District Contributions to School Leaders' Sense of Efficacy

A Qualitative Analysis

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Abstract

This study, based on interviews with 31 principals, was undertaken in response to quantitative evidence from a larger mixed-methods project which found school leaders' collective efficacy to be a crucial link joining district leadership and conditions to school conditions and student learning. Results of this study suggest that districts contribute to school leaders' sense of efficacy by (a) establishing clear, widely shared purposes (b) awarding priority to the improvement of instruction, and (c) ensuring that teachers and administrators have access to appropriate amounts of meaningful professional development aimed at developing the capacities needed to achieve the shared purposes.

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Introduction

This study is part of a larger, mixed-methods, Wallace Foundation-funded project aimed at better understanding how successful leadership affects student learning. Since most leadership effects will be indirect, our task is to discover those "links in the chain" connecting state, district and school leadership to student learning. The qualitative study reported in this paper was undertaken in direct response to quantitative evidence from our larger project suggesting that school leaders' collective efficacy is a crucial link joining district leadership and organizational conditions to school conditions and student learning (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

Efficacy is a belief about one's own ability (self-efficacy), or the ability of one's colleagues as a whole (collective efficacy), to perform a task or achieve a goal. It is a belief about ability, not actual ability. Bandura claims that:

> *People make causal contributions to their own functioning through mechanisms of personal agency. Among the mechanisms of agency, none is more central or pervasive than peoples' beliefs about their capabilities to exercise control over their own level of functioning and over events that affect their lives (1997a, p. 118).*

Considerable evidence has now accumulated about the significant contributions that positive efficacy beliefs on the part of those in many different education system roles make to such important personal and organizational outcomes as job search success, increased task performance, improved attendance and increased academic achievement. This evidence is also beginning to uncover the conditions that give rise to positive self-efficacy.

McCormick claims that leadership self-efficacy (or confidence) is likely the key cognitive variable regulating leader functioning in a dynamic environment. "Every major review of the leadership literature lists self-confidence as an essential characteristic for effective leadership…" (2001, p. 23). In reality, we know very little about the efficacy beliefs of leaders generally, and more particularly within education (Chemers, Watson, & May, 2000; Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005), we know even less about what gives rise to those beliefs (Chen & Bliese, 2002). Our earlier quantitative study suggested that school leaders' sense of collective efficacy was significantly influenced by school district actions, and that such efficacy made significant indirect contributions to student achievement (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006).

In response to such evidence, the current study aimed to learn more about what it is that school district-level actors do that has a significant bearing on the efficacy of school leaders. We asked: What school district conditions do principals perceive to be influencing their sense of individual and collective efficacy? Are these conditions consistent with the results of previous evidence about the characteristics of effective districts? If not, how are they different? To foreshadow our more detailed results, we found that districts contribute most to school leaders' sense of efficacy by (a) establishing clear purposes which become widely shared, (b) unambiguously awarding priority to the improvement of instruction and (c) ensuring that teachers and administrators have access to appropriate amounts of meaningful professional development aimed at developing the capacities needed to achieve the shared purposes. We also found that district-level attention to certain conditions, such as investment in teachers' professional development could have either positive or negative consequences for principal efficacy, depending on the frequency, nature, and quality of PD experiences provided.

Framework and Literature

Bandura (1986) identified key direct or "proximal" sources of efficacy beliefs - mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal processes. Through their practices, school district leaders create a set of organizational conditions potentially serving as indirect or "distal" sources of efficacy beliefs for school leaders. District conditions, we assumed, influence school leaders' efficacy to the extent that they result in mastery experiences and other proximal influences on efficacy. The organizational conditions included in the framework for our study were drawn from a recent synthesis of research by Anderson (2006). Although not an explicit focus of the present analysis, the survey component of our study also included measures of district leadership drawn from recent reviews of successful educational leadership (Leithwood & Riehl, 2005).

Leader Efficacy

School leaders' efficacy beliefs may include beliefs about one's own efficacy regarding improving instruction and student learning (LSE) and beliefs about the collective capacity of leadership colleagues across schools in the district to improve student learning (LCE). In our earlier study, these two sets of efficacy beliefs were hypothesized to have significant effects on school leaders' practices or behaviors, conditions in schools and classrooms known to account for student learning, as well as on the learning of students. Relationships among LSE, LCE, leaders' practices, school and classroom conditions and student learning were assumed to be interactive. School leaders' collective efficacy can also be conceptualized and analyzed as a school-level phenomenon associated with the presence and strength of school cultures that

exemplify norms and practices of collaboration and shared leadership. That was not the line of inquiry that gave rise to the present study, but is a worthy distinction for future investigation.

Our review of literature uncovered only sixteen empirical studies of leadership efficacy carried out in school contexts, the earliest published by Hillman in 1983. In addition, we found six empirical studies of LSE conducted in other organizational contexts. Many more theoretical papers (e.g., Gist & Mitchell, 1992) and literature reviews (Sadri & Robertson, 1993) were identified and we used them, in a selective way, to help us better understand the self-efficacy construct and what part it might play in the leadership process. Most studies were provided through one-shot surveys, although two studies conducted in non-school contexts used more sophisticated experimental or quasi-experimental designs (McCormick, 2000; Shea & Howell, 1999). All studies carried out in schools focused on the efficacy of principals, as did ours. Finally, a substantial variety of efficacy measures have been used in this research although the majority have been designed to measure the construct as it has been conceptualized by Bandura.

Leaders' self-efficacy beliefs (LSE). Most leader efficacy studies have been substantially influenced by Bandura's socio-psychological theory of self-efficacy (e.g., 1982, 1986, 1993, 1997a, 1997b). In addition to defining the meaning of self-efficacy and its several dimensions, this body of work identifies the effects of self-efficacy feelings on a leader's own behavior and the consequences of that behavior for others. This line of theory also specifies the "proximal" antecedents of self-efficacy beliefs and the mechanisms through which such beliefs develop.

