership and principal meetings, receive information about state and local policies, participate in a variety of networking events, and learn about new resources, practices, and ideas associated with changing policy and reform efforts (Coburn, 2005). These events provide principals more access to change initiatives and reforms. Principals then have to make sense of these messages and determine which messages to present to teachers, when they will present them, and which they will filter out.

These meetings do not always build the instructional leadership capacity of the principal. Principals are often not included in professional development associated with changes in instructional policy (Coburn, 2005; DeMatthews, 2014; Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017). District offices are responsible for providing principals with opportunities to develop their capacity in curriculum and instructional leadership (DeMatthews, 2014; Elmore, 2004; Leithwood, 2010). Specifically, principals need content-based professional learning opportunities and guidance in working with teachers to learn new instructional practices and implement policy changes (Coburn, 2005; Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017). However, with all of the responsibilities principals have, it becomes hard to find time to build their capacity as professional learning takes them away from the school site and the responsibilities there.

Principals have an opportunity to distribute leadership roles and responsibilities in relation to supporting student learning and well-being as well as the day-to-day functions of the principal. When principals distribute leadership to teachers, there are positive outcomes for teachers. Teacher collaboration increases and teachers readily share their knowledge with each other, take ownership of school goals, work collaboratively, provide collegial support, and have increased feelings of self-efficacy (Amels et al., 2021). When teachers are included in the decision-making process, they are more likely to implement the changes and sustain the practices over time (Hughes & Pickeral, 2013).

Shared leadership does not have to exist at the school site alone. Principals and teachers can incorporate district-level administrators such as instructional leaders into shared leadership systems. District-level administrators bring subject, grade-level, and content expertise that builds the instructional capacity of school site personnel. In partnership, principals and district-level administrators can work collaboratively to build capacity to support improvements in teaching and learning (Honig et al., 2010).

School District Effectiveness

With the shifts in the governance of schools from the national to the state and local levels, school districts and their leaders are more important in the school reform conversations. The NCLB Act was the first act to place the accountability of student learning on the district offices. District offices were then responsible for determining how to allocate resources and how to invest in reforms or initiatives that would improve schools that were not making adequate yearly progress (Leithwood, 2010; Nolen & Duignan, 2023). In addition to these decisions, district offices are responsible for making

a range of decisions related to the instructional program, student safety, mental health, and well-being (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017; Huguet et al., 2021).

E. Anderson and Young (2018) defined district effectiveness as the "influence of district-level practices that promote a mission of delivering high-quality and equitable educational experiences for each student" (p. 1). Instructionally effective school districts ensure there is a focus on high-quality education, consistency of the technical core (curriculum, instruction, and assessment), strong instructional leadership, emphasis on outcomes and progress monitoring, and a high degree of coordination among the district, schools, and classrooms (E. Anderson & Young, 2018; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). In making decisions to become instructionally effective, districts have to navigate a myriad of constraints while staying true to the shared principles and values of the district (Huguet et al., 2021). Districts play an important role in improving curriculum and instruction by providing a clear vision and supporting the focus at the school level (Corcoran et al., 2001).

School district effectiveness can be achieved by having a shared vision that drives the decision-making process. This shared vision and set of beliefs are meant to include closing the achievement gap among groups of students (Espinoza & Cardichon, 2017; Leithwood, 2010; Spillane et al., 2022). To do this, school districts need to set achievable goals and develop strategic plans. Murphy and Hallinger (1988) found that goals were a major component of instructionally effective school districts used to maintain excellence and promote improvement in schools. A district office with a clear vision will provide a better support system for efforts to improve classroom teaching and other school-led improvements that may increase student learning outcomes (Honig et al., 2010).

Districts also have a focus on curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Corcoran et al., 2001; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). To do this, districts can develop a coherent approach to curriculum and instruction that establishes student performance standards, develop or adopt district-wide core curriculum, and align curriculum, instruction, and assessments (Leithwood, 2010). Consistency and coordination are key factors between the district and schools and among the individual schools (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Spillane et al., 2022).

Districts also use data for planning, organizational learning, and accountability. Policies are placing more and more demands on school districts to use these data to guide educational improvement efforts (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Gibbs et al., 2023; Honig, 2003; Honig & Coburn, 2008). District offices use evidence to determine how to manage their organization, including providing for schools and teachers and participating in state and federal programs (Coburn et al., 2009; Honig & Coburn, 2008). This also includes ensuring the district has efficient technology and information management systems, providing schools with timely data, supporting data analysis, creating professional learning communities or other collaborative groups, using data to inform instruction, and integrating current research-based pedagogical practices (Leithwood, 2010).

Instructional Leadership

Instructional leadership occurs when an individual focuses on educational excellence through quality, equitable instruction that supports the diverse range of learners across the site or district (DeMatthews, 2015; Scott et al., 2020). Instructional leadership includes creating goals with a vision of improving student learning outcomes with effective instructional programs and school environment (Alemayehu, 2021;

Corcoran et al., 2001; DeMatthews, 2015; Hallinger, 2003; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

In addition, instructional leadership includes being knowledgeable about learning theory, effective curriculum and instruction, and being able to communicate with a variety of stakeholders about the instructional program and culture of the school (McEwan, 2003).

Traditionally, instructional leadership is associated with the principal leading, supervising, and supporting curriculum and instruction at the school site. Schools with skillful, effective school principals are a key contributing factor when it comes to explaining successful models of school-wide change, improvement, or effectiveness (Alemayehu, 2021; DeMatthews, 2014; Hallinger, 2003). Principals and school districts can create learning-focused partnerships that build the principal's capacity for instructional leadership through collaborative professional learning (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; Honig et al., 2010; Scott et al., 2020). However, this may not be feasible in an initiative-driven educational environment.

Over time, the number of responsibilities a principal has continues to grow, making instructional leadership a challenge to prioritize. Principals have begun to use the shared leadership model to distribute the role of instructional leadership with other educators. Some schools have hired instructional coaches or facilitators to support teachers (Range et al., 2014), and others have used teacher leaders (Neumerski, 2013). The research has shown that principals in high-performing schools shared or distributed some of their instructional responsibilities (Leithwood, 2010; Neumerski, 2013; Range et al., 2014). This not only ensures instructional leadership happens at a school site but also supports the overall well-being of the principal. Principals able to share leadership

responsibilities, particularly instructional leadership, would be less likely to be subject to burnout (Hallinger, 2003).

Schools in high-performing districts invest in instructional leadership by encouraging principals to seek support in their schools with district office expertise through a shared leadership approach (Leithwood, 2010; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). When district-level instructional leaders are part of the shared leadership system for schools, principals and instructional leaders work collaboratively to create an impact on student learning and well-being by providing meaningful instructional leadership to teachers (Honig et al., 2010; Leithwood, 2010).

District-Level Instructional Leaders

Instructional leaders are "district-level employees who coordinate textbook adoptions, develop curricula, and provide professional development and instructional coaching for teachers" (Domina et al., 2015, p. 359). Instructional leaders help to implement, maintain, and improve the overall quality of the district's instructional program (Allen, 1966; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994; B. M. Harris, 1967; Pajak, 1989). Instructional leaders may be known as curriculum and/or instruction coordinators, directors, or supervisors (Doll et al., 1958).

Individuals who serve in the role of the instructional district-level leader have diverse background experience including administration, teaching, curriculum, and instruction (Allen, 1966). Instructional leaders also have job descriptions that can encompass a variety of duties that can vary among districts (Doll et al., 1958; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989). Instructional leaders demonstrate their worth in terms of relevance, uniqueness, and efficiency in implementing the district's instructional

(B. M. Harris, 1967). Over time, the role of the instructional leader has grown to include more diverse responsibilities that support teaching and learning in a school and district.

History of District-Level Instructional Leaders

Instructional leaders have played a vital role in school districts since the 1920s. In 1922, the state of Maryland authorized local districts to employ supervising teachers to assist the superintendent with his responsibilities (Allen, 1966). During this time, instructional leaders used a directive approach that included goal setting, coordinating, and instilling knowledge in teachers through repetition. After World War II, there was a push for educational excellence for all students. In addition, there were societal pressures for technological revolutions and innovation (B. M. Harris, 1967). This period of educational changes brought about changes in the role of the principal and instructional leader. During this time, the principal began to take on the responsibility of instructional leadership, which led to role confusion between the instructional leader and the principal (Allen, 1966; B. M. Harris, 1967).

Because of their role in supporting curriculum and instruction in a standards and assessment-based educational environment, the number of instructional leaders has increased dramatically over the years. This trend of growth continues to occur. Table 3 shows the yearly change in instructional leaders, school administrators, and teacher staffing from 2016 to 2020. Instructional leader staffing continues to grow at a much higher rate than that of administrators and teachers.

Roles and Responsibilities

The responsibilities of instructional leaders can be quite diverse and vary based on the local needs of the school district. Typically, instructional leaders are responsible for

instruction-related tasks including coordinating, planning, and developing the curriculum;

monitoring student performance on assessments; coordinating support staff; developing

professional learning opportunities such as staff meetings and workshops; and selecting

and implementing textbooks and other instructional materials (Ausband, 2006; Doll et al.,

1958; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989). This list only covers a small

portion of the tasks an instructional leader may be responsible for.

Table 3

Number and Percent Change of Instructional Leaders, Administrators, and Teachers

School year	Number of instructional leaders	% change from previous year	Number of school administrators	% Change from previous year	Number of teachers	% Change from previous year
2016–2017	90,183		183,670		3,169,498	
2017–2018	95,746	6.17%	189,155	2.99%	3,169,749	0.01%
2018–2019	99,591	4.02%	193,934	2.53%	3,169,762	0.00%
2019–2020	104,602	5.03%	193,733	-0.10%	3,198,169	0.90%

Note. Data from "CCD Data Files: State Nonfiscal Public Elementary/Secondary Education
Survey Data," by National Center for Education Statistics, 2023
(https://nces.ed.gov/ccd/files.asp).

Early literature categorized the roles of instructional leaders into four basic

categories. B. M. Harris (1967) identified four common responsibilities of the job as

curriculum development, evaluation of instruction, development of materials, and in-

service training. With new initiatives and reforms in education, the role of the

instructional leader has expanded, and therefore, the categories have as well. After

conducting an in-depth review of the literature and analyzing the data from his own

study, Hamm (1994) categorized the work of instructional leaders into the following four

categories: communication, curriculum and instruction, program responsibility, and technical expertise.

Communication

Instructional leaders are expected to be able to communicate with a range of stakeholders. Most of an instructional leader's time is spent in verbal contact with staff in the school district including their supervisors, other district administrators such as the Superintendent and Assistant Superintendent, principals, and teachers on matters of curriculum and instruction (Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989). For principals in particular, instructional leaders spend a great deal of time supporting their instructional leadership development. Instructional leaders communicate with principals by modeling necessary skills, developing and providing resources, and identifying external supports to help principals build their instructional leadership capacity (Hamm, 1994; Honig et al., 2010). Principals can use the support of instructional leaders to be able to lead the curriculum and instruction work at their school sites.

Instructional leaders also work directly with teachers. This work can be done in curriculum committees, teacher groups, staff meetings, and more (Hamm, 1994; Pajak 1989). Instructional leaders are viewed as and are expected to be the spokesperson for their area of expertise and must be able to engage and lead dialogue about the instructional program, which may include communicating with the public and the board of education (Doll et al., 1958; Hamm, 1994).

Curriculum and Instruction

Instructional leaders serve as the curriculum and instruction leaders for their district. This includes planning, presenting, monitoring, and adjusting the district's

curriculum and instruction vision (Ausband, 2006; Doll et al., 1958; Hamm, 1994; B. M. Harris, 1967). Curriculum development includes a variety of tasks that guide instructional practices. This can include piloting projects and materials, planning professional learning, developing units of study, writing courses of study, guiding curriculum committees through the adoption and implementation process, and developing guidelines for instruction when new initiatives develop (Doll et al., 1958; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994; B. M. Harris, 1967). In addition, instructional leaders evaluate the effectiveness of the instructional programs across the district through data collected from summative assessments, classroom observations, action research, interviews, and more (Doll et al., 1958; B. M. Harris, 1967).

The goal of this task is to provide the most appropriate materials at the right time and place to facilitate instructional practices (B. M. Harris, 1967). This includes creating coherence across the district by standardizing the curricular offerings for core content areas (Pajak, 1989). This can also include selecting instructional materials, planning their development, designing instructional content, or analyzing the effectiveness of material implementation (Doll et al., 1958; B. M. Harris, 1967).

Program Management

The task of program management is associated with the work of building the capacity of staff members through professional learning opportunities. This may include formal courses, summer institutes, workshops, or released-time in-services (Hamm, 1994; B. M. Harris, 1967). Professional learning opportunities are offered throughout the year and are intended to build a teacher's capacity for curriculum and instruction and a principal's capacity for instructional leadership. These opportunities provide direct

support for implementing instructional improvements, especially those related to curriculum and instruction (B. M. Harris, 1967).

In addition to providing professional development, instructional leaders are coordinators of the instructional program. Instructional leaders coordinate people, ideas, events, information, and resources to develop or support the implementation of district-wide goals for the instructional programs across the district (Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989). This level of coordination involves bringing ideas, resources, and people together to establish a unified vision and direction for the district (Pajak, 1989).

Technical Expertise

Instructional leaders also serve as technical experts for school personnel including teachers and administrators. They are able to act as a consultant and advisor in regard to the curriculum (Doll et al., 1958). Instructional leaders are experts in their fields and have the ability and knowledge to gain an understanding of the trends, anticipate problems, develop committees to address the problems, provide accurate information regarding curriculum and instruction, and transform the district through new or evolving ideas (Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989).

Benefits of District-Level Instructional Leaders

One of the benefits of hiring instructional leaders is their ability to support the district with various roles and tasks. In addition to the many roles that instructional leaders play, they can also perform other duties that support the district. These duties can include supporting new teachers; providing input on the budget; interviewing and selecting teachers; helping to plan, design, and modernize new learning spaces; and

attending conferences on the national, state, and local levels to make reports and gather information (Doll et al., 1958; Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989).

Another benefit of instructional leaders is their ability to support change initiatives. Instructional leaders can be masterful in supporting and nurturing change in instruction because they understand the change process and can take quality time to plan (Hamm, 1994; Honig et al., 2010). Coburn and Talbert (2006) found that district office administrators like instructional leaders play a key role in mediating between the district office and the schools they support. Honig et al. (2010) recommended investing substantially in people who will be the interface between the district office and schools.

Obstacles for District-Level Instructional Leaders

With the various roles and responsibilities instructional leaders have, they also experience a range of obstacles. Some of the challenges instructional leaders face have been ingrained in the role for decades. Instructional leaders face obstacles that include exclusion from district-wide decision-making, issues with communication, the need to build trusting relationships to change teachers' mindsets, and the ability to lead curriculum work and receive training (Allen, 1966; Ausband, 2006).

Instructional leaders have a range of concerns for their positions. These concerns include finding techniques that are worthwhile for a range of new and veteran teachers, building a positive rapport with teachers, clarifying the purpose of their role and how their role is perceived by others in the district, and time (Allen, 1966; Hamm, 1994). The work of the instructional leader can be impacted by various factors including internal and external sources, past and present realities and mindsets, and projected future goals and plans from the local, state, and federal levels. Instructional leaders are also impacted by

the allotment of time with staff including time for professional development and coaching and work assigned not related to curriculum and instruction (Hamm, 1994).

