**A Study of Instructional Leadership Teams
in Three San Francisco High School**

Research Brief – November 2018

OVERVIEW: The Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE) partnered with the San Francisco Unified School District (SFUSD) High School Directors of Principal Leadership & Support to grow instructional leadership broadly in schools by providing direct support to principals and their Instructional Leadership Teams (ILTs) -- teams of administrators and teachers working together to improve instruction and student learning schoolwide. According to research in other settings, ILTs can empower teachers as decision-makers and therefore enhance teacher willingness to implement instructional reforms, improve instructional practice, and ultimately, raise student achievement.[1] The study in SFUSD builds on prior research and explores two research questions:

- To what extent does the work of administrators and teachers in instructional leadership teams (ILTs) seem consistent with the concept of shared instructional leadership?
- What conditions support or constrain shared instructional leadership?

CONTEXT OF STUDY: The three high schools that participated in the study had a history of practices and structures supporting instructional leadership already in place, and they also experience a set of conditions which supported their work prior to the start of this study. Also, the three high schools:

- Receive support from central office administrators in realizing the district's vision for administrator-teacher collaboration around instructional improvement;
- Participated in the ILT network, a district designed network of eight high schools that engaged in sustained professional development to support their work as teams
- Had principals that received weekly or bi-weekly coaching from central office administrators including direct support in planning and leading ILT meetings.

FINDINGS:

- **Teachers and administrators on ILTs in these three high school share a common definition of instructional leadership** as a combination of <u>sharing information</u>, <u>consulting on administrators' proposals</u>, and <u>joint decision-making</u>.

- **Central office leaders reinforced these notions during professional learning in the ILT network** when they described what ILTs should focus on and how they could work together through direct coaching of principals.
    - The district's requirement to establish ILTs created both a new structure and new roles for teachers as leaders, and this new structure gave teachers on the team authority to influence significant instructional decisions and to confront administrators when instructional decisions were made without consulting members of the ILT.

- **Collaboration among principals and teachers in these ILTs is more likely to involve information sharing and consultation than shared decision-making or leading instructional improvement**.

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[1] Research incudes: Johnson S. M., Reinhorn, S. K., Charner-Laird, M., Kraft, M. A., Ng, M., & Papay, J. P. (2014). Ready to lead, but how? Teachers' experiences in high-poverty urban schools. *Teachers College Record*, *116*(1), 1-50.; Ingersoll, R., Sirinides, P., & Dougherty, P. (2017). *School Leadership, Teachers' Roles in School Decisionmaking, and Student Achievement*. Working Paper (#WP 2017–2).

- **In most cases, principals seemed to retain individual authority over instructional decisions addressed in the ILT**.
  - Teachers on ILTs primarily responded to principals' ideas rather than engaging more actively as partners in problem-solving

- **Teachers' involvement in decision-making was infrequent, limited by administrators' control of the agenda and team processes, and restricted in scope**.

- **Teachers are ready to take on instructional leadership roles and, yet, administrators acted as gatekeepers to opportunities for teacher leadership.**
  - For example, teachers in one school pressed administrators to co-construct the agenda for ILT meetings during their time together with the goal of increasing teacher voice.

- **Teachers described little commitment to implementing decision they view as administrator driven or "top down."**
  - *Administrators limited their own authority on the ILT by tightly controlling teachers' authority for decision-making, which was met with teachers' resistance to implementing administrator driven decisions*. (p. 26).

<u>WHAT CAN SFUSD DO WITH THESE FINDINGS</u>:

Central leaders could continue to build capacity of principals with explicit training and coaching in collaborative approaches to instructional leadership: School administrators may be reluctant to engage in more collaborative approaches to instructional leadership if they don't have the skills, knowledge and confidence to implement those collaboration strategies, or feel safe learning these new strategies. Administrators may benefit from direct support and modeling from central office administrators on specific meeting processes and routines they can use to authorize teachers more fully as problem solvers and decision-makers. Also, it might make the learning less threatening if all high school principals were involved, rather than just a subset of principals in Tier II and Tier III schools.

The district and school leaders could provide teachers with formal roles in ILTs, and potentially provide stipends and course release time to reinforce the importance of those roles. By making the teacher role in ILTs more formal through a stipend or course release, this could lend greater authority to the teachers' work as leaders and empower them to press administrators for greater involvement in the decision-making process.

ILT members could set goals for their process of working together and could survey their members' to monitor their progress towards those goals. This study was conducted using a methodology that allowed the central and site leaders to examine evidence collected by a research partner related to their ILT. If the central and site leaders decided to improve their ILT work, they could collect more limited, but similar types of data related to the goals they set out for improving their ILTs to help them monitor their progress towards those goals.