Self-efficacy beliefs, according to this socio-psychological theory, have directive effects on one's choice of activities and settings and can affect coping efforts once those activities are begun. Such beliefs determine how much effort people will expend and how long they will

persist in the face of failure or difficulty. The stronger the self-efficacy the longer the persistence. Sometimes the perceived risks or costs of failure exceed the actual material or personal consequences. In such situations, people who persist at subjectively threatening activities gain corrective experiences that further enhance their sense of efficacy. In sum, "Given appropriate skills and adequate incentives ….efficacy expectations are a major determinant of peoples' choice of activities, how much effort they will expend and how long they will sustain effort in dealing with stressful situations (Bandura, 1997a, p.77)

Efficacy beliefs, suggests Bandura (1993), develop in response to both cognitive and affective processes. Among the strongest cognitive influences on self-efficacy are beliefs about ability as either "inherent capacity" or "acquired skill". The "inherent capacity" view fosters a concern for protecting one's positive evaluation of one's competence. Those in leadership roles holding this view, for example, will experience an eroding sense of efficacy as difficulties arise, become more erratic in their problem solving and lower their aspirations for the individuals or groups in their organization. These lowered aspirations then lead to declines in performance. The "acquirable skills" view, on the other hand, encourages the expansion of one's competence. Under this belief system, leaders' own self-judgements change very little in response to challenging circumstances. They will continue to set challenging goals for themselves and their colleagues and remain systematic and efficient in their problem solving. High levels of organizational performance are predicted by such behavior.

Also among the cognitive mechanisms influencing efficacy beliefs are perceptions about how controllable or alterable is one's working environment. This perception includes two components: one's ability to influence what goes on in the environment through effort and

persistence; and the malleability of the environment itself. Bandura (1993) reports evidence suggesting that those with low levels of belief in the controllability of their environment produce little change even in highly malleable environments. Those with firm beliefs of this sort, through persistence and ingenuity, figure out ways of exercising some control even in environments with many challenges to change.

Self-efficacy beliefs also evolve in response to motivational and affective processes. These beliefs influence motivation in several ways: by determining the goals that people set for themselves--behavior is motivated and guided by goals that are both explicit and challenging (see also Locke & Latham, 1984), by how much effort they expend, by how long they persevere in the face of obstacles and their resilience to failure. Most theories of motivation award substantial influence to personal goals. Additionally, motivation relies on both discrepancy reduction, as well as discrepancy production. That is, people are motivated both to reduce the gap between perceived and desired performance and to set themselves challenging goals which they then work hard to accomplish. They mobilize their skills and effort to accomplish what they seek (Bandura, 1993). Leaders' beliefs in their own capacities affect how much stress and depression they experience in threatening or difficult situations.

Leaders' collective efficacy beliefs (LCE). Collective efficacy is defined by Bandura as "a group's shared belief in its conjoint capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given levels of attainments" (1997a, p. 477). Although conceptually close to individual efficacy, research about the antecedents, nature and consequences of collective (or group) efficacy is relatively recent. Results of that research in both schools (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Ross, Hogaboam-Gray, & Gray,

2004; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004; Tschannen-Moran & Goddard, 2001) and other types of organizations (Chen & Bliese, 2002; Pescosolido, 2003) indicate that it is a significant predictor of job attitudes, training proficiency, and job performance. In addition, it acts as a buffer to ameliorate the negative effects of work stressors on employees' psychological well being.

School-based research associates collective teacher efficacy with faculty trust in students and parents (Tschannen-Moran, 2001), as well as student achievement in math and reading (Goddard, Hoy & Wolfolk Hoy, 2000). Almost all of the available evidence about collective efficacy concerns groups of teachers or other employees not typically considered to be in leadership roles. So our focus in this and the prior quantitative study on school administrator efficacy is relatively unique. As previously noted, in the analysis of principal survey data from our multi-method investigation of leadership, we isolated and studied the relationships between district office leadership practices, organizational conditions at the district-level, and measures of both principals' individual and collective sense of efficacy. For that analysis, "collective" referred to the actions and perceived effects of principals' professional work in association with other building and central office leaders across the school district, not to the collective efforts of principals and other educators at the school level (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The findings from that analysis suggested that district organizational conditions (described below) had much larger effects on school leaders' collective than on individual efficacy. The influence of district leadership practices and policies was largely indirect: they help create district conditions that are viewed by school leaders as enhancing and supporting their work. The finding that organizational conditions, such as the district's focus on student learning and the quality of instruction and district investment in instructional leadership, have substantially greater influence

on school leaders' collective efficacy than on their individual efficacy may relate to the fact that these conditions and associated actions are perceived by principals as system-wide influences, not directed at them individually. The finding is consistent with broader (not education specific) theories of differentiation in the sources and effects of antecedents to collective and individual efficacy in organizations (Chen & Bliese, 2002; Pescosolido, 2003). As suggested through the work of Chen and Bliese (ibid), direct influences on collective efficacy may exert a more distal indirect influence on individual efficacy, perhaps mediated by other more proximal antecedents to the latter as described by Bandura (e.g., Bandura, 1986) and others (e.g., Zaccaro, Blair, Peterson, & Zazanis, 1995). In addition to the need for further research on the nature and sources of collective efficacy of school leaders and its relationship to individual efficacy, little can be said at the present time about the consequences of collective efficacy for school leader actions and impact. In our prior analysis of principal survey data from this study, we began to explore the relationships between school leaders' sense of efficacy (individual and collective) and a variety of school-level variables (leadership practices, school and classroom conditions, aggregate measures of student learning). The results of that analysis were inconclusive, showing moderate to weak and mixed (individual vs. collective) effects of leader efficacy on the variables considered, while clearly pointing to the need for further research on the links between leader efficacy and conditions and practices most closely relevant to the quality of teaching and learning. Following upon our principal survey findings, the analysis of principal interview data presented in this paper focuses specifically on the relationship between principal efficacy and organizational conditions that support school quality and improvement at the district level.

Proximal sources of efficacy beliefs. Bandura (e.g., 1986) proposed four proximal sources of both self and collective efficacy beliefs and explained the nature of their influence:

- *Mastery experiences* or individual past successes and failures with a task, will have strong effects on feelings of self-efficacy for accomplishing similar future tasks. School leaders might have mastery experiences, for example, from participation in some form of district professional development, opportunities to solve manageable problems in their schools and districts and working with a mentor;
- *Vicarious experiences* may arise through the visualization of successful performance. Such experiences may also be a product of observing a skilled model such as a district administrator (Coffin & Leithwood, 1996), mastering an important task or skill or by hearing about how other leaders have solved relevant organizational problems;
- *Verbal persuasion* includes encouragement and feedback from a credible, trusted and respected colleague. We speculate that performance appraisal feedback from central office leaders might serve as a form of verbal persuasion influencing school leaders' efficacy beliefs. Bandura argues that performance feedback "focused on achieved progress underscores personal capabilities whereas feedback that focuses on shortfalls highlights personal shortcomings" (1977 p. 199);
- *Emotional arousal* may occur in response to an inspirational other (e.g., a charismatic district leader) who helps elevate leaders' standards and aspirations and helps them see the relationship between the district's goals and larger social and moral purposes. District conditions are likely to be antecedents of leader efficacy to the extent that they influence one or more of the four proximal sources of efficacy identified by Bandura.