Finally, because the educational and professional backgrounds and the job description for instructional leaders can be broad and diverse, some instructional leaders experience uncertainty or role confusion. B. M. Harris (1967) identified factors that contribute to confusion about the roles and responsibilities of instructional leaders, which include clearly defining who the instructional leader is working with (teacher, principal, public, school board, etc.); assigning priorities to tasks that are often shared with principals, teachers, and other staff; understanding their role in supporting change initiatives; having a space to work; and being unique in their approach.

Conceptual Framework

Shared leadership was the conceptual framework for this study. Although Delphi studies do not necessarily require a conceptual or theoretical framework, the role of district-level instructional leaders is to share the instructional leadership responsibilities with principals within the district. Shared leadership provides a model for distributing leadership to various individuals within the organization based on their talents, knowledge, skills, and expertise. Shared leadership is used when the organization's challenges are so complex that they require a diverse set of skills that cannot by possessed by a single leader (O'Toole et al., 2002). In education, new initiatives encourage schools and districts to transform the way they deliver curriculum and instruction to support student learning and well-being. Shared leadership is a system for principals and other administrators to share instructional leadership responsibilities with individuals who have curriculum and instruction expertise.

Shared leadership is a dynamic process among individuals in groups in which the distribution of leadership can change over time in a number of ways depending on a phenomenon or the organization (Dresher et al., 2014; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The shared leadership model reimagines the who and where of leadership by focusing on the need to distribute tasks, roles, and responsibilities up, down, and across the organization (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). The shared leadership model encourages peers to exchange leadership roles, which may result in an increase of leadership responsibilities in one group and a decrease in another, as opposed to solely relying on a vertical and downward leadership exchange by the appointed leader (Cox et al., 2003; Dresher et al., 2014; Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

Leadership can be distributed up and down the organization for multiple reasons. One reason is that the hierarchical or senior most leader may not possess the necessary skills or information to make highly effective decisions, especially when group members become more experienced with a task (Dresher et al., 2014; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Sharing the leadership allows individuals with expertise in the necessary area to provide leadership. Another reason is the demand for speedy responses in a fast-paced work environment. Leadership that is distributed across the organization provides opportunities for quick responses as opposed to sending all decisions to the hierarchical leader (Pearce & Conger, 2003).

In a shared leadership model, individuals in the organization will take on the role of leader at certain times and the role of follower or supporter at other times (Dresher et al., 2014). In this system, leadership roles are not tied exclusively to the hierarchical leader. Instead, leadership is a social process that occurs in and through social

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interactions and focuses on the knowledge, skills, and expertise required to support the goals and objectives of the organization (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003). Individuals in a shared leadership system are more likely to experience success when they take on different yet complimentary roles (O'Toole et al., 2002). This creates opportunities for individuals to use their expertise to lead and impact the effectiveness of the organization.

Shared leadership allows the members of a team to influence one another in a multifaceted approach (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003; Pearce & Sims, 2001). Teams are a fast-growing unit within organizations, especially cross-functional teams (O'Toole et al., 2002; Pearce & Conger, 2003; Seers et al., 2003). Cross-functional teams bring together a diverse set of backgrounds, expertise, skills, and strengths, and the formal leader is only one of the many unique individuals on the team (Cox et al., 2003; Pearce & Conger, 2003). Depending on the demands of the organization, an individual, who may or may not be the appointed leader, can take on the role of the leader and then step back at other times to allow others to lead (Pearce & Conger, 2003). Thus, leadership can exist as a group or team-based experience, and shared leadership calls for a process of shared influence between and among individuals to accomplish goals and meet performance expectations (Klasmeier & Rowold, 2020; Pearce and Sims, 2001).

Shared Leadership Framework

A conceptual framework of shared leadership developed by Pearce and Sims (2001) is presented in Figure 1. Figure 1 shows "shared leadership as a mediating causal variable between three categories of antecedent variables (group characteristics, task characteristics, and environmental characteristics) and three categories of group outcome variables (group psyche, group behavior, and group effectiveness)" (Pearce & Sims,

2001, p. 125). The antecedents are the conditions that will likely impact shared leadership and the outcomes are the factors likely to be impacted by shared leadership.

Figure 1

Conceptual Model for Shared Leadership
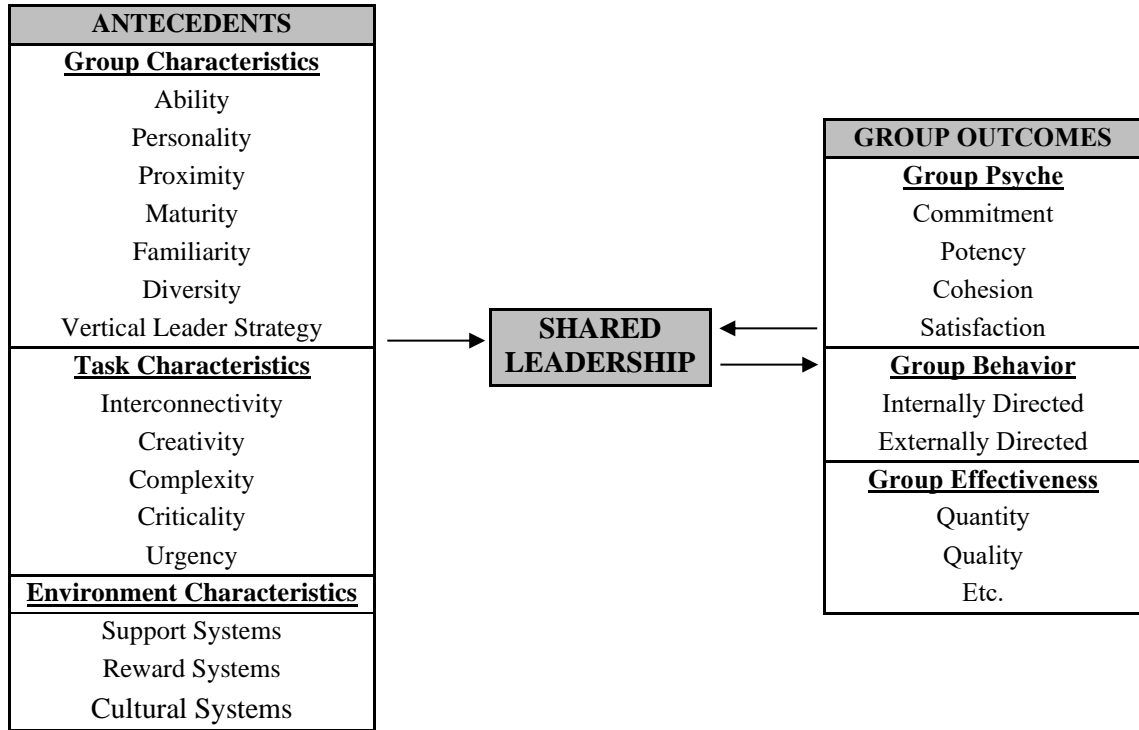
Note. From "Shared Leadership: Toward a Multi-level Theory of Leadership," by C. L Pearce and H. P. Sims, 2001, *Advances in Interdisciplinary Studies of Work Teams*, *7*, p. 126 (https://doi.org/10.1016/S1572-0977(00)07008-4).

The factors that are likely to impact shared leadership are group characteristics, task characteristics, and environment characteristics. Group characteristics refer to the attributes of the group, including an individuals' ability to perform the task, affinity toward teamwork, spatial distance to one another, development in the group over time, familiarity with one another, diversity among the other group members, and the size of the group. Task characteristics include the interconnectivity of the tasks within the group,

creativity required to complete the task, complexity of the task, critical necessity of the task, and urgency to complete the task. Environmental characteristics are the large-scale issues outside the group that impact its effectiveness. These include support systems such as education and skills development, reward systems that recognize the impact of the group over an individual, and cultural systems such as shared beliefs, norms, and values (Pearce & Sims, 2001).

The model of shared leadership can be used within school districts to distribute leadership responsibilities to experts, particularly in the area of instructional leadership during district-wide change initiatives. Shared leadership is considered a necessity when organizations are leading change initiatives (O'Toole et al., 2002). The structure of shared leadership allows for specific subsets of group members with specialization in needed areas to function as leaders (Dresher et al., 2014; Spillane & Diamond, 2007). District-wide instructional leaders can be used to develop coherence regarding the instructional program and build the instructional leadership capacity of the site principals through the shared leadership model. Shared leadership allows a variety of instructional leaders within the same district to share and develop instructional leadership responsibilities to support learning and well-being.

Summary

The literature review began by highlighting the myriad of reforms and change initiatives that have been part of the educational system. The primary goal of these reforms has been to increase educational access and opportunities for diverse student population groups. The publication of *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform* (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983) led to key reforms

including the NCLB Act and the ESSA. These reforms pushed for high-stakes testing that held schools and districts accountable for student learning outcomes. In addition to these reforms, the 21st century brought about new ideas that promoted a focus on academics, behavior, and social-emotional learning for students and provided tiers of support for students who struggle.

The literature review then discussed that one way to ensure the successful implementation of these multiple initiatives is through shared leadership. Shared leadership broadly distributes roles and responsibilities among a set of individuals throughout the organization (Pearce & Conger, 2003). School districts often use this model of leadership to distribute the roles of the principal to instructional leaders to support district-wide change initiatives.

Instructional leaders are district-level administrators who support the instructional program. Their primary roles include providing support in curriculum and instruction, delivering professional development, developing curriculum resources, providing technical expertise, and more. Their broad range of responsibilities, which researchers have applauded as necessary, can lead to obstacles including role confusion and a lack of time to support additional work (Allen, 1966). The final section of this review discussed the importance of shared leadership as a theoretical foundation and how leaders who use this approach navigate educational obstacles.

This study continues with Chapter III, which includes a description of the Delphi methodology used and the data collection process. Chapter IV presents the data and analyzes the key findings. Chapter V provides a summary of the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations for future action and research.

CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

Overview

This research study, through the use of the Delphi method, focused on identifying the obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach as well as potential strategies for overcoming obstacles. A panel of expert district-level administrative instructional leaders from K-12 school districts was selected to provide their perceptions of obstacles through three rounds of questionnaires and data collection. This study adds to the body of knowledge in the field of education pertaining to instructional leaders. By identifying the obstacles district-level instructional leaders face when supporting change initiatives, district offices can better plan for overcoming the obstacles in the face of an initiative-rich educational environment.

This chapter explores the components of the Delphi methodology and how it was used in this study. This chapter begins with the purpose statement, research questions, and research design. A detailed description of the population, target population, sample, and sampling methods are then provided to identify how the expert panel for this Delphi study was selected. The chapter then describes the instruments used in data collection, validity and reliability of the study, data analysis, and the limitations of the study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles they face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level

administrative instructional leaders. The second purpose of this Delphi study was to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The third purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being when implementing district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach.

Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

2. What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

3. What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

Research Design

This study used the Delphi methodology to identify the obstacles instructional leaders encounter when supporting district-wide change initiatives, the degree of importance of identified obstacles, and the strategies that have the greatest likelihood of overcoming these obstacles. The Delphi method is a research methodology that uses a group of experts to gather opinions to obtain the most reliable consensus through a series of questionnaires (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). Hsu and Sandford (2007) added that the Delphi method "is a widely used and accepted method for achieving convergence of opinion concerning real-world knowledge solicited from experts within certain topic areas" (p. 1).

The Delphi method was developed by the RAND Corporation in the 1950s for defense research (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Yousuf, 2019). Starting in the 1960s, the Delphi method began to appear in other areas of study including aerospace, and technology, and eventually made its way to nonprofits, government, industry, healthcare, and education (Linstone & Turner, 1975). One of the benefits of the Delphi method is its use in a variety of sectors for different purposes. The Delphi method has been used by organizations for research and development, program planning, long-range forecasting, needs assessments, policy development, and resource management (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Linstone & Turner, 1975).

The Delphi method presents to the panel of experts a series of repeated individual questions through interviews or survey questionnaires and avoids direct confrontation of the experts with one another (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963). Experts on the panel remain anonymous to one another throughout the study. The anonymity of the panel removes

bias, group conformity, or dominance of a member that may occur during face-to-face

interactions (Nasa et al., 2021). Selecting experts or subjects for a Delphi study is a key

component of the research process. Experts are selected based on their areas of expertise

in relation to the specific problem presented and their ability to provide useful input (Hsu

& Sandford, 2007).

A Delphi study is a mixed method approach that integrates qualitative and

quantitative methods. The first and third rounds of this study gathered qualitative data,

and the second round collected quantitative data. Descriptive data were obtained through

a phenomenological approach, which is used to understand the participants' perspectives

on an event or phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The questionnaires were

focused on the central problem of implementing change initiatives district-wide.

Instructional leaders provided their opinions and perspectives of the obstacles they faced

when supporting district-wide changes to improve student achievement and well-being

through a shared leadership approach and the strategies that can be used to overcome

obstacles.

In a Delphi study, multiple, interconnected questionnaires are used during at least

three different rounds (Ludwig, 1997). The first round of the Delphi method asks an

open-ended question, and the responses are then used to develop the questionnaire for the

second round of data collection (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). The second round asks the

experts to rate items or use a Likert scale to prioritize items (Hsu & Sandford, 2007;

Ludwig, 1997). The third round provides the list and ratings of the items from the second

round (Yousuf, 2019). The multiple rounds of questionnaires provide an opportunity for

the panel of experts to come to a consensus about the presented problem.

The Delphi process was selected as the appropriate research methodology for this study to understand a key problem school districts face when implementing systemic changes. The Delphi method allows the experts to provide their accounts and perspectives on the obstacles they face when supporting the implementation of change initiatives through a shared leadership approach as well as potential strategies to overcome these obstacles. Each expert panel member responded to the same questionnaire in the three rounds of survey administration. Data were collected from each round, analyzed, and used to determine the questions in the next survey round administered. The findings from the Delphi panel were used to identify ways in which district offices can use instructional leaders more efficiently and effectively to impact student learning and well-being.

Population

According to Creswell (2012), a population is "a group of individuals having one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups" (p. 142). The population for this study was all district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction and included administrators who were either directors or coordinators in K-12 California school districts. Instructional leaders are individuals who serve as district-level administrators under the direction of the superintendent or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction or educational services. They do not serve as school site leaders such as a principal or assistant principal nor do they work at the district's corresponding county office of education. Instructional leader positions include administrator of instructional/curriculum services, administrator of staff development, administrator of elementary education, and administrator of secondary education

(California Department of Education, 2019a). Instructional leaders may also include content area administrators such as math, science, history, and language arts. They do not include nonadministrators such as teachers on special assignment. In California, there are 58 counties, 1,018 school districts, and approximately 2,100 administrative instructional leaders with the titles of administrators identified above who serve under the supervision of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in educational services departments in K-12 school districts (California Department of Education, 2019b).

Target Population

A target population is "a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study" (Creswell, 2012, p. 142). A target population allows the researcher to choose a smaller selection of individuals from the larger population because it would not be feasible to study the entire population. The target population was selected from the Inland Empire, a region of Southern California consisting of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. This area includes school districts that include a diverse population of students similar to the demographics of the state of California. In California, 56% of the students are Hispanic or Latino, 20% are White, 9.5% are Asian, 19% are English learners, and 60% are socioeconomically disadvantaged. In the Inland Empire, 67% of the students are Hispanic or Latino, 15% are White, 3.8% are Asian, 16% are English learners, and 70% are socioeconomically disadvantaged (DataQuest, 2023). Although the percentages as compared with California are different, the researcher sought to identify two counties in southern California that consisted of student populations that were similar for both counties.

For this study, the target population was K-12 district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, there are a total of 56 K-12 school districts and 220 administrative instructional leaders. The number of school districts and instructional leaders in each county can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4

Instructional Leader Population for Riverside and San Bernardino Counties

County	Number of school districts	Number of instructional leaders
Riverside	23	87
San Bernardino	33	133
Total	56	220

Sample

The sample population was selected from the target population. According to Creswell (2012), "The sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population" (p. 142). In a Delphi study, 15 to 20 participants should be carefully selected by identifying the characteristics and qualifications of desirable respondents (Ludwig, 1997). In this study, the sample was 18 district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction from school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The goal was to have 50% of the participants from Riverside County and 50% of the participants from San Bernardino County.

For this Delphi study, the process of selecting the panel of experts for the sample population (district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction) consisted of establishing screening criteria. Hsu and Sandford (2007) shared

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that the selection of Delphi subjects is dependent upon the specialized area of knowledge or expertise related to the specific issue. In addition, Ludwig (1997) added that the characteristics and qualifications of desirable participants should be identified. The district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction who served on the expert panel possessed the following characteristics:

- are employed as an administrator (i.e. director, coordinator, etc.)

- are employed in a K-12 school district

- are employed at the district office and supported more than one school in the district

- have full-time equivalent or a 1.0 FTE

- have a minimum of 3 years of experience in the role

- directly oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction

- have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative such as CCSS, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and so forth.

To determine the sample for this Delphi study, purposive, convenience, and expert nomination sampling were used.

Purposive Sampling

Purposive sampling is a nonrandom technique and occurs when the participants are intentionally selected by the researcher (Ayhan, 2011). Participants in a Delphi study should have related backgrounds and experiences connected to the central problem or phenomenon and be highly trained and competent within their area of expertise (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). Purposive sampling occurs when researchers purposefully sample individuals because of their membership, employment, or participation in a subgroup that

has defining characteristics (Creswell, 2012). In this Delphi study, the subgroup was district-level, administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction in Riverside and San Bernardino Counties with the following defining characteristics:

- are employed as an administrator (i.e. director, coordinator, etc.)

- are employed in a K-12 school district

- are employed at the district office and supported more than one school in the district

- have full-time equivalent or a 1.0 FTE

- have a minimum of 3 years of experience in the role

- directly oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction

- have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative such as CCSS, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and so forth.

Convenience Sampling

Convenience sampling occurs when researchers select participants who are accessible or expedient for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). In this study, convenience sampling was used to select participants from Riverside and San Bernardino counties. These counties were geographically convenient to conduct this study because the researcher lived and worked in Riverside County at the time of this study and was familiar with the demographic make-up of the student populations served in these counties.

Expert Nomination Sampling

Ludwig (1997) stated that the random selection of participants in a Delphi study is not acceptable, and instead, a nomination process should be used to select participants. A

nomination process was used in this study to identify participants through the use of an expert. Expert choice is a type of purposeful sampling in which an expert with knowledge of the population makes judgments about which subjects should be selected (Ayhan, 2011; McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Experts were defined as persons employed in a curriculum and instruction leadership role in the county office of education, who were assistant superintendents or directors of curriculum and instruction for school districts in their counties. To be in these positions, the person must serve and support the needs of the school districts in their respective counties. They also had to have background experience in curriculum and instruction and be knowledgeable about the district leaders of curriculum and instruction who they provide services to. To identify an expert and request them to nominate instructional leaders from a minimum of 20 Riverside and San Bernardino school districts from the 57, the researcher engaged in the following process. This process included the following steps:

1. To begin the selection process, the researcher identified an expert in curriculum and instruction who supports districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. This individual served as an executive director at the county office of education and at the time of this study had over 10 years of experience working in the county office's curriculum and instruction department supporting schools and districts. The researcher presented the expert with an overview of the study including background information and purpose statements.

2. Second, the expert was requested to assist the researcher in identifying districts that employed district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and

instruction in Riverside and San Bernardino counties who were leaders in the school districts in these counties and would be likely to participate in this study. The researcher asked the expert to send an informational letter written by the researcher (see Appendix B) to assistant superintendents in those districts and asked these assistant superintendents to respond back to the researcher if they were interested in allowing selected staff to participate in this study. In the selection of district participants for this study, the school district the researcher worked in was eliminated from the nomination process to avoid bias.

3. Third, once interested district assistant superintendents responded that they were interested in nominating instructional leaders to participate in this study, the researcher requested that the assistant superintendents nominate district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction within their K-12 district who met the sample criteria for this research (see Appendix C). Each district assistant superintendent was requested to nominate one, and no more than two persons, whom they felt could participate in this study.

4. Finally, the nominated instructional leaders were provided with a letter (see Appendix D) explaining the purpose of this Delphi study and the processes involved in the study. When the nominated instructional leader agreed to participate in the study and to ensure the nominated instructional leaders met the criteria, each instructional leader completed a Google Form (see Appendix E) in which they stated they possessed the characteristics listed.

Out of this process, there were 18 nominated instructional leaders (nine from Riverside County and nine from San Bernardino County) who met the sample criteria and were invited to participate in the study.

Instrumentation

Consistent with the Delphi method, this study used three rounds of surveys to gather data from the panel of instructional leaders. Delphi studies use a series of questionnaires in at least three different rounds. The first round usually asks one or two open-ended questions related to the problem, the second round asks participants to review the data collected in the first round and to rate or rank the data collected, and the third round reevaluates the items (Ludwig, 1997). The researcher developed the survey questions for Rounds 1, 2, and 3 by aligning the survey questions with the research questions and the data that needed to be collected as well as aligning the survey questions with the shared leadership conceptual framework.

In Round 1, the panel of instructional leaders was asked to identify the obstacles faced when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach in a Google Form. This survey question was aligned with the first research question.

After gathering the responses from the panel in Round 1, the data were converted to a well-structured questionnaire that is used as the survey instrument for Round 2 of data collection (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). In Round 2, the panel of instructional leaders was asked to indicate the degree of importance on a 6-point Likert scale in a Google Form that the identified obstacles have on implementing district-wide initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being using a shared leadership approach. This

survey question was aligned with the second research question. The 6-point Likert scale requested the panel members to rate each obstacle when implementing district-wide change initiatives from *extremely unimportant* to *extremely important*. This rating scale provided the panelists an opportunity to establish priorities among the items collected in Round 1.

In Round 3 of this Delphi study, the top responses identified in Round 2 were used as the basis for the third questionnaire. The panel members were asked to identify strategies that could be used to overcome the top three rated obstacles from Round 2 via a Google Form when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. This survey question aligned with the third research question. In each round of this Delphi study, the researcher aligned the survey questions with the purpose statements, research questions, and conceptual framework of shared leadership (see Appendix F).

Researcher as an Instrument for the Study

In this Delphi study, the researcher served as the primary instrument of data collection for all three rounds. Quantitative studies allow researchers to detach from the study to avoid bias whereas qualitative studies ask researchers to immerse themselves in the study's phenomenon (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The researcher maintained standards of practice throughout the two rounds of qualitative data collection and the entire research process to limit bias. There was a potential for bias because the researcher formerly served as an instructional leader for a school district in Riverside County. The researcher recognized this and was highly aware of following consistent protocols and methodology throughout the study, conducting field tests and using an external coder to

reduce bias. In addition, in the selection of district participants for this study, the district the researcher worked in was eliminated from the nomination process.

Validity

It is vital that the instruments used for this study produced data that were both valid and reliable. Validity refers to the "degree of consistency between the explanations of the phenomena and the realities of the world" (McMillan and Schumacher, 2010, p. 330). The Delphi method itself increases validity because of the use of panel members who are experts in the area of study with the potential to implement decisions if they choose (Cantrill et al., 1996). The panel of instructional leaders submitted their responses during each round of the study independently of each other. All members of the panel were able to see the responses in subsequent rounds because the data were used as a base for the instrument. For example, the panel members saw the obstacles identified in Round 1 when they were asked to rate them in Round 2. This allowed for member checking, in which the participants could informally check for the accuracy of the data (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

Before the surveys were sent out, the researcher used an expert to provide feedback on the questionnaires. This expert had a doctorate, was familiar with using Delphi questionnaires, and was able to provide recommendations for each survey. The researcher adjusted the surveys accordingly based on the feedback provided.

Reliability

Reliability was established in this Delphi study. Reliability refers to the consistency of measurement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The data gathered need to be stable and consistent to be meaningful (Creswell, 2012). To ensure reliability, the

same emails, information, and directions were sent to all participants. For each round of the Delphi study, the participants received the same questionnaires with the same survey questions and the opportunity to respond (i.e., open-ended, Likert scale) and the same amount of time to respond. In addition to consistent communication and measurement, field tests were conducted to increase reliability.

Field Test

To increase the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher field-tested the surveys prior to administering them to the panel of instructional leaders. A field or pilot test is a procedure that allows researchers to administer the instrument to a small number of individuals who evaluate it and provide feedback (Creswell, 2012). A Delphi field test can be conducted to test and adjust the Delphi questionnaires for each round to improve comprehension and uncover any procedural problems (Skulmoski et al., 2007).

Field tests were conducted with a sample of three instructional leaders. These instructional leaders met the same criteria as the sample population identified previously in this study. The three field-test participants received the emails, information, and directions for this study and were asked to evaluate them for readability and understandability. For each round of the Delphi study, the field-test participants received the questionnaires with the survey questions and opportunities to respond. Field-test participants were given 3 days to respond to the surveys for each round and then asked to evaluate the questionnaires for ease of use. The field-test panel members' data were not included in the data analysis for this study and were only used to evaluate the responses for validity.

The instruments were adjusted based on recommendations from the field-test participants and then given to the panel of instructional leaders for the purpose of this study. The researcher adjusted the emails, information, and survey questions for each round of the Delphi study based on the feedback from this field-test panel.

Data Collection

The Delphi method uses a series of sequential questionnaires to obtain group consensus from a panel of experts (Brown, 1968). Data collected from Round 1 were used as the basis for the survey administered in Round 2, and data collected in Round 2 were used in the survey administered in Round 3. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected in this Delphi study.

Human Subjects Consideration

Data were collected from the panel of instructional leaders through three rounds of questionnaires. Each subsequent round of data collection was developed based on the results of the previous survey (Skulmoski et al., 2007). Prior to engaging with the participants and collecting data, the researcher gathered permission to conduct the study from the University of Massachusetts Global's Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is responsible for reviewing and approving research studies with human subjects to ensure compliance with federal regulations and all ethical considerations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). With IRB approval, the preliminary data collection process began (see Appendix G).

After the panel members completed the demographic form to identify their eligibility for this Delphi study (see Appendix E), the researcher began by emailing the participants a welcome letter with a copy of the Participant's Bill of Rights (see

Appendix H) and Informed Consent (see Appendix I) forms to be reviewed, signed, and returned to the researcher. According to McMillan and Schumacher (2010), "Informed consent is achieved by providing participants with an explanation of the research, an opportunity to terminate their participation at any time with no penalty, and full disclosure of any risks associated with the study" (p. 118). The email sent to participants also included the researcher's background, an overview of the Delphi study, an estimate of the time commitment, a description of the research design including the three rounds of the Delphi study, and contact information. Specific data from each round of this Delphi study were collected as described in the following sections.

Delphi Round 1

In the first round of the Delphi study, the panel of K-12 instructional leaders was asked an open-ended question to gather qualitative data on the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face while supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives (see Appendix J). The open-ended survey question aligned with the first purpose statement, first research question, and the conceptual framework regarding shared leadership. The following open-ended question was sent to the participants through a Google Form:

- What do you think are the obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?

To ensure clarity and reliability in the data, a definition and examples of district-wide change initiatives were provided to the panelists. A district-wide change initiative is a strategy that is designed to change educational systems and is implemented across all

school sites within a school district. Examples of district-wide obstacles were also briefly described. The survey questions and descriptors are included in Appendix J.

Delphi Round 2

After data from Round 1 were collected, the researcher identified the frequencies of responses and major themes to elicit a consolidated list of obstacles identified by the instructional leaders. This list was used to develop the survey questionnaire for Round 2. For this round, participants were asked to rate the importance of each item on the list using a 6-point Likert scale where responses from 1 = *extremely unimportant* through 6 = *extremely important* were provided (see Appendix K). This survey question was aligned with the second purpose statement and second research question. The results produced quantitative data that were collected and analyzed. Similar to Round 1, a Google Form was sent to each panel member. The Round 2 survey question was, "To what degree is it important to overcome the obstacles identified in Round 1 when implementing district-wide change initiatives?" The Likert scale had the following ratings:

- 1 = *extremely unimportant*
- 2 = *moderately unimportant*
- 3 = *slightly unimportant*
- 4 = *slightly important*
- 5 = *moderately important*
- 6 = *extremely important*

In addition, participants were also asked whether there were any obstacles they thought should have been included on the list but were not.

Delphi Round 3

Data from Round 2 were collected and used to identify the top obstacles as rated by the panel of instructional leaders. The most important obstacles were identified using the top three mean scores from the Likert-scale responses. These data were used to create the third questionnaire, which asked an open-ended question about the strategies that could be used to overcome the top obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach (see Appendix L). This survey questionnaire was aligned with the third purpose of the study and Research Question 3. The Round 3 survey question was, "Of the obstacles identified as most important to overcome in Round 2, what are the most effective strategies for each obstacle when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?" The panel of instructional leaders were asked to identify no more than three strategies for each of the top three obstacles identified.

Ethical Considerations

Researchers need to ensure good ethical practices when conducting a study, especially during data collection, data analysis, and data reporting (Creswell, 2012). McMillan and Schumacher (2010) said, "The researcher is ethically responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of the subjects who participate in a study" (p. 15). This study ensured there was minimal risk to the participants. The researcher provided each participant with an electronic copy of the Bill of Rights to make sure each participant was aware of their rights (see Appendix H).

The National Institutes of Health has developed policies with systems of protection for human subject research according to federal law 45 CFR 46, Protection of Human Subjects (National Research Council, 2004). All institutional research and subsequent individual researchers must comply with this law. To comply with this law, the researcher completed a Human Subjects training program and received a certificate of completion (see Appendix M). The researcher did not begin to collect data until the research study was approved by the UMass Institutional Review Board. Approval by IRB is confirmed in Appendix G.

Participants in the study remained anonymous, and their responses were confidential throughout the study. Names of participants and the school districts they worked for were not shared during data collection or data analysis. Participants' responses were anonymous and not identifiable to other individuals in the study. All records including demographic data and responses from participants were kept in a password-protected Dropbox folder for 3 years. In addition, the researcher's computer was password protected.

Data Analysis

In this Delphi study, data were collected and analyzed in three different rounds. Qualitative data were collected in Rounds 1 and 3 through open-ended survey questions, and quantitative data were collected in Round 2 through a 6-point Likert-scale. Data collected in Rounds 1 and 2 were used for the subsequent round's questionnaire.

Delphi Round 1

The open-ended question in this round collected qualitative data and asked the participants to identify the obstacles instructional leaders face when implementing

district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. The responses were collected and coded for themes and frequencies. To code the data, the researcher reviewed the responses and identified the themes that emerged and the frequency of each theme using NVivo. The obstacles identified by the panel of instructional leaders were used to generate the questionnaire for Round 2.

Delphi Round 2

In Round 2, the participants were asked to rate the top 10 obstacles identified in Round 1 using a 6-point Likert scale where 1 = extremely unimportant, 2 = *moderately unimportant*, 3 = *slightly unimportant*, 4 = *slightly important*, 5 = *moderately important*, and 6 = *extremely important*. Descriptive statistics were used to calculate the mean scores for each of the obstacles identified. Descriptive statistics are used to summarize, organize, and reduce large numbers of observations (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010). The top rated responses were used to generate the questionnaire for Round 3.