Empirical support for these as proximal influences on leader efficacy is presently more robust for individual than for collective efficacy.

District Conditions

For this study, we explored the presence and reported effects of district conditions on school leader efficacy. District conditions measured in the original study were identified through a comprehensive review and synthesis of evidence about the characteristics of school districts that have positively influenced the achievement of their students, often in the context of large-scale reform initiatives (Anderson, 2006; Anderson & Togneri, 2005; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004). These conditions, explained and referenced in detail in the works cited, included:

- A district-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction (e.g., goals focused on the quality of all students' learning, programs aligned with state and local standards, efforts to develop coherence in curriculum, materials and instructional strategies across classrooms and schools);
- District-wide use of data (e.g., capacity for reliably assessing student learning, use of such data in district decision making about needs for improvement, strategies, and progress);
- Targeted and phased focuses for improvement (e.g., multi-year improvement efforts focused on clear goals, targeting specific areas of the curriculum, giving particular attention to lower performing schools and classrooms);
- Investment in instructional leadership at the school and district levels (e.g., training for principals in school improvement processes, systematic and written appraisals of

principals' performance, establishment and support for school-based teacher instructional leader positions);

- An emphasis on team work and professional community (e.g., fosters flow of ideas through district, chances for principals to share knowledge with peers, support for teacher collaboration in schools);
- New approaches to board-district and district-school relations (e.g., work towards a productive balance of local autonomy and central control, stability in tenure and relations between district office and school board officials);
- District–sponsored teacher professional development (e.g., sustained commitment and resources for district priorities, intensive instructionally-focused teacher development, coordination of school and district-based professional learning activities).

We note that these conditions have been identified largely using case-study evidence, and that the investigations of school district effectiveness and improvement from which they are drawn typically examines and asserts relationships between district level characteristics and district-wide measures of student performance, but does not explicitly investigate the interactions between those conditions and the beliefs and behaviors of principals. Until our own previous study (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006), no large-scale quantitative efforts had been made to assess their contribution to leader efficacy or other school level variables. Drawing upon Bandura's theoretical work, we conceptualized these district conditions as "distal" antecedents influencing, in turn, the proximal antecedents included in Bandura's account of efficacy sources - mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and emotional arousal processes. However, since the principal interviews were not specifically designed to gather information on proximal

variables, the analysis here aims to assess what it was about district conditions measured in our earlier study (and others) that gave rise (indirectly) to leader efficacy beliefs without examining the probable mediation of those conditions through the proximal antecedents.

Methods

Sampling

Evidence for the study was provided by 31 principals interviewed as part of site-based data collection undertaken for our larger study. The quantitative components of our larger study are based on evidence from a stratified random sample of states (9), districts (45) and schools (180). A sub-set of districts (18) and schools (36) within the same nine states provide evidence for the qualitative components of larger study. State sampling, carried out first, aimed to ensure variation in geography, demographics, state governance for education, curriculum standards, leadership policies, and accountability systems. District sampling within the nine states aimed at variation in district size and student diversity (e.g., race/ethnicity, family income). Within the 18 site visit districts, schools were sampled to ensure variation in school level (elementary, middle and secondary), and student diversity. Two schools (one elementary, one middle or high school) in each of the 18 districts were visited for purposes of collecting interview data from teachers and administrators at the school level and observations of classroom practice, in addition to district level interviews associated with the overall study of leadership and learning. The overall district sample was designed to be sensitive to variations in leadership and policy conditions associated with contextual differences in district size and student diversity (race/ethnicity, family income). Statistical analysis of the effects of these district context variables indicated that district size, student racial/ethnic diversity, and SES levels accounted for little of the variability

(16%) in district policy conditions as measured in the principal surveys. This finding, coupled with the small number of schools per site visit district from which interview data were gathered, led to our decision not to differentiate the principal interview data in this analysis by district.

Of the 31 principals in our sample (at the time of this analysis site visits were pending in the remaining schools), 19 were females, 11 were males (one was not specified). Three levels of schools were represented: thirteen elementary, seven secondary, nine intermediate, one combined elementary/middle school, and one junior/ senior high school. Principals had been leading their schools for an average of 4.67 years (ranging from 1 to 22 years), and had been working in their present district for an average of 7.83 years (ranging from 1 to 27 years).

While previous evidence paints a mixed picture of the influence of these and other demographic variables on leader efficacy, the overall effect of such variables seems to be weak or non-existent (Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005). For example, there is virtually no evidence suggesting that school level or size (although see DeMoulin, 1992), teachers' age or total years experience in education**,** student SES or student ethnicity, influence leader efficacy (e.g., Gareis & Tschannen-Moran, 2005; Lucas, 2003; Roberts, 1997). Leader gender appears to be the strongest of the demographic variables. Although most studies report no influence of gender (e.g., Dimmock & Hattie, 1990; Roberts, 1997), the few studies reporting a positive influence find women's levels of professional efficacy higher than men's (Imants & DeBrabander, 1996; Waskiewicz, 2002). We report demographic information about the 31 respondents in this study for descriptive purposes only.

Instrument

Interviews with principals were guided by a 21 question semi-structured interview protocol inquiring about principals' views of state and district initiatives, as well as principals' own leadership practices, how leadership was distributed in the school, professional development of teachers and principals, and the nature of relationships between the school and its external community. Interviews lasting an average of 60 minutes were tape recorded and transcribed. While NVivo software was used to assist in the coding of our interview data as a whole, transcripts for this study were manually coded for two reasons. First, there was not a large number of interviews, so the task was not overwhelming. Second, because the importance of school leader efficacy only became apparent to us after analyzing our survey data, the interview protocol did not include questions specifically designed to elicit leader efficacy information. We needed to interpret the interview data using a framework partly different from the theoretical and research foundations underlying the conceptual structure of the interview protocol and coding framework. This placed constraints on our analysis, in that we were not able to systematically and confidently discriminate principal statements about personal sense of efficacy from their collective sense of efficacy. Our own reading of these data is that principals typically spoke more generally about district office influences and effects on their work and that of their teachers and colleagues in other schools, and that this likely is more reflective of their collective sense of efficacy than of their views on their individual capabilities to successfully accomplish their work. There is clearly a need for more research specifically designed to be analytically sensitive to the difference and interplay between individual and collective efficacy and the antecedents of both.

Data Analysis

The transcripts from the interviews with the 31 principals were examined for evidence of district conditions that would influence the principals' efficacy. Data analysis proceeded in two phases. In phase one, relevant sections of the transcripts for each principal were coded and excerpted under four headings linked to our conceptual framework:

1. *Indicators / feelings identified by principals of their ability to get the job done:* these were statements that provided evidence of the interviewees' sense of personal or collective efficacy to effectively perform their job (often embedded in statements about influential district or school level conditions, as illustrated in the sample quote below).
2. *Factors in the district that influence principals' ability to get the job done:* these were variables giving rise to Indicators/Feelings. Factors were separated according to their reported positive or negative influence on the principal's ability to get the job done.
3. *District conditions:* each district factor was coded using the seven district conditions. Some factors were related to more than one condition. For example, "the district holds regular meetings for administration groups to keep everyone up to date so people can act as supports and resources for one another" would be coded under *District wide use of data and knowledge* as well as *An emphasis on teamwork and professional community.* Several district conditions emerged that did not readily fit into previous categories and they were recorded and subsequently treated like the original seven conditions.
4. *Bandura's individual and collective efficacy experiences:* initially, data were also coded using Bandura's four proximal sources of self and collective efficacy beliefs. For example, the quotation above regarding regular meetings for administrator groups would

be coded as a *Mastery experience* because principals would have opportunities to interact with others, share problems and solutions, and get updated on district activities. Eventually, however, we decided that this coding task involved too high a level of inference to be trustworthy and did not adequately account for principals' own interpretations and sense making. Results of this coding are not reported.

All coding was initially carried out by the second author (Strauss). Two other researchers (not the authors) working on the larger project were then asked to code a sample of transcription data for reliability purposes. To do this they were provided with: an introduction to this study and its purposes; background information about the seven district conditions and how they were enacted in schools; a numbered list of the seven conditions with a brief explanation of each; and a chart containing 25 uncoded quotations from the principal transcripts. Their task was to match each quotation to an appropriate district condition(s). Decisions by the two coders were the same as decisions by the original coder 88% (22 out of 25 quotations) and 84% (21 out of 25 quotations) of the time.

The second phase of analysis we used the process of analytic induction (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) to generate propositions that reflected our interpretation of findings grounded in the interview excerpts and related to the appropriate conceptual framework codes. For example, when a principal said: "*I am like a cheerleader for them [teachers] and they have to be there for the kids. But I recognize that they were not trained. They haven't had the training. Their curriculum was not there. They didn't have the materials to do what they wanted to do*," this statement was coded under Indicators/Feelings, and was interpreted and summarized in propositional form as: "a new principal feels enthusiastic about the work in the school, but

> recognizes the teachers have been lacking training, curriculum, and materials for teaching." This statement was also coded as a "district factor" and interpreted as: "the district is not providing adequate financial support for professional development or for instructional materials." While the interpretive process in the conversion of qualitative data to statements of findings is always subject to concerns about validity, we believe that clear descriptions of the analytical procedures employed provide the reader with a legitimate basis for assessing the trustworthiness of findings.

Results

Questions motivating our research and about which we had adequate data were concerned with the extent to which conditions associated in previous research with school district effectiveness were reported as influences on principals' sense of efficacy, and whether additional district conditions also had such influence.

Table 1 summarizes evidence about the number of respondents who identified each of the original seven district conditions, along with two more suggested by our data (#4 and #9) as having a bearing on their own sense of professional efficacy. The first column of Table 1 shows the relative rankings of the ten conditions and the efficacy-influencing enactments related to each condition (also ranked). The second and third columns show positive and negative effects on efficacy, and the fourth column shows the total number of respondents who made positive or negative comments. Several respondents identified both positive and negative features of some conditions.

Our analysis prompted us to relocate one of Anderson's district sub-conditions and to add two new conditions. The sub-condition we have relocated is union-school relationships. Anderson included this as part of *Emphasis on team work and professional community*, and we now think it should be part of *New approaches to board-district and district-school relationships* (reconceptualized as #8, "*New approaches to key relationships*" in Table 1). Principals in our sample spoke about the effects of strong unions with a traditional focus primarily on teacher working conditions raising significant barriers to the creation of collaborative cultures and the engagement of teachers in school-wide and district-wide decision making. In our evidence, this relationship is largely negative and a drain on principals' sense of efficacy. Unlike some of the studies reviewed by Anderson, none of the principals we interviewed alluded to the positive contributions that teacher unions can make to school improvement efforts which could enhance the principal's sense of personal and collective efficacy. Our evidence also suggests the addition of two district conditions not included in Anderson's list of strategic conditions associated with district effectiveness: *District personnel policies* and *District policies governing school choice*. These added conditions will be discussed in detail in the section below.

Evidence summarized in Table 1 as a whole, indicates that principals viewed the enactments of our selected conditions in their own districts as influences on their sense of efficacy with a largely positive bias. This evidence, as a whole, also suggests that the conditions making the greatest positive contribution to school leaders' sense of efficacy were, in order: a district-wide focus on student achievement and quality of instruction, district-sponsored PD for teachers, investment in instructional leadership at the school and district level, and district

personnel policies. District policies governing school choice were only mentioned as having negative influences on principals' sense of efficacy.

Most frequently cited (by a third or more of the sample) as a negative influence on efficacy were: district-wide focus on student achievement and instruction, district-sponsored professional development of teachers, and district personnel policies. These three conditions account for a disproportionate number of both positive and negative influences on efficacy – very sharp- but double-edged swords insofar as leader efficacy is concerned.

Our findings in relation to the nine district conditions and the related efficacy-producing enactments are described in the following section. The numbers in parentheses following efficacy-producing enactments indicate how many principals made comments that reflected a positive influence on their efficacy (e.g., 9+), or a negative influence on their efficacy (e.g., 3-) Excerpts from principals' transcripts illustrate positive influences.