Delphi Round 3

In the third and final round of this Delphi study, participants were asked to identify no more than three strategies to overcome each of the top three obstacles identified in Round 2 of the study. This open-ended question produced qualitative data similar to Round 1. To analyze the data, the researcher coded the responses and analyzed them for themes and frequency of themes using NVivo.

Intercoder Reliability

Intercoder reliability is when two or more individuals independently observe or code the data to ensure consistency in measurement (McMillan & Schumacher, 2010).

This process has the benefit of reducing bias that may occur if only one individual codes the data (Creswell, 2012). After the data were collected in Rounds 1 and 3, an external coder, who understood the purpose of this study and had experience with data, reviewed 10% of the data to ensure the responses were coded correctly. The external coder and the researcher agreed on 80% of the themes, which is the minimal acceptable agreement level (Lacy & Riffe, 1996; Lombard et al., 2002). This individual had a doctoral degree and experience in the field of educational research.

Limitations

Limitations are potential weaknesses or problems with the study (Creswell, 2012). Limitations of a Delphi study can include low response rates, large amounts of time required for the study, molding opinions of the participants, and identifying general statements instead of specific, topic related accounts (Hsu & Sandford, 2007). These limitations can be attributed to the multiple rounds of the study that the Delphi method requires. In addition to the limitations identified in the literature specific to Delphi studies, this study had further limitations.

According to Roberts (2010), a study's limitations may affect results or the researcher's ability to generalize the findings. Therefore, it is vital that the researcher both recognizes the study's limitations and is transparent in describing them. Geography, sample size, and bias were limitations of this study and affected the researcher's ability to generalize findings. For geography, participants were limited to K-12 districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, which may not be representative of all instructional leaders in California. In addition, the data gathered were dependent upon the experience and expertise of the instructional leader in implementing district-wide change

initiatives. Another limitation was the small sample size. Having a panel of 18 expert

district-level instructional leaders limited the study's generalizability to all instructional

leaders in California. Finally, the researcher's experience as a district-wide instructional

leader in a K-12 school district in Riverside County meant the researcher had to

acknowledge potential bias throughout the study.

Summary

Chapter III began with the purpose statement and research question and then

provided a detailed explanation of the Delphi methodology. This chapter also included

the population, target population, sample, instrumentation, validity and reliability, data

collection, data analysis, and limitations. The objective of this chapter was to provide the

rationale for conducting a Delphi study to identify the obstacles instructional leaders face

when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives. Chapter IV

presents an analysis of the data collected from the panel of instructional leaders in each

round of the Delphi study. Chapter V discusses the major findings of the study,

conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER IV: RESEARCH, DATA COLLECTION, AND FINDINGS

Overview

This Delphi study identified the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach to improve student achievement and well-being. In addition, this study identified potential strategies to overcome the identified obstacles. Data were collected through three rounds of survey questionnaires from a panel of expert district-level administrative instructional leaders in K-12 school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Participants were asked to identify obstacles in Round 1, rate the identified obstacles using a 6-point Likert scale in Round 2, and provide potential strategies for overcoming the top-rated obstacles in Round 3. The researcher used qualitative and quantitative methods to analyze and present the data.

Chapter IV includes the data collected during each round of this Delphi study, followed by data analysis of the qualitative and quantitative data collected. This chapter begins with an overview of the study, followed by the purpose statements, research questions, methodology, data collection procedures, population, and sample. The remaining sections of Chapter IV contain a detailed report of the findings of this Delphi study. Data from each round of the study are presented and analyzed.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles they face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level

administrative instructional leaders. The second purpose of this Delphi study was to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The third purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being when implementing district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach.

Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

2. What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

3. What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

Research Methods and Data Collection Procedures

This study used the Delphi methodology to collect data from district-level administrative instructional leaders regarding the obstacles encountered when supporting district-wide change initiates and the strategies with the greatest likelihood of overcoming the identified obstacles. The Delphi method was developed in the 1950s by the RAND Corporation and is a widely accepted method for obtaining the most reliable consensus among a group of experts with real-world knowledge (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Skulmoski et al., 2007; Yousuf, 2019). Researchers began using the Delphi methodology in defense research, and then it spread to other areas of study including education, aerospace, technology, and healthcare (Dalkey & Helmer, 1963; Linstone & Turner, 1975). The Delphi methodology allows the researcher to develop trends and policies, identify needs, manage resources, forecast short and long-range plans, and more (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Linstone & Turner, 2007; Okali & Pawlowski, 2004; Yousuf, 2019)

The Delphi methodology uses a panel of experts to obtain consensus through a series of questionnaires. Experts are selected based on their areas of expertise and remain anonymous throughout the study to each other but not to the researcher (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Okali & Pawlowski, 2004). The initial questionnaire used a qualitative approach asking participants to respond to an open-ended question, which generated ideas for subsequent rounds (Cantrill et al., 1996). The second questionnaire used a Likert scale to prioritize or rank order items identified in the first round (Hsu & Sandford, 2007; Ludwig, 1997). The final questionnaire asked the experts to discuss their opinions of the ratings (Yousuf, 2019).

In this study, the researcher used an expert panel of district-level administrative instructional leaders to collect data in three rounds of survey questionnaires. The expert panel was asked to identify obstacles faced when supporting district-wide change initiatives, identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have, and provide potential solutions for the top-ranked obstacles. Qualitative and quantitative data were collected and analyzed.

Population

A population is "a group of individuals having one characteristic that distinguishes them from other groups" (Creswell, 2012, p. 142). The population for this study was all district-level administrative instructional leaders. This included administrators who were either directors or coordinators in K-12 California school districts. District-level administrative instructional leaders are individuals who serve under the direction of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction or educational services in a school district. Instructional leader positions include administrator of instructional/curriculum services, administrator of staff development, administrator of elementary education, and administrator of secondary education (California Department of Education, 2019a). Instructional leaders may also include administrators who oversee one of the core content areas such as math, science, history, and language arts. There are approximately 2,100 district-level administrative instructional leaders with the titles of administrators identified who serve under the supervision of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction in educational services departments in K-12 school districts (California Department of Education, 2019b).

Target Population

According to Creswell (2012), a target population is "a group of individuals with some common defining characteristic that the researcher can identify and study" (p. 142). The target population for this study was selected from the Inland Empire, a region of Southern California consisting of Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Riverside and San Bernardino counties have a diverse population of students similar to the demographics of the student population in the state of California. In Riverside and San Bernardino counties, there are 220 district-level administrative instructional leaders.

Sample

Creswell stated, "The sample is a subgroup of the target population that the researcher plans to study for generalizing about the target population" (p. 142). In a Delphi study, participants are experts who have desirable characteristics and qualifications with knowledge and experience in the desired area (Ludwig, 1997). In this study, the sample was 18 district-level administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction from K-12 school districts in Riverside and San Bernardino counties who met the following criteria:

- are employed as an administrator (i.e. director, coordinator, etc.)
- are employed in a K-12 school district
- are employed at the district office and supported more than one school in the district
- have full-time equivalent or a 1.0 FTE
- have a minimum of 3 years of experience in the role
- directly oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction

- have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative such as CCSS, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and so forth.

Demographic Data

Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction were asked to nominate one or two individuals who met the criteria. Eighteen individuals were nominated and invited to participate in the study. Of these 18 participants, nine were from Riverside County and nine were from San Bernardino County. The participants from Riverside County were from six different school districts (Corona-Norco, Jurupa, Moreno Valley, Murrieta Valley, Romoland, and Val Verde). The participants from San Bernardino County were also from six different school districts (Alta Loma, Chaffey, Yucaipa-Calimesa, Victor Valley, Upland, and Rialto). Table 5 summarizes the number of school districts and participants by county.

Table 5

Number of School Districts and Instructional Leaders by County

County	K-12 school districts	Number of instructional leaders
Riverside	6	9
San Bernardino	6	9
Total	12	18

Presentation and Analysis of Data

This section presents the data collected and an analysis of the data collected for each round of this Delphi study. The data from the participants are presented sequentially following the Delphi methodology.

Delphi Round 1

Round 1 of this Delphi study used a survey questionnaire to ask one open-ended question aligned to Research Question 1. Participants were asked to identify obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. Round 1 questionnaire was emailed to the 18 district-level instructional leaders invited to participate in the study. Sixteen participants responded to this survey.

The researcher examined the responses and analyzed them for themes and frequency of codes using NVivo. As a result of this qualitative data analysis, 21 themes emerged. Table 6 shares the themes and the frequency of themes from the Round 1 survey questionnaire from highest frequency to lowest frequency.

Professional Development Plan

The theme with the highest frequency was a professional development plan. Seven respondents indicated the need for a professional development plan to support the initiative with ongoing professional learning opportunities, coaching, and mentoring. In addition, one participant indicated the need for a professional development plan to ensure the instructional leaders are receiving professional development to master their craft and keep abreast of updated research and instructional approaches.

Resistance to Change

Resistance to change also had the highest frequency of 7. Five of the participants indicated teachers resist change because they fear or assume they will spend time on something that will change in the next few years. Two of the five participants specifically called out teacher mindset as the reason for the resistance to change. One individual

included other stakeholders who resist change, including community members. The other

two participants did not specify who the resistance to change was from.

Table 6

Round 1 Themes and Frequencies

Theme	Frequency
Professional development plan	7
Resistance to change	7
Consistent communication	6
Shared vision/clear purpose	5
Fidelity of implementation	5
Leadership development	5
Maintaining the initiative	5
Instructional leader capacity	4
Competing initiatives	4
Budget and funding	3
Fear of new initiative	3
Leadership turnover	3
Resources	3
Time	3
Unions	3
Elected officials (school board, governor, etc.)	3
Using existing systems to support the change	3
Implementation timeline	2
Onboarding new leaders	2
Site leadership capacity	2
Other duties as assigned	1

Consistent Communication

Consistent communication was another obstacle identified, and it had a frequency

of 6. Two participants indicated a lack of clear communication at all levels of the

organization. One participant indicated the lack of clarity and effective communication

does not create a culture of trust and mutual respect. The participant added that defining

roles, providing support, and creating opportunities for collaboration with stakeholders throughout the organization would help to build trusting and respectful relationships.

Additional Themes

The next four themes identified by the panel of expert district-level administrative instructional leaders had a frequency of 5. These obstacles were

- fidelity of implementation

- leadership development

- maintaining the initiative

- shared vision/clear purpose

Three participants called out the fidelity of implementation across all sites, and two participants included accountability as part of fidelity. For leadership development, participants shared the need to create opportunities to grow leaders because shared leadership differs from traditional top-down leadership roles. In addition, implementing a change initiative requires leaders to engage adults in the change process and build buy-in. Participants shared that maintaining the initiative with consistency and staying the course over the years is an obstacle. Two participants also included understanding and showing the data to maintain the change. For shared vision and clear purpose, participants indicated establishing a collective vision with input and buy-in from a variety of stakeholders as an obstacle.

Competing initiatives and instructional leader capacity each had a frequency of four. For competing initiatives, two participants shared that school districts do not implement one district-wide change initiative at a time. One participant added that there is a lack of ability to integrate the competing initiatives. The obstacle of instructional

leader capacity included varying or lack of knowledge and skills to implement a change initiative successfully. Two participants stated that there is an assumption that school and district leaders already know how to implement district-wide change initiatives.

The next eight themes had a frequency of 3. These included budget and funding, elected officials or politics, fear of a new initiative, leadership turnover, resources, time, unions, and using existing systems to support the change. Three themes had a frequency of 2, which included implementation timeline, onboarding new leaders, and site leadership capacity. The last theme had a frequency of 1. This theme was other duties as assigned, which referred to instructional leaders being called to other tasks that did not support the change initiative.

Delphi Round 2

Round 2 of this Delphi study aligned with the Research Question 2 and used a survey questionnaire with a 6-point Likert scale for participants to rank the themes identified in Round 1. The survey asked participants what degree of importance the obstacles identified in Round 1 had to impact the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives focused on improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. The 6-point Likert scale had the following rating scale:

- 1 = *extremely unimportant*
- 2 = *moderately unimportant*
- 3 = *somewhat unimportant*
- 4 = *somewhat important*
- 5 = *moderately important*

- 6 = *extremely important*

The Round 2 questionnaire was emailed to the 18 district-level instructional leaders invited to participate in the study. Sixteen participants completed this survey and ranked the 21 themes according to the Likert scale. The researcher used quantitative data analysis and calculated the means for each of the obstacles. Table 7 shares the mean scores calculated for each of the 21 themes in order from highest mean to lowest mean score.

Table 7

Round 2 Themes and Means

Theme	Mean
Instructional leader capacity	5.69
Consistent communication	5.63
Leadership development	5.50
Site leadership capacity	5.44
Fidelity of implementation	5.38
Shared vision/clear purpose	5.38
Budget and funding	5.25
Resources	5.25
Time	5.25
Maintaining the initiative	5.19
Professional development plan	5.19
Leadership turnover	5.06
Onboarding new leaders	5.06
Competing initiatives	5.00
Implementation timeline	5.00
Unions	4.69
Resistance	4.63
Other duties as assigned	4.44
Fear of new initiative	4.19
Elected officials (school board, governor, etc.)	3.88

The mean scores for the 21 obstacles (themes) identified in Round 1 ranged from 3.99 to 5.69. There were 15 themes with a mean score of 5.0 or higher, four had a mean score between 4.0 and 4.9, and one had a mean score less than 4.0. None of the participants marked any of the themes as extremely unimportant, and only two participants marked themes as moderately unimportant.

Top Three Rated Themes

The top-rated theme was instructional leader capacity with a mean of 5.69. Of the 16 participants, 11 rated this obstacle as extremely important, and five rated it as moderately important. The second highest-rated theme was consistent communication with a mean of 5.63; 10 participants rated it as extremely important, and six as moderately important. The third highest rated theme was leadership development with a mean of 5.50. Nine of the participants rated this theme as extremely important, six as moderately important, and one as somewhat important.

Additional Obstacles

In addition, this survey questionnaire asked whether any obstacles should have been included on the list but were not. Three respondents marked yes. Two of the three respondents indicated the need to have support and alignment from the superintendent, cabinet, and the board of education. The third participant responded an obstacle is the management of tasks needed to implement the change initiative, which includes identifying who is responsible for the various goals and actions as well as administrative tasks such as scheduling, budgets, ordering materials and supplies, and more.

Delphi Round 3

Round 3 of this Delphi study aligned with Research Question 3 and used a survey questionnaire to ask one open-ended question with three parts. Participants were asked to identify no more than three effective strategies for overcoming the top-rated obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. The top three obstacles presented were instructional leader capacity, consistent communication, and leadership development. The survey was emailed to the 18 district-level instructional leader participants, and 16 responded to the survey. The researcher examined the responses for each obstacle and analyzed them for themes and frequency using NVivo.

Instructional Leader Capacity

For instructional leader capacity, five themes emerged from the responses as effective strategies for overcoming this obstacle. These themes included training and professional development, monitor the effectiveness of the initiative, professional learning communities (PLCs) with job-alikes, time with district leadership, and reducing the number of initiatives within the district. Table 8 shows the themes and the frequency of themes from highest frequency to lowest frequency.

Training and Professional Development. The theme with the highest frequency was training and professional development. There were 12 responses that included training and professional development as an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of instructional leader capacity. Six participants indicated that the training and

professional development needed to include job coaching or modeling. In addition, the

following were suggested as specific training and professional development strategies:

- scenario-based training where leaders can work together to norm decisions

- professional development series for administrators from consultant groups

- site-based walkthroughs

- training how to run and monitor PLCs

Table 8

Round 3 Themes and Frequencies for Instructional Leader Capacity

Themes	Frequency
Training and professional development	12
PLC with job-alikes	6
Monitor the effectiveness of the initiative	6
Time with district leadership	4
Reduce initiatives	2

PLC With Job-Alikes. Six participants shared that an effective strategy for

overcoming the obstacle of instructional leader capacity is creating PLCs with job-alikes.