1. District-wide focus on student achievement and the quality of instruction. Particular enactments of this district condition were mentioned as a positive influence on efficacy by 28 respondents and as a negative influence by 16. Principal efficacy was enhanced for example, when districts: provided curricula and performance standards but allowed for some flexibility in how they were implemented, not only established clear policies but continued to review and revise them, assigned subject area facilitators to schools to provide regular help to teachers, and promoted differentiated instruction.

As a negative influence on their efficacy, principals cited such specific enactments of this condition as: enforcing common standards without giving credit for large gains that schools have made even though standards have not yet been reached, adopting initiatives that are based on

conflicting assumptions or ideologies, adopting a focus for student learning that narrows the taught curriculum and minimizes the value of important fields of study, and excessive prescription from the district about how to enact the district's focus in schools thereby reducing the flexibility that school leaders require to effectively adapt the focus to their own contexts.

According to our evidence, principal efficacy is enhanced, in sum, when this district condition includes:

- Providing a clear sense of direction through establishment of achievement standards and provision of district-wide curriculum and/or programs. (23+, 8-)

  The fact that we have a more central focus and central direction, I think has improved student instruction and improved student learning, and forced us to take a hard look at what we're doing with students.

- Providing human and financial resources to assist schools in achieving district established directions. (15+, 11-)

  I think in general it's really a privilege to work in a district like this. There's a great deal of support, you know, budgetarily, which helps us to move things in a direction that we feel is positive, that's gonna help the students, so, we have a lot advantages.

- Communicating high expectations for the work of teachers and principals in accomplishing district directions and implementing effective instruction. (14+, 2-)

  I would say the accountability at all campuses. The superintendents that we've had have put a lot of pressure on the principals, to make sure that the teachers feel more accountable for the students that they have.

- Allowing schools sufficient flexibility in pursuing district directions. (11+, 1-)

  The impetus to tailor it to the school site has been very clearly indicated. But the initiatives have come out of the district office.

- Engaging in ongoing or periodic review of directions and plans and revising as appropriate. (5+)

  Our district curriculum now has been rewritten to mirror the state curriculum but also all of that ties into our state testing. So the state testing now is more in alignment with what is actually being taught.

2. District-sponsored teacher professional development. Professional development for both teachers and principals is an important part the enactment of most of the conditions. Of the 31 principals in our sample, 29 associated district-sponsored teacher professional development with a positive sense of efficacy on their part. Ten principals, however, identified some aspect of district-sponsored professional development in their own districts as having a negative influence on their efficacy.

What is it about district-sponsored teacher professional development that positively that influences principal efficacy? The answer seems to be the district providing data and guidelines for principals and teachers to help them better programs for students. The answer includes, as well: supporting the opportunities for school representatives to attend professional development conferences, encouraging schools to use their staff meetings for professional development purposes, aligning professional development with the district curriculum, allowing schools significant flexibility in designing their own professional development, and providing funds to be used by schools in a variety of ways for meaningful professional development.

Aspects of this district condition viewed less favorably by principals as influences on their efficacy include the requirement for excessive professional development for teachers and principals, allowing in-school professional development to crowd out time for teacher

collaboration, setting limits on the use of substitute teachers, and placing excessive constraints on absences from the school building for professional development. Also viewed negatively by principals was inadequate funding by the district for professional development and situations where a focus on PD for one initiative (literacy) left other important programs unsupported (technology).

District-sponsored professional development for teachers seems to enhance principal efficacy, in sum, when:

- Districts hold principals accountable for implementing and following up on what is learned during district-sponsored PD. (19+, 2-)

  I think fundamentally my role is to help hold people accountable that the professional development initiatives and activities … are then reflected in practice so that it's not just simply, "Here's a good idea somebody thinks we should be talking about."

- Districts approve of a wide variety of types of PD but insist they be meaningful for teachers and aligned with district goals and priorities. (17+)

  I think we do have some direction from our central office and from our curriculum director about where we should go, but we also have flexibility about how we are going to do that.

- Districts mandate participation in PD considered critical to the achievement of district priorities. (17+, 5-)

  With that the district said how we were to do it. It provided professional development for the teachers, for myself, so that we could go and be trained in it. And then as a result we are expected to follow that curriculum.

- Adequate funds are provided to support significant PD. (13+, 6-)

Encourage [teachers] to attend PD that's offered by the district. Encourage and/ or financially support them to attend outside professional development

- Encouragement is provided by the district for the use of school staff meetings for the purposes of PD. (11+, 1-)

  Because part of what we do is if the district office offers in-service kinds of things or professional development, either the department chairs go, or they send stronger teachers to go and bring it back to the department.

- Evidence is provided by the district to assist in the planning of teacher PD. (4+)

  Definitely a push towards using data and increased to create teacher leaders, recognizing that that's where the staff development needs to happen.

3. Investment in instructional leadership at the school and district levels. Enactments of this condition attracted positive comments related to effects on school leader efficacy from all but one of the 31 principals, and negative comments from three. Positive feelings of efficacy were associated by respondents with districts providing support for principals' professional development, providing individualized support for principals depending upon the challenges they were facing in their schools, holding principals accountable for both student achievement and teacher contributions to such achievement, and giving principals responsibility for responding to student data.

District enactments also associated with positive feelings of self-efficacy were the provision of district staff to oversee subject matter teaching in all elementary schools and a curriculum set by the district with supporting professional development for both principals and teachers. As these examples begin to illustrate, investments in instructional leadership perceived

by principals to contribute to their efficacy were for the most part variations on forms of professional development for principals and in some cases for teachers as well.

Among district enactments of this condition with negative consequences for principal efficacy were: a lack of support for principals' professional development, requiring teachers and principals to participate in excessive amounts of professional development, and not providing enough professional development through the district. As these examples illustrate, efficacy enhancing professional development is something of a balancing challenge. Principal efficacy is fostered in a positive way by the right amount of professional development and in a negative way by either too much or too little.

Leader efficacy is nurtured, in sum, when district investments in instructional leadership include:

- Establishing teachers' work as the main focus of attention for school leaders. (28+)

  We have to participate, we have to help rather than manage. Although a lot of the job is still managing because there is still the paperwork. … We also have to relate more to the teachers and the students. To actually know what they are doing in the classrooms.

- Holding principals directly responsible for student achievement in their schools (23+)

  Frankly my communication is very simplistic, I tell people, I tell our staff constantly that my goal and I expect it to be theirs is that we help improve the student achievement and that we do so in a caring and nurturing environment.

- Providing a wide range of professional development opportunities to help build the instructional leadership capacities of principals. (20+, 3-)

  We have principal meetings two times a month and then … because I am a new principal this year – I get a third one. … About every year I go to either a state or national conference and attend courses there …and occasional workshops.

4. *District personnel policies.* District personnel policies, one of the two conditions we added to Anderson's original list of seven, had a positive influence on efficacy for 22 of our respondents and a negative influence for 10 respondents. Positive influences included: encouraging promotion of principals from within the district and giving principals a significant role in selecting teachers. Mention was made of the importance of "matching" teachers and principals to the mission or culture of the school, or allocating especially effective principals to especially challenging schools. Hiring district office staff into school leadership roles was typically viewed as adding strength to the collective capacity of schools in the district. Stable and consistent district leadership, which we included as a feature of district personnel policies, also contributed to principals' sense of efficacy. Principals' commitment to directions established by the district and confidence in being able to pursue them successfully was significantly eroded by frequent superintendent turnover. Furthermore, principals' efficacy was especially challenged when they were appointed to schools which had been experiencing frequent turnover of leaders in recent years. We are not suggesting here that district personnel policies or policies governing school choice should be regarded as additional dimensions of district effectiveness as per the district conditions identified in Anderson's review (though personnel policies seems a likely candidate for inclusion as the long term effects of accountability sanctions become increasingly evident on the public school landscape); it is simply that they emerged in our analysis of these principal interview data as additional sources of district influence on principal efficacy.

- Stability in district leader roles (10+, 3-)

  There have been a lot of changes in the district in the last couple of years. Some probably stem from the fact that there was a large turnover in leadership in the last couple of years. But education is constantly evolving. It's not a static thing.

- Competent principals are hired from within the district and their capabilities are matched with school needs (9+)

  When I first took this building in 1989, I didn't want to come back because the morale was terrible here. But I took the challenge, I had been asked to come back and so I did. I have not been sorry. It has turned out to be everything I wanted it to be. Now I can kind of sit back and enjoy it.

- District hiring policies ensure principals can select and retain outstanding teachers (9+, 4)

  Well, the principals do almost all the hiring in the district. As a matter of fact, I will be hiring a new teacher. … So we control over what our staff looks like. … It is about hiring good people but it is not always a guarantee. It is about keeping good people.

- District leaders assume school leadership roles when needed (4+)

  When I was weighing whether to leave Central Office or stay or leave to go to the building level, it was … [this school]. I was interviewing perspective candidates for the principal here. No one knew anything about small schools. What they were going to do with this building was distressing me, you know?

- Principal succession is planned and minimized (4+, 2-)

  Cultivating our own leaders is very important …, which I really appreciate and admire about the school district. So that when you step into that position [of principal] you kind of know the district's way of doing things and you are able to just pick up and go.

5. Emphasis on team work and professional community. This condition attracted positive comments from 26 principals and negative comments from two. Enactments of this condition that engendered positive associations with principal efficacy included: keeping schools informed about state and district initiatives, and support and encouragement from the district for principal and teacher collaborative relationships. Principals also believed their sense of efficacy was

improved when districts followed through on state requirements in ways that led to greater collaboration within schools and when district leaders met with principals both frequently and regularly to work through decisions together. Efficacy was influenced in a negative way at one small school where involvement in the district meant the principal had to divide 15 curricular liaison positions among 11 staff members without overwhelming anyone.

This condition is associated with a positive sense of leader efficacy, in sum, when it includes:

- Principal and teacher participation in district-wide decisions that directly impact on their work. (14+, 1-)

  The superintendent's office, the curriculum department really was working with a group of teachers and supervisors, administrators to come up with a new form that would make it easier for you to observe forty teachers but really pinpoint some areas that we wanted to work on.

- Schools being kept informed about both state and district initiatives. (13+)

  That is my work. ... The district translates what the state expects from us. ...We need to translate for our students, teachers, support staff, parents, what that means.

- Structures which allow for sharing of information and collaborative problem solving within and across schools. (13+)

  During the summer, the superintendent housed all the top administrators, the principals and assistant principals for a whole week, and they had to learn to work together, not just within their campus, but within the district.

- Support and encouragement for teacher and principal collaboration. (8+, 1-)

  One thing that our superintendent has presented us with is he wants us [principals and teachers] to be more collaborative.

6. District-wide use of data. Specific enactments of this district condition were cited by 18 respondents as a positive influence on their efficacy, while five respondents identified them as negative. Specific enactments considered to have a positive influence on efficacy were: district provision of data useful to schools in planning for PD, involvement of schools in decision making related to the data, engagement of an external person to conduct a curriculum audit which encouraged more alignment within the district, and detailed guidance and support by the district for schools trying to interpret and use their data.

Five respondents referred to negative influences on their sense of efficacy. One of these principals pointed to his/her district requiring more information about student achievement results than he/she had access to or could collect. Another principal was unnerved by having sole responsibility for explaining state requirements to students, parents and teachers; this meant also being the brunt of the resistance and negative feelings people had about state requirements over which the principal had no control. Our evidence, in sum, indicates that principals' sense of efficacy is positively influenced by this condition when its enactment consists of districts:

- Insisting on data-based decision making in schools. (12+, 5-)

  But the good news about all of that [district direction] is that we make very data-driven decisions now. We do a lot of assessments. Those are both local assessments and state assessments. We use that information obviously to plan for our children.

- Using data to determine the goals for principal and teacher professional development. (6+)

  One of them is the data part and the district calls it data sources. Everybody has a data source. Then with the data source … each teacher created a goal for his- or herself in professional development.

- Providing schools with much of the data they need to exercise data-based decision making. (4+)

  [The district provides] an amazing amount of data. And the people to help us interpret that data.

- Assisting schools in the interpretation and use of data for decision making. (4+)

  We have had in the past extensive training from our central office on understanding and utilizing test data.

- Creating structures which foster the sharing of information across schools and between schools and the district. (3+)

  As an entire district we have our hand on every kid's test data. I don't care if it's elementary or high school. We have weekly administrative meetings and you know those issues will come up and communication is really strong.

7. Targeted and phased focus for improvement. District enactments of this condition attracted positive responses from 20 school leaders and a negative response from one. In particular leaders believed their efficacy was influenced positively, for example, by: district requirements leading to a better process of goal setting, establishment by the district of detailed improvement plans, district requiring school improvement plans with the involvement of people in the community, and a clear articulation of expectations for student outcomes derived from state policy.