A job-alike is a term used to refer to employees with similar positions, roles, and/or

responsibilities. Of these six participants, two indicated the importance of having the PLC

facilitated by excellent leaders such as district directors. In addition, participants

indicated that the PLCs could include a book study, research-based best practices using

data, and leadership development. In addition, participants shared that the PLC meetings

should focus on what the instructional leaders can control and determine the needs of the

instructional leaders involved.

Monitor the Effectiveness of the Initiative. Six participants indicated that

monitoring the effectiveness of the initiative is an effective strategy for overcoming the

obstacle of instructional leader capacity. Two participants included that the initiative needs to have a clear plan that aligns to the mission, priorities, goals, and values of the district; has been researched and piloted on a small scale; and includes training opportunities. One participant also included that districts need to be ready to adjust the initiative if it is not working based on the data collected to monitor the effectiveness.

Time With District Leadership. Four participants indicated that time with district leadership is an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of instructional leader capacity. The participants varied about who they included in the term district leadership. Two referenced superiors, one referenced executive cabinet, and one included the board of education. One participant suggested monthly team meetings to help build capacity.

Reduce the Number of Initiatives. Two participants indicated the importance of reducing the number of initiatives as a means for overcoming the obstacle of instructional leader capacity. One participant included that districts should set strict guidelines about the number of new initiatives that are allowed to be implemented each year.

Consistent Communication

The second obstacle presented to the participants was consistent communication. Four themes emerged from the responses. These themes included having a communications system or plan, providing multiple means of communication, building relationships, and reducing the number of initiatives. Table 9 shows the themes and frequency of these themes in order from highest to lowest.

Table 9

Round 3 Themes and Frequencies for Consistent Communication

Theme	Frequency
Communication systems/plan	10
Multiple means of communication	5
Build relationships	5
Reduce initiatives	2

Communications Systems or Plan. The theme with the highest frequency was having a communication system or plan. There were 10 responses that included the need for a communication system or plan as an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of consistent communication. Three participants included that the communication plan should have shared agreements or clearly outline who is communicating what, how, and when. One participant also added that the communication needs to connect and be aligned. Another participant stated that people need to be held accountable for the communication plan, and the district should survey recipients to determine its effectiveness.

Multiple Means of Communication. Five participants shared that having multiple means of communication is an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of consistent communication. Four out of the five participants included examples of ways to communicate about the initiative including newsletters, weekly email updates, websites, joint communications, and announcements at meetings.

Build Relationships. Five participants indicated building relationships as an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of consistent communication. One participant shared that instructional leaders should be approachable, accessible, and active listeners who create a safe space for the sharing of thoughts and ideas. Another

participant shared that relationships will provide instructional leaders opportunities to share their expert opinions when they meet with district leaders.

Reduce the Number of Initiatives. Two respondents indicated having fewer initiatives would overcome the obstacle of consistent communication. One participant shared that fewer, more long-lasting initiatives allow for prolonged, focused communication, and the other participant shared that limiting the number of initiatives reduces the amount of communication.

Leadership Development

The third obstacle presented to the participants was leadership development. Six themes emerged from the participants' responses. These themes included recruiting and training future leaders, collaborating, providing training and professional development, having a leadership development plan, scheduling monthly district-wide leadership meetings, and reducing the number of initiatives. Table 10 shows the six themes and frequency of these themes from highest to lowest.

Table 10

Round 3 Themes and Frequencies for Leadership Development

Theme	Frequency
Recruit and train future leaders	6
Collaboration	5
Training and professional development	5
Leadership development plan	3
Monthly district-wide leadership meetings	3
Reduce initiatives	2

Recruit and Train Future Leaders. The theme with the highest frequency for overcoming the obstacle of leadership development was recruiting and training future

leaders. This theme had a frequency of 6. Two participants indicated that districts should provide a variety of individuals with leadership opportunities including site and district committees and professional development. One participant shared that districts should provide leadership professional development to instructional coaches and teachers on special assignment. Two participants suggested districts should maintain a continual leadership development mindset that can include a future leaders network. One of these participants shared the importance of building the capacity of the leaders within the district because they are familiar with the history and culture of the organization.

Collaboration. Five participants shared that collaborating is an effective strategy for overcoming the obstacle of leadership development. Three participants shared that collaboration should be with job-alikes such as PLCs. Collaborating in a PLC provides a safe space to process the demands of the position and collaborate on overcoming situations. Two participants shared that collaboration should be with site leaders. One participant recommended attending principal meetings, and a second participant recommended participating in site-based walkthroughs.

Training and Professional Development. Five participants indicated training and professional development as a strategy to overcome this obstacle. Four participants specifically indicated the need for leadership training and professional development opportunities for administrators. This can occur during monthly meetings or by attending conferences One participant also added the need for guidance and coaching as the initiative is being implemented by the district.

Leadership Development Plan. Three participants shared the need for a leadership development plan as an effective strategy. One participant shared that the plan

needs to address both operational and cultural leadership. Another participant shared that the plan needs to allocate time for leadership development.

Monthly District-Wide Leadership Meetings. Three participants provided monthly district-wide leadership development meetings as a strategy to overcome this obstacle. Two participants shared these meetings should be monthly mandatory meetings for all managers. Another participant shared that executive cabinet should model effective leadership in these meetings, and they should be an opportunity to create coherence around the district's mission, values, goals, and priorities.

Reduce the Number of Initiatives. Two participants indicated the need to reduce the number of initiatives to overcome the obstacle of leadership development. One participant shared that by limiting the number of initiatives, the district would increase the capacity of leaders to grow because they are not so overwhelmed and overworked. With fewer initiatives, instructional leaders would have the capacity to learn and grow.

Reducing initiatives was the only theme identified as a strategy to overcome all three obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. Of the six responses indicating the need to reduce the number of initiatives, three were from one participant.

Key Findings

Round 1 of data collection, which aligned with Research Question 1, asked participants to identify the obstacles faced when supporting a district-wide change initiative. Twenty-one themes emerged from the data analysis ranging from professional development plan and resistance to change to leadership turnover and site leadership

capacity. Round 2 of data collection, which aligned with Research Question 2, asked the participants to rate the 21 themes using a 6-point Likert scale. The average for each obstacle was calculated from the ratings, and the top three obstacles were identified. The top rated obstacles were instructional leader capacity, consistent communication, and leadership development. Round 3 of data collection, which aligned with Research Question 3, asked the participants to identify strategies to overcome each of the three top-rated obstacles. There were five strategies for overcoming the obstacles of instructional leader capacity, including training and professional development and PLC with job-alike personnel. There were four obstacles identified for overcoming the obstacle of consistent communication, including a communication plan and multiple methods of communication. Finally, there were six strategies for overcoming the obstacle of leadership, and these strategies included recruiting and training future leaders and collaboration. One strategy that emerged for all three obstacles was to reduce the number of initiatives.

Summary

Chapter IV provided an analysis of the data collected in this Delphi study. The Delphi methodology is a mixed-methods approach that used a group of experts to gather opinions to obtain the most reliable consensus through a series of survey questionnaires. In this study, the experts were a panel of district level, administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction in K-12 school districts, and they were asked to identify the obstacles they face when supporting a district-wide change initiative, rank the obstacles identified, and identify strategies to overcome the top-rated obstacles.

Chapter IV provided an analysis of the data collected during the three rounds of this Delphi study. Chapter V presents conclusions, implications, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V: FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Chapter V begins with a review of the purpose statement, research questions, methodology, population, and sample for this Delphi study. The chapter continues with the researcher's major findings, unexpected findings, conclusions, implications for action, and recommendations for further research. Chapter V ends with the researcher's concluding remarks and reflections on this study.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles they face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The second purpose of this Delphi study was to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders. The third purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being when implementing district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach.

Research Questions

1. What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve

student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

2. What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

3. What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?

Methodology

This study used the Delphi methodology to survey a panel of expert district-level administrative instructional leaders on the obstacles faced when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach and potential strategies to overcome identified obstacles. The sample population consisted of a panel of 18 district-level administrative instructional leaders in Riverside and San Bernardino counties who met the following criteria:

- are employed as an administrator (i.e., director, coordinator, etc.)
- are employed in a K-12 school district
- are employed at the district office and supported more than one school in the district
- have full-time equivalent or a 1.0 FTE
- have a minimum of 3 years of experience in the role

- directly oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction

- have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative
  such as CCSS, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, and so forth.

In this Delphi study, three rounds of survey questionnaires were administered. Round 1 aligned with Research Question 1, and one open-ended question was sent to participants. Participants were asked to identify obstacles faced when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. Responses were collected and analyzed for themes. Of the 18 participants, sixteen (89%) responded to the Round 1 survey questionnaire, and 21 themes were identified from the responses. The 21 themes in order from highest frequency to lowest frequency were:

- professional development plan

- resistance to change

- consistent communication

- fidelity of implementation

- leadership development

- maintaining the initiative

- shared vision/clear purpose

- competing initiatives

- instructional leader capacity

- budget and funding

- elected officials (school board, governor, etc.)

- fear of a new initiative

- leadership turnover

- resources

- time

- unions

- using existing systems to support the change

- implementation timeline

- onboarding new leaders

- site leadership capacity

- other duties as assigned

Round 2, which aligned with Research Question 2, asked participants to rate the 21 obstacles identified in Round 1 on a 6-point Likert scale. The 6-point Likert scale had the following rating:

- 1 = *extremely unimportant*

- 2 = *moderately unimportant*

- 3 = *somewhat unimportant*

- 4 = *somewhat important*

- 5 = *moderately important*

- 6 = *extremely important*

Mean scores were calculated for each obstacle, and the top three obstacles were identified. A total of 16 out of 18 participants (89%) responded to the Round 2 survey questionnaire, and the mean scores ranged from 3.88 to 5.69. Using the mean scores, the top-rated obstacles were identified. The top-rated obstacles were instructional leader capacity, consistent communication, and leadership development.

Round 3 aligned with Research Question 3 and asked participants to identify no more than three effective strategies to overcome each of the top-rated obstacles identified in Round 2 (instructional leader capacity, consistent communication, and leadership development). A total of 16 out of 18 participants (89%) responded to the survey. Five themes emerged as effective strategies to overcome the obstacle of instructional leader capacity. These five themes from highest frequency to lowest frequency were

- provide training and professional development

- offer PLC with job-alikes

- monitor the effectiveness of the initiative

- spend time with district leadership

- reduce the number of district initiatives

Four themes emerged as effective strategies to overcome the obstacle of consistent communication. The four themes from highest to lowest frequency were

- develop a communication systems/plan

- provide multiple means of communication

- build relationships

- reduce the number of district initiatives

Finally, six themes emerged as effective strategies to overcome the obstacle of leadership development. The six themes from highest to lowest frequency were

- recruit and train future leaders

- provide opportunities for collaboration

- provide training and professional development

- develop a leadership development plan

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- hold monthly district-wide leadership meetings

- reduce the number of initiatives

Major Findings

In this section, a summary of the six major findings from this study is presented. Findings are organized by research question and the corresponding round of survey questionnaires administered during this Delphi study.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was, "What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?" Research Question 1 aligned with the Round 1 survey questionnaire in which district-level administrative instructional leaders were asked to identify the obstacles they face when supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach.

Major Finding 1

The major finding from Round 1 was that all of the obstacles identified by the expert panel of district-level administrative instructional leaders can be categorized into one of the three groups of antecedents found in the shared leadership conceptual framework. The antecedents are group characteristics, task characteristics, and environment characteristics. Thus, the obstacles district-wide administrative instructional leaders face impact the effectiveness of the shared leadership system. According to Pearce and Sims (2001), the antecedents are the factors likely to impact shared

leadership. Of the 21 obstacles identified, four were categorized as group characteristics, nine as task characteristics, and eight as environment characteristics. Table 11 shows how the obstacles identified in Round 1 of this study were categorized into one of the three groups of antecedents aligned with the shared leadership conceptual framework in this study. The obstacles are listed from highest frequency to lowest frequency in each category.

Table 11

Obstacles Identified in Round 1 Categorized by Antecedent

Antecedent	Obstacles identified
Group characteristics	• Leadership development • Instructional leader capacity • Onboarding new leaders • Site leadership capacity
Task characteristics	• Fidelity of implementation • Maintaining the initiative • Competing initiatives • Budget and funding • Resources • Time • Using existing systems to support the change • Implementation timeline • Other duties as assigned
Environment characteristics	• Professional development plan • Resistance to change • Consistent communication • Shared vision and clear purpose • Elected officials (school board, governor, etc.) • Fear of a new initiative • Unions • Leadership turnover

Group Characteristics. Antecedents are influential in the emergence of shared leadership (Sweeney et al., 2019). Pearce and Sims (2001) shared that group characteristics consist of the attributes of the individuals within the group. The obstacles

categorized as group characteristics were instructional leader capacity, site leadership capacity, leadership development, and onboarding new leaders. These four obstacles are specific to the individual's ability and capability within a shared leadership system. Shared leadership takes advantage of the knowledge and skills of the team members (Fausing et al., 2015). Thus, a lack of expertise by the individuals in the group impacts the effectiveness of the shared leadership system.

Task Characteristics. Task characteristics are the key components of what must be done and how the group will do it (Pearce & Sims, 2001). The obstacles identified as task characteristics include fidelity of implementation, maintaining the initiative, competing initiatives, budget and funding, resources, time, using existing systems to support the change, the implementation timeline, and other duties as assigned. Focusing on the task characteristics can encourage shared leadership by ensuring interdependence in the design of the tasks (Fausing et al., 2015; Sweeney et al., 2019). A lack of connection of these obstacles to the work of the instructional leader impacts the outcomes of the shared leadership system.

Environment Characteristics. The environment characteristics are the key macrolevel factors such as support systems, reward systems, and cultural systems that impact how the group functions (Pearce & Sims, 2001). The obstacles that were categorized as environmental characteristics are a professional development plan, leadership development, shared vision and clear purpose, consistent communication, resistance to change, fear of a new initiative, elected officials, and unions. Teams with a positive internal environment, including a collective understanding of the objectives, have a positive influence on the emergence of shared leadership (Wu et al., 2020).

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Obstacles that are categorized as environment conditions do not set the right conditions for shared leadership to occur within the organization.

Research Question 2

The second research question was, "What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert administrative instructional leaders?" Research Question 2 aligned with Round 2 of the Delphi study and asked the participants to rate the 21 obstacles identified in Round 1 on a 6-point Likert scale. There were two major findings from this round of the study.

Major Finding 2

The first major finding for this round of the study was that two of the three top-rated obstacles (instructional leader capacity and leadership development) were related to the ability level or capacity of the district-level administrative instructional leader. The highest-rated obstacle was instructional leader capacity, which had a mean score of 5.69. From the data collected, 69% of the participants rated instructional leader capacity as extremely important, and the remaining 31% rated it as moderately important. Leadership development was rated the third highest obstacle with a mean score of 5.50. Leadership development was rated as extremely important by 56% of participants, moderately important by 38% of participants, and somewhat important by 6% of participants.

Shared leadership takes advantage of dispersed knowledge and expertise among team members (Fausing et al., 2015). Members of the group who are highly skilled in their task requirements are more likely to actively engage in shared leadership (Pearce &

Sims, 2001). Thus, to be able to participate in a shared leadership system, individuals must have the ability and capability to do so. For district-wide administrative instructional leaders, this includes expertise in the initiative as well as the leadership skills to participate in a shared leadership system, which differs from the traditional top-down approach.

Major Finding 3

The second major finding for this round of the study was that consistent communication was one of the top-rated obstacles by the expert panel of district-wide administrative instructional leaders. Consistent communication was categorized as an environment characteristic in the shared leadership conceptual framework and more specifically related to the support systems that will impact shared leadership. Consistent communication had a mean score of 5.63; 63% of respondents rated it as extremely important, and the remaining 37% rated it as moderately important.

Consistent communication was categorized as a support system within the environment characteristics of the shared leadership conceptual framework. Support systems include information systems, coordination systems, and more. Individuals will work together when support systems enable them to do so, and shared leadership is more likely to be reinforced when viable support systems are present (Pearce & Sims, 2001). Clear communication that focuses on mutual understanding across status and rank is crucial to the success of a shared leadership system (Meyers & Johnson, 2008; O'Toole et al., 2002). Ensuring there is clear communication throughout the organization is an important antecedent to the effectiveness of the shared leadership system.

Research Question 3

The third research question for this study was, "What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?" Research Question 3 aligned with Round 3 of this Delphi study and asked participants to identify potential strategies for overcoming the three top-rated obstacles from Round 2. There were three major findings for this round of the study.

Major Finding 4

The first major finding for this round of the study was that there were three similar strategies identified for overcoming the obstacles of instructional leader capacity and leadership development. The three similar strategies were

- training and professional development
- PLCs with job-alikes
- collaboration with other managers including district and/or site-based leaders

It is important to build the capability and capacity of leaders in a shared leadership system because individuals who are empowered to provide and accept leadership in a team are positively associated with the emergence of shared leadership. (Fausing et al., 2015; A. Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). Districtwide, job-embedded professional development should align with the focus of the district's improvement initiatives and be differentiated to meet the needs of the administrators involved (Leithwood, 2010). PLCs and collaboration provide opportunities for mutual learning and

shared understanding, which in turn lead to positive outcomes through a shared leadership system (Fletcher & Kaufer, 2003).

The difference in providing these strategies is that for instructional leader capacity, the approaches should be specific to the content of the initiative, including research-based strategies to improve student achievement and well-being, and should be adjusted based on the effectiveness of the initiative. Continual, ongoing professional development allows instructional leaders to develop expertise relevant to achieving the goals of the organization (Leithwood, 2010).

On the other hand, leadership development should include opportunities for instructional leaders to grow as leaders and should include future leaders or individuals within the organization who have the potential to fulfill the role of a district-wide administrative instructional leader in the future. Leadership development requires training and support in leading others to meet the goals and objectives of the organization and can also include additional areas such as building relationships and how to effectively train others (Winston & Patterson, 2006).

Major Finding 5

The second major finding in this round of the Delphi study was the strategy with the highest frequency of responses to overcome the obstacle of consistent communication was developing an effective communication plan. A communication plan encourages shared leadership by ensuring that crucial information is cascaded effectively, providing opportunities for individuals to engage in conversations using similar terms, and allows individuals to have a voice. Participants shared that the communication plan should clearly outline what, how, and when the information will be communicated, the roles and

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responsibilities of individuals within the communication plan, and who will be receiving the communication. In addition, communication needs to be connected and aligned to the district-wide initiative to improve student achievement and well-being to ensure coherence among individuals involved.

Participants identified three other strategies to overcome the obstacle of consistent communication, which can be part of having an effective communication system and plan. These strategies from highest to lowest frequency were

- multiple means of communication

- build relationships

- reduce the number of initiatives

It is important to consider the support systems and conditions that would support positive shared leadership in practice (A. Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016). Coordination and alignment in the shared leadership system begin with consistent communication (O'Toole et al., 2002). Communication needs to move from merely disseminating information to conversations in which participants have a voice and are focused on creating a mutual understanding (Meyers & Johnson, 2008; Wu et al., 2020). An effective communication plan is one of the support systems districts can implement that would positively impact shared leadership.

Major Finding 6

The final major finding for this Delphi study was that the panel members responded that reducing the number of initiatives was a critical strategy to help overcome all three of the top-rated obstacles (instructional leader capacity, consistent communication, and leadership development). The finding that too many initiatives

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impact the work of district-level administrative instructional leaders is supported in the literature (Hamm, 1994; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988; Newmann et al., 2001). According to participants, reducing the number of initiatives increases the capacity of the district-level administrative instructional leader. Fewer initiatives provide more time for district-level administrative instructional leaders to learn and grow in the role. In addition, having fewer initiatives reduces the quantity of communication district-level administrative instructional leaders receive and are responsible for conveying to others.

Reducing the number of initiatives focuses the work of the instructional leaders, creating consistency and coordination of instructional activities and communication (Murphy & Hallinger, 1988). With so many demands on school districts to improve student achievement and well-being, district leadership may feel the need to continue to adopt new programs or initiatives. Districts tend to hope that the additional initiatives will complement existing ones, but many districts do little to coordinate and create coherence among them (Newmann et al., 2001). Fewer initiatives create focused and coherent instructional programs across the school district.

Unexpected Findings

Three unexpected findings emerged from the data analysis of this Delphi study.

Unexpected Finding 1

The first unexpected finding was two of the top-rated obstacles in Round 2 were not obstacles with the highest frequencies in Round 1. The professional development plan had the highest frequency of 7 in Round 1 and had a mean score of 5.19, which was the 10th highest mean score. Resistance to change was the obstacle with the second highest frequency in Round 1 with a frequency of 6 and a mean score of 4.63, which was the 17th

highest mean score. This unexpected finding suggests that the most prevalent obstacles identified in Round 1 were not rated as important as other obstacles that emerged.

In Round 1, in which participants were asked to identify obstacles, there was a focus on the frustration and concerns related to how the obstacles impact the work getting done. However, when it came to rating the obstacles in Round 2, the focus was on the individual's capacity and connectedness to the organization. Instructional leaders play a vital role in the work of the district, and their expertise in knowing how to support and enrich the district's work needs to be valued (Ausband, 2006). District-level administrative instructional leaders may have felt that their ability to support the goals of organization rated higher than other obstacles that they have less control over such as resistance to change.

Unexpected Finding 2

A second unexpected finding was the underlying feeling of the impact of competing initiatives. In Round 1, competing initiatives had a frequency of four, and in Round 2, it had a mean score of 5.0. In both rounds, competing initiatives fell in the middle of the data analysis. In addition, in Round 3, reducing initiatives was a strategy that emerged for all three of the top-rated obstacles. This suggests that district-level administrative instructional leaders are feeling the impact of competing initiatives and feel the need to reduce the number of initiatives to narrow the focus of their work.

Unexpected Finding 3

A third unexpected finding was the emergence of recruiting and training future leaders as a strategy to overcome the obstacle of leadership development. This strategy had the highest frequency in Round 3 of this Delphi study. This response and the

frequency of the response were surprising because it did not directly impact the expert

panel of district-wide administrative instructional leaders. Instead, this strategy focused

on succession planning and sustaining the initiative with individuals who are future

leaders.

<div align="center">**Conclusions**</div>

The following conclusions were drawn from the findings of each of the three

research questions. There are a total of six conclusions that align with the six major

findings outlined in the previous section.

Conclusion 1

The obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face impact the

effectiveness of a shared leadership system used to implement a district-wide change

initiative to improve student achievement and well-being.

All of the obstacles identified by the participants fall into one of the three

categories of antecedents from the shared leadership conceptual framework. Antecedents

are factors that impact the successful development of a shared leadership system (Fausing

et al., 2015; Han et al., 2024; Pearce & Sims, 2001; Sweeney et al., 2019; Wu et al.,

2020).

For shared leadership to develop within an organization, certain conditions must

be met (Fausing et al., 2015; Wu et al., 2020). Having obstacles that affect the conditions

needed for a shared leadership system to emerge ultimately impacts the outcomes of the

shared leadership system. The relationship between antecedents and shared leadership

influences the results of the team's performance (Fausing et al., 2015; Pearce & Sims,

2001). In this case, the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face are

classified as antecedents of shared leadership and thus impact the successful

implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and

well-being.

Conclusion 2

One of the greatest obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders

face is their own capacity and leadership knowledge to move the content of the initiative

forward.

This conclusion is supported by the findings in the literature that an obstacle

instructional leaders face is being able to receive training to develop in their role and as

professional leaders (Allen, 1966; Ausband, 2006). Shared leadership depends on the

best-equipped and skilled team members who can adopt leadership roles to fulfill the

goals or objectives of the organization (Amels et al., 2021; A. Harris & DeFlaminis,

2016). When individuals in the shared leadership system are not skilled in their area of

expertise or lack leadership, it impacts the emergence of shared leadership in the system

and the outcomes of the initiative being implemented.

District-wide administrative instructional leaders serve as leaders of curriculum

and instruction for their district. They are called to guide instructional practices, plan

professional learning, develop guidelines for instruction when new initiatives are

implemented, and more (Doll et al., 1958; Domina et al., 2015; Hamm, 1994; B. M.

Harris, 1967). To execute these responsibilities, instructional leaders are called to be

experts in their fields and gain an understanding of the educational trends, provide

accurate information regarding curriculum and instruction, and support the district when

implementing new or evolving ideas (Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989).

In addition, instructional leaders need to have the leadership capacity to be confident in being able to provide and accept leadership through a shared leadership system (Fausing et al., 2015). Team members must have both the requisite skills to engage in key leadership behaviors and share leadership roles (Houghton et al., 2003).

Conclusion 3

District-level administrative instructional leaders need consistent communication to support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being.

One of the greatest obstacles district-wide administrative instructional leaders face is consistent communication. The conclusion that communication issues are an obstacle for instructional leaders is supported in the literature *(*Allen, 1966; Ausband, 2006). Instructional leaders are viewed as experts in curriculum and instruction and are expected to engage in dialogues about instructional programs. When communication is unclear or inconsistent, district-level administrative instructional leaders struggle in their role to support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being.

Communication is one of the four major categories of work for instructional leaders (Hamm, 1994). Communication can be informal, formal, scheduled, or unscheduled (Ausband, 2006). District-level administrative instructional leaders are expected to communicate with a range of stakeholders, particularly principals and teachers. Instructional leaders support principals with the curriculum and instruction work done at their site. This support can include building the instructional leadership capacity of the principal or working with teachers through professional development,

staff meetings, and curriculum committees (Hamm, 1994; Pajak, 1989). District-wide administrative instructional leaders must receive clear and consistent communication to build coherence throughout the district and to be able to relay the message to the principals and teachers they work with.

Conclusion 4

District-level administrative instructional leaders need to have multiple, ongoing, collaborative opportunities to build their capacity and develop as leaders to be an effective member of the shared leadership system that is implementing a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being.

These opportunities include professional development and training, participating in PLCs, collaborating with site and district leaders, and reducing the number of initiatives. These opportunities need to be able to build the instructional leader's expertise in the content of the initiative and support their development as a leader.

Building the capacity of instructional leaders is one way to ensure progress toward a goal, such as successfully implementing a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being. Preparing individuals to participate in a shared leadership system to improve instruction and promote higher achievement is done by providing ongoing specialized professional development, leadership coaching, PLCs, and other routines focused explicitly on instructional improvement (Coburn & Talbert, 2006; A. Harris & DeFlaminis, 2016; Lewis, 2019; Scott et al., 2020). Instructional leaders need to have expertise in teaching and learning and support the management of the district's instructional program. This includes supervision and evaluation of instruction, curriculum coordination, and implementation of research-based instructional

practices (Lewis, 2019). To be able to do this effectively, district-level instructional leaders need ongoing opportunities to build capacity in the role and develop as leaders.

Conclusion 5

District-level administrative instructional leaders need a communication plan when supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being initiative.

The communication plan needs to be specific to the initiative and district-level administrative instructional leaders should be aware of its contents. The purpose of the communication plan is to create coherence and build relationships among the individuals involved. The communication plan should provide communication in multiple modalities including newsletters, email updates, website updates, verbal announcements at meetings, and more. It is important to create mechanisms for communicating across the district to mitigate the development of misinformation or false narratives about the initiative (Coburn & Talbert, 2006).

The success of shared leadership depends on how effectively the individuals involved communicate (O'Toole et al., 2002). To be able to effectively communicate, districts must establish a climate of trust and willingness to openly communicate across status and rank (Meyers & Johnson, 2008). Trust must be built between district-level instructional leaders and those they support (principals and teachers). Regular communication is one way to build relationships and trust intentionally (Lewis, 2019). Districts need to develop a communication plan that district-level instructional leaders, who are supporting the change initiative, are aware of and able to support through the implementation of the district-wide change initiative.

Conclusion 6

When school districts have too many competing initiatives being implemented simultaneously, the work of district-level administrative instructional leaders is negatively impacted.

District-level administrative instructional leaders are expected to support and nurture change initiatives that seek to improve student achievement and well-being. One of the primary responsibilities of the district-level administrative instructional leader is to support the district's vision in curriculum and instruction (Hamm, 1994; Newmann et al., 2001). District-level administrative instructional leaders cannot engage in the curriculum and instruction work or support the implementation of the initiative when they have competing responsibilities and demands for their time, expertise, and participation.

District-level administrative instructional leaders spend a lot of time planning actions, providing professional development, communicating with various stakeholders, and more. To be able to do this for multiple initiatives taxes the capacity of the individual. When multiple initiatives are being implemented, district-level administrative instructional leaders have to make decisions about how to allocate their time, which creates additional tension and stress (Hamm, 1994).

Districts that wish to implement change initiatives need to identify and maintain a clear focus for improvement that centers on student achievement and well-being. Any new proposals that are considered should be aligned with the district's main focus or not attempted at all. Too many competing initiatives give the impression that the district's work is unclear and ill-defined. Instead, districts should prioritize their initiatives so

stakeholders clearly understand the district's commitment to improving student achievement and well-being.

<div align="center">**Implications for Action**</div>

The conclusions from this study show that district-level administrative instructional leaders face various obstacles when supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being, and there are strategies to overcome the greatest obstacles identified. This section provides implications for action for school districts to consider.

Implication 1

When planning to implement a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, districts need to plan for obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders may face by looking at the antecedents to shared leadership. Districts need to consider the group characteristics, task characteristics, and environmental characteristics that may impact the successful implementation of a change initiative. In particular, districts need to consider the ability of the individuals involved, the communication plan, and how the district can reduce the number of initiatives. There needs to be a consideration of the simultaneous influence and impact multiple antecedents can have on the shared leadership framework (Klasmeier & Rowold, 2020). To build a system around shared leadership, districts need to ensure the proper antecedents are in place. The antecedents include having individuals with the ability and capability to support the implementation of a new initiative, identifying the key components of what needs to be done and how it will get done, and having the proper support systems in place.

Implication 2

Districts should invest in multiple, ongoing, collaborative professional learning opportunities for their district-level administrative instructional leaders with a focus on building capacity and leadership development. Professional learning opportunities should include training, coaching, PLCs with job-alikes, and collaboration with principals and district leaders to promote cross-role collaboration. Professional learning promotes systemwide sharing of knowledge and skills, which can contribute to a culture of learning and alignment among central office staff, principals, and teachers (Scott et al., 2020). Professional learning should be a priority and needs to be ongoing so district-level administrative instructional leaders can continue to build their capacity in both the content of the initiative and their ability to support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being from a leadership perspective.

Implication 3

When implementing a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being, districts need to develop a communication plan with multiple methods of consistent communication. Methods of communication can include newsletters, email and website updates, joint communications, announcements at meetings, and more. The communication plan should be specific to the implementation of the district-wide change initiative, and district-level administrative instructional leaders should be aware of its contents. A communication plan will help to develop coherence around the initiative. Improvement efforts that strengthen instructional program coherence can lead to increased student achievement (Newmann et al., 2001). Thus,

having a specific communication plan will support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being.