Also having a positive influence on leader efficacy were such enactments as district support for collaboration between high schools and middle schools, and selecting some reading and writing programs along with support for teachers in learning how to use these programs. Overall, a significant level of prescription by the district about the nature of school improvement

plans and the process for creating those plans seemed to be associated in principals' minds with positive feelings of efficacy.

In sum, leader efficacy is associated with this district condition when its enactment includes:

- Requiring the development of improvement plans in all schools (either district or school developed). (9+)

  The school improvement plan is a requirement that we all have to do which lays out staff development and the plan for school improvement.

- Clear school improvement goals aligned with state and district standards. (7+)

  But …[the school improvement plan] is campus-based. … We have to align it with the district improvement plan.

- School improvement plans aligned with district improvement plans. (7+, 1-)

  The district and the school board have sent down a five-year goal for us. It's to improve academic achievement for each and every child, especially in the area of literacy and math.

- In cases of school-developed improvement plans, district provision of a procedure for the development of the plan. (6+)

  We're in a five-year cycle. We involve teachers, administrators, business people, parents, community people, and we set forth a plan of how we can improve our schools. The process begins with parent surveys.

*8. New approaches to board-district and district-school relations***.** Enactments of this condition attracted positive comments from sixteen principals and negative comments from four. A large proportion of the positive enactments of this condition entailed district sharing of key

decisions with school administrative staff and was viewed as having a positive influence on leader efficacy when it included district staff: listening to and staying in touch with schools and school personnel, involving schools in the field testing of programs and in the writing of school plans, and budgeting for the implementation of those plans. A number of principals pointed to the small size of their district as an important contributor to positive district-school relations. They noted the increased chance of district staff being in touch with the challenges they were facing. Principals' sense of efficacy is undermined when districts neglect to provide adequate information for schools and parents about expectations from the state level. Principals are left in the difficult of position of having to explain requirements over which they have no control.

Almost all comments from principals were about district-school relations. Not surprisingly, principals had little to say about board-district relations and the approaches taken by their districts to such relations.

To have a positive influence on school leader efficacy, in sum, new approaches to board-school and board-district relations need to feature:

- Encouragement for communication across schools by principals and provision of opportunities for this to occur. (10+, 1-)

  Monthly meetings really looking at our school improvement plan and having the opportunity to visit with other schools and talk with them, to share ideas and find out what's worked in one school that we might be able to look at as a possible intervention.

- Flexibility for schools in the implementation of district initiatives. (9+, 4-)

  I have a lot of autonomy as far as what kind of staff development I do for my own teachers on my campus … and I make a lot of decisions with my team.

- District staff keeping themselves well informed about school programs, priorities, initiatives and programs. (6+, 1-)

  [The district listened] … to the concerns of the teams. … We felt that there was a need to kind of look at some parts of the instructional parts of things. … So they came out and helped make that happen.

- Significant opportunities for principals and teachers to be involved in decisions at the district level. (4+)

  That is certainly a team that works at the district level and then that framework of curriculum comes back to our level and then our individual teams and departments work on it has well.

9. District policy governing school choice. The second district condition bearing on principals' sense of efficacy not included in Anderson's list of characteristic of effective school districts was *District policies governing school choice*. Eight respondents identified situations where a change in district policies had affected their efficacy negatively. The evidence illustrates how significant an impact some choice policies can have on the challenges facing schools, and on the confidence of principals and their staffs in being able to meet those challenges. Creating an open choice policy for schools, one principal recounted, meant that his school serving a relatively stable group of local students quite well, by all accounts, suddenly found itself serving students from a radius of about 14 miles. Another principal described how his school had changed "overnight" also from serving a fairly stable student population to a highly diverse group of students from all over the district, including members of over 30 gangs.

- District helps schools respond to rapid and dramatic changes in curriculum and student population (8-)

> *The classic example is changing our reading curriculum. We started it in November. They were well into the curriculum that was known to us and we had been using for seven, eight years. And now, in November you're starting day one with a new curriculum that should have been started in September.*

Discussion and Conclusion

Part of a multi-year multi-method research project, the focus for this analysis grew directly out quantitative evidence demonstrating that school leader efficacy had important consequences for schools and students and that such efficacy was significantly influenced by district conditions (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006). The purpose of this study was to understand in more detail, using qualitative data, the influence of district conditions on school leader efficacy. Transcribed interviews with 31 principals provided evidence for this study.

Three limitations of the study impose notable constraints on the claims we are able to justify. The first is a limitation on the external validity of our results. While sampling procedures in our larger project (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson & Wahlstrom, 2004) were designed to reflect school, state and district populations across the United States, the sample of principals included in this study cannot be considered representative of the principal population. Furthermore, this group of principals worked in elementary, middle and secondary schools, including only a relatively small number of principals from each level. Although the meager evidence relevant to such an hypothesis does not suggest it (e.g., Roberts, 1997; Dimmock & Hattie, 1996), there is a possibility that the same district conditions influence somewhat differently the efficacy of principals at each school level. In addition, we did not collect the range of demographic data about each principal respondent that would be required to compare our sample with the population of principals in the country, as a partial test of their representativeness.

The stimuli used to elicit interview responses are a second constraint on claims that can be justified by the study. The questions in our interview protocol were not specifically designed with leader efficacy in mind. This increased the amount of inference required in interpreting the data and prevented us from linking district conditions as closely as we would have liked to the proximal sources of efficacy identified in Bandura's (e.g., 1986) formulation. A third constraint, flowing directly from the second, was our inability to distinguish between district conditions influencing leader self-efficacy and conditions influencing leader collective efficacy. This constraint is important because the evidence from our prior principal survey study (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2006) indicated that collective leader efficacy had more significant positive consequences for schools and students than individual efficacy.