Implication 4

Instead of introducing new initiatives, districts need to focus on a small number of focused key initiative priorities. Districts should consider strengthening the implementation of current initiatives and reducing or eliminating the initiatives that do not have a positive impact on student achievement and well-being. Competing initiatives can inhibit the work of district-level administrative instructional leaders and move the district away from attaining its goals (Hamm, 1994). When district-level administrative instructional leaders are supporting multiple initiatives, they are forced to make decisions on how to allocate their time and expertise. Instead, districts need sustained organizational focus with clear and specific goals, common academic expectations, and a culture of collective efficacy (Newmann et al., 2001). In addition, districts need to set the standard for how district-level administrative instructional leaders will support an initiative (Lewis, 2019). Thus, districts need to establish focus

Implication 5

Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction need to create an environment in which district-level administrative instructional leaders can be successful in supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative. Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction serve on the superintendent's cabinet and are responsible for overseeing, managing, and evaluating curriculum and instruction work in the district. District-level administrative instructional leaders serve under the direction of the assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Thus, the assistant

superintendent of curriculum and instruction will be the individual who ensures the proper conditions and supports are in place for a district-wide change initiative.

Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction need to ensure there is a clear focus for improving student achievement and well-being that is clearly communicated throughout the organization. A clear focus allows the district to limit and reduce the number of initiatives that do not meet the needs of the organization. Assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction are responsible for communicating to the superintendent and cabinet which initiatives align with the district's focus and which do not. In addition, assistant superintendents need to ensure the proper support systems are provided for district-level administrative instructional leaders and principals. These support systems include training, professional development, collaboration, and leadership development that enhance the ability and capability of the individuals to move the initiative forward (Leithwood, 2010; Murphy & Hallinger, 1988).

Recommendations for Further Research

School districts are constantly implementing district-wide change initiatives and can benefit from additional research. The following list represents recommendations for future research:

Recommendation 1

Districts across the state of California implement district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being. One recommendation is to replicate this Delphi study and expand the sample to include school districts in all counties throughout the state of California. This study was limited to Riverside and San Bernardino counties. Expanding this study to include participants from all counties in California would

increase the number of participants and responses. More participants and responses would help to identify any patterns or inconsistencies in the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face and strategies to overcome them. Districts could use this data to develop a plan to support district-level administrative instructional leaders as they support the implementation of the change initiative.

Recommendation 2

District-wide change initiatives directly impact the school site. A second recommendation is to recreate this Delphi study with a panel of expert principals who have experience implementing a district-wide change initiative at the school site. This study could analyze the obstacles principals face when implementing district-wide change initiatives at their school sites and potential strategies for overcoming these obstacles. Districts could use this information to develop a plan that would support principals prior to implementing the initiative. Researchers could compare the obstacles principals face with the obstacles identified by district-level instructional leaders to see whether there are patterns or consistencies in the responses.

Recommendation 3

In addition to principals, district-wide change initiatives impact the teachers at the school site. Teachers are likely experiencing this change on a day-to-day basis. Thus, a third recommendation is to recreate this Delphi study with a panel of expert teacher leaders who have experience implementing a district-wide change initiative at their school site. The purpose of the study could be to identify obstacles teacher leaders face when implementing a district-wide change initiative and the potential strategies for

overcoming the identified obstacles. Districts would be able to use the information when developing their implementation plan

Recommendation 4

A fourth recommendation is to conduct a case study with a minimum of three school districts that have successfully implemented a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being. The purpose of the research would be to understand how the districts were able to overcome the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders faced during the implementation process. This study would provide detailed information and clear examples of strategies that worked and did not work for other districts looking to implement change initiatives.

Recommendation 5

A fifth recommendation is to conduct a case study with a minimum of three school districts who were able to successfully implement a change initiative because they identified and considered antecedents of shared leadership first. The purpose of this research would be to identify districts that have successfully implemented an initiative by identifying key antecedents characterized as group characteristics, task characteristics, and environment characteristics. This study would provide examples of key antecedents necessary to successfully implement a change initiative.

Recommendation 6

A final recommendation is to conduct a phenomenological study that would study the lived experiences of district-level administrative instructional leaders who support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being. The researcher could conduct a series of semiunstructured interviews with a

sample of district-level administrative instructional leaders. The interviews would allow the researcher to ask in-depth questions and follow-up questions that would give the district-level administrative instructional leaders an opportunity to describe their experiences in detail. Participants could explain what the obstacles were, how the obstacles were experienced, and how they were impacted by the obstacles. In addition, participants could elaborate on the strategies that were used or could have been used to overcome the obstacles. This study would allow the researcher to ask clarifying questions and follow-up questions that a Delphi study does not.

Concluding Remarks and Reflections

School districts are constantly looking at new, innovative initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being. The current state of education has become an initiative-rich environment, which has led to the need for a shared leadership approach. Shared leadership calls on the expertise of the individuals within the organization to distribute leadership responsibilities. One group of individuals who can impact the implementation of a district-wide change initiative through a shared leadership approach is district-level administrative instructional leaders.

This study was important to the researcher because of her former role as a district-level administrative instructional leader and her future aspirations to serve as a director or assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. The researcher had a deep curiosity to understand how district-level administrative instructional leaders could better support the implementation of a district-wide change initiative. Improving student achievement and well-being is the major focus of school districts, and district-level administrative instructional leaders can play a key role in the success of the

implementation if obstacles and barriers are removed. As a reflective educator, it was important to research and understand the obstacles district-level administrative instructional leaders face and the strategies to overcome them.

District-level administrative instructional leaders are experts in curriculum and instruction and are able to support principals with instructional leadership and teachers with pedagogical practices. Although their role has been studied throughout the literature, the obstacles district-wide administrative instructional leaders face and potential solutions to these obstacles has not. Much of the literature focused on the perceptions and experiences of principals and teacher leaders. This study is unique in the population that was chosen to participate and the implications for actions that can be used to improve the implementation of a district-wide change initiative through a shared leadership approach.

When conducting this study, the researcher was surprised by the participants' responses. Some participants were succinct in their responses, using short phrases to convey their response, and others provided in depth narratives with examples. Another surprise was the number of days it took for the sample to complete the surveys. Rounds 1 and 3 in which the participants had to provide written responses took longer for participants to respond. This required multiple follow-up emails to remind the participants to complete the survey. For Round 2, which had the 6-point Likert scale, participants responded much quicker. Some participants even responded that this survey was interesting and fun.

The major findings of this study are not surprising; however, there is little to no current research on this topic with this population. District-level administrative instructional leaders face various obstacles when supporting the implementation of a

change initiative. The obstacles fall into the following three different categories: group characteristics, task characteristics, and environment characteristics. These three categories are antecedents to shared leadership, which indicates that the conditions are not set up for a successful shared leadership system. Thus, school districts need to consider how to mitigate these obstacles to successfully implement a district-wide change initiative to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach.

The other major findings concerned two specific areas: instructional leader capacity and leadership ability and consistent communication. To build capacity and leadership skills, district-level administrative instructional leaders need ongoing, collaborative professional development opportunities in various formats. In addition, districts need to build communication plans specific to the initiative and ensure that instructional leaders are aware and versed in the contents. Again, these findings are not surprising; however, now they will be added to the body of knowledge regarding this topic and allow districts to create plans that will specifically support district-level administrative instructional leaders.

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APPENDICES

Synthesis Matrix

	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Adler-Greene, L. (2019). Every Student Succeeds Act	X	X												
Alemayehu, E. (2021). Practices, obstacles, and benefits of IL								X	X	X				
Allen, R. (1966). Role and function of supervisors and curriculum workers											X	X	X	X
Amels, J., et al. (2021). The relationship between primary school leaders' ...						X	X	X						
Anderson, D. & Anderson, L. A. (2010). Beyond change management				X	X									
Anderson, E. & Young, M.D. (2018). A research-based framework for district...								X	X	X				
Arrington, J.D. (2014). Creating 21st century classrooms:										X	X		X	X
Ausband, L.T. (2006). Instructional technology specialists & curriculum											X		X	X
Averill, O. H., & Rinaldi, C. (2011). Multi-tier system of supports (MTSS)	X	X												
Buckle, J. (2023). A comprehensive guide to 21st century skills			X											
Callahan, R. E. (1966). The superintendent of schools	X	X												
Care et al. (2018). Education system alignment for 21st century skills			X											
Carlson, E. F. (1965). Role of supervisor and curriculum director in a climate...											X	X	X	
Carr et al., (2002). Positive behavior support: Evolution of an applied science	X		X											
CASEL (n.d.) Fundamentals of SEL	X		X											
Center on PBIS (n.d.) What is PBIS?	X		X											

	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Chalkiadki, A. (2018). A systematic literature review of 21st century skill...	X		X											
Cobanoglu, N. (2020). Investigation of shared leadership & organizational...						X	X			X				
Coburn et al., (2009). Evidence, interpretation and persuasion							X		X	X				
Coburn, C. E., & Talbert, J. E. (2006). Conceptions of evidence use in school...	X								X	X				X
Coburn, C.E. (2005). Shaping Teacher Sensemaking								X	X	X				
Cohen, D. K., & Spillane, J. P. (1992). Policy and practice	X													
Corcoran et al (2001). The district role in instructional improvement									X	X				X
Cox,et al., (2003). Toward a model of shared leadership and distributed...				X		X								
Cunningham, W. G. & Sanzo, T. D. Is high-stakes testing harming lower SES...	X	X												
Cunningham, W. V., & Villasenor, P. (2016). Employer voices, demands...	X		X											
Darrow, A. (2016). The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).	X	X												
De Pree, M. (2004). Leadership is an Art				X	X									
DeMatthews, D. E. (2014). How to improve curriculum leadership							X		X	X	X		X	
Diamond, J. B., & Spillane, J. P. (2016). School leadership & management...				X		X	X	X	X					
Doll, R. C., et al. (1958). What are duties of the curriculum director?											X	X	X	
Domina, T., et al. (2015). Professional sense-makers											X	X	X	
Dresher et al., (2014). The dynamics of shared leadership				X		X	X							

	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Ellis, R.P. (2023). Horace Mann	X													
Elmore, R. F. (2004). School reform from the inside out	X	X												
Encyclopedia (n.d.). The education reform movement	X	X	X											
Espinoza, D., & Cardichon, J. (2017). Investing in effective school leadership	X							X	X	X				
Finkel, E. (2012). Principals as instructional leaders							X	X	X	X				
Fletcher & Kaufer (2003). Shared leadership: Paradox and Possibility				X		X								
Fredrick, L. (2023). A comprehensive guide to MTSS	X		X											
Fullan, M. (2002). Leadership and sustainability							X	X	X		X			
Gibbs et al. (2023). Same tests, same results	X	X												
Goldin, C. (1999). A brief history of education in the United States	X													
Grissom et al., (2021). How principals affect students and schools							X	X	X					
Hallinger, P. (2003). Leading educational change								X	X	X				
Hallinger, P. (2005). Instructional leadership and the school principal							X	X		X				
Hamm, J. D. (1994). Drawing a new picture											X	X	X	X
Harris, A. (2014). Distributed leadership matters				X		X	X							
Harris, B. M. (1967). Roles of supervisors and curriculum workers											X	X	X	X
Hattie, J. & Smith, R. (2020). Ten mindframes for leaders				X				X	X	X				
Honig, M. I. (2003). Building policy from practice									X	X				

	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Honig, M. I., & Coburn, C. (2008). Evidence-based decision making...									X	X				
Honig, M. I., et al. (2010). Central office transformation for district-wide teaching and learning improvement.									X	X	X			
Houghton, J. D., et al. (2003). Self-leadership and superleadership				X		X								
Hughes, W., & Pickeral, T. (2013). School climate and shared leadership						X	X	X	X					
Huguet et al., (2021). Constraints, values, and information									X	X				
Huguet, A, et al. (2021). Constraints, Values, and Information												X		
Hunt, T. C. (2005). Education reforms: Lessons from history	X													
Jacobs et al., (2017). Understanding teacher resistance to instructional...			X								X		X	X
Klasmeier & Rowold. (2020). A multilevel investigation of predictors...				X		X								
Kleinberg, S. J. (1999). Women in the United States, 1830-1945.	X													
Kozlowoski, S. W. J., Mak, S., & Choa, G. T. (2016). Team-centric leadership				X		X								
Lambert, L. (2002). A framework for shared leadership				X	X	X								
Leithwood, K. (2010). Characteristics of school districts	X							X	X					
Leithwood, K. et al. (2004). How leadership influences student learning	X								X	X				
Lewis, M. A. (2019). Administrators' instructional leadership perspective...							X	X	X		X			

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	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Mathis, W. J., & Trujillo, T. M. (2016). Lessons from NCLB for ESSA	X	X												
McEwan, E. K. (2003). Seven steps to effective instructional leadership										X	X			
McKee, A., et al., (2008). Becoming a Resonant Leader				X										
Miller, M. (2020). Leadership during change							X	X						
Mitani, H. (2018). Principals' working conditions, job stress, and turnover...	X							X	X					
Mitchell et al., (2018). An exampination of the evidence base of SWPBIS	X		X											
Muijs, D. (2011). Leadership and organizational performance					X	X								
Murname, R. J., & Papay, J. P. (2010). Teachers' views on NCLB	X	X												
Murphy, J. & Hallinger, P. (1988). Characteristics of instructionally effective...							X	X	X	X	X			
Nanjundeswaraswamy, T. S. & Swamy, D. R. (2014). Leadership styles.					X	X								
National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983). A nation at risk	X		X											
National Commission on Social, Emotional, & Academic. (2019)	X		X											
Neumerski, C. M. (2013). Rethinking instructional leadership, a review											X	X	X	
Newmann, F. M., et al. (2001). Instructional program coherence							X	X	X	X				
Nolen, J. L., & Duignan, B. (2023). No Child Left Behind	X	X												
O'Toole, J.et al., (2002). When two or more heads are better than one				X		X								

	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education (2020). What is ESSA?	X	X												
Pajak, E. (1989). The central office supervisor of curriculum and instruction											X	X	X	
Pearce, C. L., & Conger, J. A. (2003). All those years ago				X		X								
Pearce, C. L., & Sims, H. P. (2001). Shared leadership				X		X								
Pearce, C. L., & Sims, H. P. (2002). Vertical versus shared leadership				X	X	X								
Pechota, D., & Scott, D. (2021). The changing role of school leaders							X	X	X	X				
Poff, J. C., & Parks, D. J. (2010). Is shared leadership right for your district						X	X	X	X					
Range, et al. (2014). An analysis of instructional facilitators' relationship...							X	X	X	X				
Reardon, S. F. (2011). The widening academic achievement gap...	X	X	X											
Reese, W. J. (2003). American education in the twentieth century	X	X												
Reid, D. B. (2021). US principals' sensemaking of the future roles...								X	X	X				
Scott et al., (2020). Instructionally engaged leaders in outlier districts								X	X	X				
Sharp, L. A. (2016) ESEA reauthorization: An overview of ESSA	X	X												
Spillane, J. P. (2005). Distributed Leadership				X		X								
U.S. Department of Education. (2008). A nation accountable	X		X											
Urban, W. J., & Wagoner, J. L. (2009). American education	X		X											

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	Educational Reforms	History of Reforms	Education in 21st Century	Leadership	Traditional Leadership	Shared Leadership (SL)	SL in Education	Principals	School District Effectiveness	Instructional Leadership	Instructional Leaders (IL)	History of ILs	IL Roles and Resp.	Obstacles
Utley, C. A., & Obiakor, F. E. (2015). Research perspectives on MTSS	X		X											
Winston & Patterson (2006). An integrative devinition of leadership				X	X									

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APPENDIX B

Email From Expert to Assistant Superintendents

Date:

Dear [Assistant Superintendent]

I am emailing you on behalf of Ashley Fulmer, an elementary principal in the Riverside Unified School District and a Doctoral Candidate in UMASS Global's Doctor of Education in Organizational Leadership program who is looking for participants for her research study

The purpose of her Delphi study is to identify the obstacles district-level, administrative instructional leaders face when supporting district-wide change initiatives and the strategies for overcoming obstacles that will support teachers in improving student learning and well-being.

Participants from Riverside and San Bernardino Counties will be asked to engage in three rounds of survey questionnaires with open-ended questions and Likert scale rating questions.

Mrs. Fulmer asked me to reach out to request your help in identifying participants for this study. If you are interested in helping her identify district-level, administrative instructional leaders from your district, please email her at [redacted].

Respectfully,

Email From Researcher to Assistant Superintendents

Date:

Dear [Assistant Superintendent]

My name is Ashley Fulmer and I am a doctoral candidate for UMass Global's Doctor of Organizational Leadership Program. I have been an educator for 16 years and currently serve as a Principal in the Riverside Unified School District.

Thank you for your interest in helping me identify participants for my study. The purpose of this Delphi study is to identify the (1) obstacles district-level, administrative instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives and (2) the strategies for overcoming obstacles that support teachers in improving student learning and well-being. This study will consist of three rounds of surveys sent via email to the participants with open-ended questions and Likert-scale rating questions.

Can you provide the **names of one or two** district-level, administrative instructional leaders of curriculum and instruction who would be willing to participate and have the following characteristics:
- Employed at the district office and supports more than one school in the district
- Full-time equivalent or a 1.0 FTE
- A minimum of three years of experience in the role
- Directly oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction
- Have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative such as Common Core, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, etc.

Thank you,

Ashley Fulmer
Doctoral Candidate
UMASS Global

APPENDIX D

Invitation to Participate

Date:

Dear [Prospective Study Participant],

My name is Ashley Fulmer and I am a doctoral candidate for UMass Global's Doctor of Organizational Leadership Program. I have been an educator for 16 years and currently serve as a Principal in the Riverside Unified School District.

This is a formal invitation to participate in a Delphi study to investigate the obstacles district-level, administrative instructional leaders face when they implement district-wide change initiatives and the strategies that will help to overcome the obstacles to support student learning and well-being. You were chosen to participate in this study because of your expertise and experience as a district-wide, administrative, instructional leader.

This study asks you to complete three rounds of survey questionnaires over the course of two months. Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may withdraw from this study at any time without consequences.

PURPOSE: The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level expert instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives. The secondary purpose is to identify the strategies for overcoming the obstacles that support teachers in improving student learning and well-being.

PROCEDURES: If you decide to participate, then you will complete a short form to confirm that you are a full-time district-level, administrative instructional leader overseeing an area of curriculum and/or instruction in a K-8 or K-12 district with a minimum of three years experience in your role and have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative.

The researcher will then send three rounds of electronic surveys via Google Forms, with each survey taking approximately 15 to 20 minutes to complete. The Round 1 survey will consist of an open-ended question. The Round 2 survey will utilize a Likert scale for participants to rate the obstacles identified in the first survey. Finally, the Round 3 survey will contain an open-ended question about the obstacles that were rated the highest.

RISKS, INCONVENIENCES, AND DISCOMFORTS: There are minimal risks to your participation in this research study and no known harms or discomforts are associated with this study. There is no cost to you for participating, and you will not be compensated for your participation. The surveys will be completed anonymously, and the researcher will not know your identity.

POTENTIAL BENEFITS:
There are no major benefits to you for participation. However, analysis of the data generated from your participation in this study may contribute to supporting instructional leaders in overcoming barriers while supporting district-wide change initiatives. The information from this study is intended to inform researchers and educational leaders. Additionally, the findings and recommendations from this study will be made available to all participants.

ANONYMITY:
Records of information that you provide for the research study, and any personal information you provide, will not be linked in any way. It will not be possible to identify you as the person who provided specific information for the study, particularly since the surveys will be completed anonymously.

If you have any questions, comments or concerns regarding this study, you may contact me at [redacted] or by email at [redacted]. You can also contact Dr. Lisbeth Johnson by email at [redacted]. If you have any further questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, please contact UMass Global's Office of Institutional Research, UMass Global, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA 92618, BUIRB@umassglobal.edu

Thank you,

Ashley Fulmer
Doctoral Candidate
UMass Global

Interest Google Form

Delphi Study Participation Form

The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level expert instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives. The secondary purpose is to identify the strategies for overcoming the obstacles that support teachers in improving student learning and well-being.

afulmer@mail.umassglobal.edu Switch account

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Personal Information
The researcher will protect your confidentiality. Each round of questionnaires shall be structured in a way to ensure communication between the expert panelists in anonymous. Your name will not be shared with other members of the expert pane.

Name (First and Last) *

Your answer

Email Address *

Your answer

Phone Number *

Your answer

Participant Criteria

Do you agree to participate in this study? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Are you currently employed as a distict-level, administrative instructional leader such as Curriculum Coordinator, Instructional Specialist, Director of Curriculum and Instruction, etc.? *

◯ Yes

◯ No

Which County is your district located in? *

○ Riverside

○ San Bernardino

Are you currently employed as an instructional leader in a K-8 or K-12 district? *

○ Yes

○ No

Are you currently employed at the district office and support more than one school across the district? *

○ Yes

○ No

Are you currently employed as a full-time (1.0 FTE) employee? *

○ Yes

○ No

Do you have a minimum of 3 years experience in your role as an instructional leader? *

○ Yes

○ No

Do you currently oversee an area of curriculum and/or instruction? *

○ Yes

○ No

Do you have experience supporting the implementation of a district-wide change initiative such as Common Core, MTSS, PBIS, SEL, etc.? *

○ Yes

○ No

Informed Consent Verification

Electronic Signature: By typing your name below, you verify you have read the
Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form and give consent to participate in this
study.   *

Your answer

Today's Date *

Date

mm/dd/yyyy

Submit   Clear form

APPENDIX F

Alignment of Research and Survey Questions and Framework by Round

Purpose Statement	Conceptual Framework	Research Question	Survey Question
The purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive as obstacles that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach.	Shared leadership is a mediating causal variable between three categories of antecedent variables (group characteristics, task characteristics, and environmental characteristics) and three categories of group outcome variables. Obstacles can arise when there are issues with the antecedents.	RQ1: What are the obstacles expert district-level administrative instructional leaders face that impact the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?	SQ1: What do you think are the obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?
The second purpose for this study was to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert administrative district level instructional leaders.	Shared leadership is a mediating causal variable between three categories of antecedent variables (group characteristics, task characteristics, and environmental characteristics) and three categories of group outcome variables. Obstacles can arise when there are issues with the antecedents.	RQ2: What degree of importance do selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert administrative district-level instructional leaders?	SQ2: To what degree of importance do the obstacles identified in Round 1 impact the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives focused on improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?
The third purpose of this Delphi study was to identify what expert district-level administrative instructional leaders perceive are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being, when implementing district-wide change initiatives, through a shared leadership approach	Overcoming barriers to shared leadership impacts the group outcome variables (group psyche, group behavior, and group effectiveness). In addition, the conceptual framework shows the group outcome variables have influence on shared leadership.	RQ3: What are the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach, as perceived by expert district-level administrative instructional leaders?	SQ3: Of the obstacles identified as most important to overcome in Round 2, what are the most effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?

APPENDIX G

IRB Approval

Dear Ashley Fulmer,

Congratulations! Your IRB application to conduct research has been approved by the UMass Global Institutional Review Board. Please keep this email for your records, as it will need to be included in your research appendix.

If you need to modify your IRB application for any reason, please fill out the "Application Modification Form" before proceeding with your research. The Modification form can be found at IRB.umassglobal.edu

Best wishes for a successful completion of your study.

Thank You,

IRB
Academic Affairs
UMass Global
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618
irb@umassglobal.edu
www.umassglobal.edu

This email is an automated notification. If you have questions please email us at irb@umassglobal.edu.

APPENDIX H

Bill of Rights

UMASS GLOBAL INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD Research

Participant's Bill of Rights

Any person who is requested to consent to participate as a subject in an experiment, or who is requested to consent on behalf of another, has the following rights:

1. To be told what the study is attempting to discover.

2. To be told what will happen in the study and whether any of the procedures, drugs or devices are different from what would be used in standard practice.

3. To be told about the risks, side effects or discomforts of the things that may happen to him/her.

4. To be told if he/she can expect any benefit from participating and, if so, what the benefits might be.

5. To be told what other choices he/she has and how they may be better or worse than being in the study.

6. To be allowed to ask any questions concerning the study both before agreeing to be involved and during the course of the study.

7. To be told what sort of medical treatment is available if any complications arise.

8. To refuse to participate at all before or after the study is started without any adverse effects.

9. To receive a copy of the signed and dated consent form.

10. To be free of pressures when considering whether he/she wishes to agree to be in the study.

If at any time you have questions regarding a research study, you should ask the researchers to answer them. You also may contact the UMASS GLOBAL Institutional Review Board, which is concerned with the protection of volunteers in research projects. The UMass Global Institutional Review Board may be contacted either by telephoning the Office of Academic Affairs at (949) 341-9937 or by writing to the Vice Chancellor of Academic Affairs, UMASS GLOBAL, 16355 Laguna Canyon Road, Irvine, CA, 92618.

UMass Global IRB   Adopted   2021

Informed Consent and Confidentiality Form

RESEARCH STUDY TITLE: District-Level Instructional Leaders' Perceptions of Obstacles when Implementing District-Wide Change Initiatives – A Delphi Study

UMASS GLOBAL University
16355 Laguna Canyon Road
Irvine, CA 92618

RESPONSIBLE INVESTIGATOR: Ashley Fulmer, Doctoral Candidate

TITLE OF CONSENT FORM: Research Participant's Informed Consent Form

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY: You are being asked to participate in a Delphi panel research study conducted by Ashley Fulmer, a doctoral candidate from UMass Global's Doctor of Organizational Leadership Program. The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach. The second purpose for this study is to identify the degree of importance selected obstacles have on the successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being. The third purpose is to identify the primary strategies for overcoming obstacles that have the greatest likelihood of improving student achievement and well-being when implementing district-wide change initiatives through a shared leadership approach.

PROCEDURES: By participating in this Delphi study, I agree to participate in three rounds of electronic survey questionnaires through Google Forms as described below. Each round's survey will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes for you to complete. Your responses for these rounds will be completely anonymous from the researcher.

> **Round 1:** The expert panel will respond to an open-ended questionnaire to identify the obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting the implementation of district-wide change initiatives.

> **Round 2:** The expert panel will review the results of the Round 1 questionnaire as compiled by the researcher and rate the list of obstacles using a four-point Likert scale.

> **Round 3:** The expert panel will respond to an open-ended questionnaire to identify the most effective strategies to overcome the top obstacles identified.

Delphi Study Requirements: To ensure the validity and reliability of this study, expert panelists are requested to review the following requirements of a Delphi study and confirm your willingness and ability to participate.

I understand that:

1. No known major risks or discomforts are associated with this research.

2. Participation in this study does not yield any direct benefit. However, analysis of the data generated from my participation in this study may contribute to supporting instructional leaders in overcoming obstacles during district-wide change initiatives. Therefore, the information from this study is intended to inform researchers and educational leaders. Additionally, the findings from this study will be made available to all participants.

3. The study will use electronic surveys. All surveys and research data collected will be stored securely and confidentially on a password-protected server.

4. Google Forms will be utilized to gather the panelist's responses. The response survey for each round will be sent to you as a link within the body of an email.

5. My participation in this research study is voluntary. I may decide to not participate in the study and I can withdraw at any time.

6. All questions or concerns should be directed to the researcher, Ashley Fulmer at [redacted] or by phone at [redacted], who will make every effort to return your email within 24 hours.

Consent to Participate: Prior to the distribution of the questionnaires, the researcher must obtain your consent to participate in this research study. Please use the following link to provide your consent electronically:

LINK HERE

The UMASS GLOBAL University Bill of Rights document is also attached to this email for your review and information.

Finally, if you have questions or concerns regarding the information provided in this email or the research study, please contact Ashley Fulmer at [redacted] or [redacted].

Thank you.

Ashley Fulmer
Doctoral Candidate
UMass Global

Delphi Round 1

Delphi Study: Round 1

PURPOSE: The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level expert instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives.

DEFINITION:
District-wide change initiative: a strategy designed to change educational systems and is implemented across all school sites within a school district. Examples of district-wide change initiatives include MTSS, PBIS, SEL, etc.

---

afulmer@mail.umassglobal.edu Switch account ☁

✉ Not shared

---

* Indicates required question

What do you think are the obstacles instructional leaders face when supporting *
the implementation of district-wide change initiatives to improve student
achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?

Your answer

Submit Clear form

Delphi Round 2

Delphi Study: Round 2

PURPOSE: The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level expert instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives.

DEFINITION:
District-wide change initiative: a strategy designed to change educational systems and is implemented
across all school sites within a school district. Examples of district-wide change initiatives include MTSS, PBIS, SEL, etc.

afulmer@mail.umassglobal.edu Switch account

Not shared

* Indicates required question

To what degree of importance do the obstacles identified in Round 1 impact the *
successful implementation of district-wide change initiatives focused on
improving student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership
approach?

	1 = Extremely Unimportant	2 = Moderately Unimportant	3 = Somewhat Unimportant	4 = Somewhat Important	5 = Moderately Important	6 = Extremely Important
Obstacle 1	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Obstacle 2	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Obstacle 3	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Obstacle 4	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Obstacle 5	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐

Were there any obstacles you though should have been in cleded on the list but *
were not?

○ Yes

○ No

If you answered yes to the question above, which obstacles were not included on
the list and how would you rank each? Please use the scale from above to rate the
items you include.

Your answer

Submit   Clear form

Delphi Round 3

Delphi Study: Round 3

PURPOSE: The primary purpose is to identify the obstacles district-level expert instructional leaders face when implementing district-wide change initiatives.

DEFINITION:
District-wide change initiative: a strategy designed to change educational systems and is implemented across all school sites within a school district. Examples of district-wide change initiatives include MTSS, PBIS, SEL, etc.

afulmer@mail.umassglobal.edu Switch account

Not shared

* Indicates required question

Of the obstacles identified as most important to overcome in Round 2, what are the most effective strategies for overcoming these obstacles when implementing district-wide change initiatives to improve student achievement and well-being through a shared leadership approach?

In the spaces below, identify no more than three effective strategies for overcoming each obstacle.

Obstacle 1 *

Your answer

Obstacle 2 *

Your answer

Obstacle 3 *

Your answer

Submit   Clear form

NIH (CITI) Certificate

Completion Date	19-May-2022
Expiration Date	N/A
Record ID	48940155

This is to certify that:

Ashley Fulmer

Has completed the following CITI Program course:

> Not valid for renewal of certification through CME.

Human Subjects Research
(Curriculum Group)
Social-Behavioral-Educational Researchers
(Course Learner Group)
1 - Basic
(Stage)

Under requirements set by:

University of Massachusetts Global

Verify at www.citiprogram.org/verify/?w5b7691a2-8434-4f56-a38b-836c0f8fa8f6-48940155