With these limitations in mind, our analysis indicates, in sum, that all of the conditions which Anderson's (2006) review associated with effective districts - and two more *(District personnel policies,* and *District school choice policies)* - had some influence on feelings of efficacy by principals. It is important to note that these conditions may be enacted differently and have different effects on school leader efficacy from quite positive to very negative. Several of these conditions are clearly associated with leader efficacy by many more people than are others: *District-wide focus on student achievement and instruction; District-sponsored professional development for teachers; Investment in both school and district-level instructional leadership; District personnel policies; and Emphasis on teamwork and professional community*. The contribution to efficacy of a district-wide focus on student achievement reflects earlier evidence that a "shared sense of mission broadens interaction opportunities for subordinates and superordinate actors, minimizing conflict over divergent individual interests or disagreements in

priority…" (Fuller, Wood, Rapoport & Dornbusch, 1982). District sponsorship of professional development for both school leaders and teachers reflects the primacy, as a proximal source of efficacy in Bandura's framework, of mastery experiences. The contribution to school leader efficacy of more collaborative district-school relationships reflects evidence reported by Chen and Bliese (2002) who interpreted their data to suggest that self and collective efficacy evolve through somewhat different mechanisms. Specifically they found that "upper level leadership climate", a variable we believe to be very similar to our district-school relationships, was a direct predictor of collective leader efficacy.

Although we distinguish among seven conditions after Anderson, the enactment of many of these conditions with positive influences on efficacy seemed to turn on goal-focused professional development; this is central to the enactment of both district-sponsored teacher development and district investment in instructional leadership. If there is one broad set of initiatives that districts can undertake to improve the efficacy of principals, it would seem to be providing flexible, varied, meaningful and just-in-time professional development for both school administrators and their staffs. Consistent with recent evidence from Goldring and her colleagues (2006), this is not a matter of "the more the better", however. Our data make clear that excessive amounts of professional development can be just as much a detriment to the work of school leaders as too little professional development. This key variable is one that deserves considerable attention by district administrators in almost all their efforts.

In sum, our results suggest that districts contribute most to school leaders' sense of efficacy by: ensuring that teachers and administrators have access to appropriate amounts of meaningful professional development aimed at expanding the capacities needed to achieve

shared purposes, unambiguously awarding priority to the improvement of student achievement and instruction, ensuring that personnel policies support the selection and maintenance of the best people for each school, and emphasizing team work and professional community.

The practical implications of our findings seem quite straightforward assuming, of course, that subsequent evidence continues to support the prominence of school leader efficacy as a key link in the chain joining successful district leadership with student learning. Assuming that it does, creating the most positive enactments of those conditions associated with district effectiveness should be considered well worth the attention of district leaders. It seems likely that such attention would produce higher levels of principal efficacy, as well as having other positive consequences on districts, schools, and students.

Our study also points to several key recommendations for subsequent research aimed at further understanding what it is about districts that influences school leader efficacy. First, such research should encompass a broad array of non-district conditions potentially influencing leader efficacy, in contrast to the exclusively district sources explored in this study. These non-school conditions may include, for example, leaders' professional background and leaders' degree of success in previous leadership positions. What is it, this research should ask, besides district conditions that shapes leaders' job efficacy? How much of the variance in leader efficacy is explained by district conditions as compared with other efficacy-influencing variables? Does the relative explanatory power of district conditions justify a strategic focus on these conditions by district administrators?

Second, the analysis presented in this study focused on district conditions affecting principals' sense of personal efficacy, though we distinguished personal from collective efficacy

in introductory discussion of prior research and theory. We have already acknowledged this as a limitation, and believe that further investigation into the nature, influences, and consequences of school leaders' sense of collective efficacy provides another potentially productive focus for continuing research. In this regard, we note that there is limited evidence and discussion about this phenomenon that focuses on principals' sense of collective efficacy in concert with other principals within a particular school district setting. We are mindful, however, that in many schools and school districts (including some of those that we are studying) deliberate efforts are being made to develop new school-level leadership roles and relationships, typically associated with the development of professional learning communities and more distributed forms and patterns of leadership for learning (Leithwood et al., 2007; DuFour, Eaker & DuFour, 2005). We would argue that future research on principals' collective efficacy might take into account collective efficacy at both school and district levels.

A third focus for future research emerging from our study concerns the relationship between district conditions and those direct or proximal sources of efficacy identified in the larger efficacy literature (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal). Theoretically, the influence of district conditions on leader efficacy is mediated by these proximal sources of efficacy. The current study did not inquire directly about these relationships, although many plausible inferences are suggested by our data. For example, mastery experiences would seem to be mediated by district conditions such as *Investment in both school- and district level instructional leadership,* where the district provides a range of professional development opportunities to help build the instructional leadership capacities of principals. A principals' retreat would contribute to mastery experiences through opportunities to

develop leadership skills in the company of district-level role models and the principal peer group. As one principal explained:

> *We are going to do a retreat with B [the superintendent]. B is going to take all the principals … and we go spend the night. We go out to eat and we have an in-service. Last year … it was to get to know each other. And what are our leadership styles and strengths? What would we do in situations? It was a very interesting retreat. I take those ideas and transfer it to my staff.*

We are mindful, of course, that the mere provision of professional development experiences does not guarantee the quality of those experiences in terms of professional knowledge and skills, hence the importance in future research to assess both the form and impact of those experiences.

Our data also suggests that vicarious efficacy experiences might well be influenced by district conditions such as *District-wide use of data,* where the district creates structures which foster the sharing of information across schools and between schools and the district. District leaders can model collaborative, data-based, decision-making by working with principal groups and then school leaders can use the same strategies with their teachers. This influence is reflected in the comments by another of our respondents:

> *We were invited to come with all of our data to the district office and meet with … [the district leaders] and really look at our data, try to analyze our data, and get input and have the opportunity to ask questions of them. I think their goal is to model for us what they'd like to have us do in our buildings. And I think we all have adopted that.*

Many of our district conditions seem to serve as a form of verbal persuasion including: *Investment in both school- and district level professional development, Emphasis on team work and professional community,* and *New approaches to relationships among district, board, union,*

and school. These district conditions often involve meetings among district and school leaders where at least some of the communication amounts to feedback about principals' performance. The most striking example of this emerged from district selection processes. One principal recounted her experience of being selected to lead a particularly challenging school:

> *The superintendent told me to go fix it! I think it was because I have had a variety of experiences in this district. I had taken on some challenges within the district. Being able to be successful in doing those things.*

Understanding these distal - proximal (or indirect – direct) relationships better seems central to understanding and improving the impact of district conditions on leader efficacy. For example, the theoretical literature suggests that mastery experiences are the most powerful direct sources of increased efficacy. Which district conditions provide such experiences? As these implications for research begin to suggest, we have much to learn about how leader efficacy develops and what district leaders can do to foster the development of this critical resource.

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