

Building Leadership Capacity: Tiered Leadership Development

A ‘Story’ of Building Leadership Capacity

The Clark County School District in Las Vegas, Nevada covered a geographic area of approximately 8000 square miles and served 285,000 students by 2006. An average of nine schools were built and 700 to 2600 new teachers hired each year between 1992 and 2006 as the district grew from the fifteenth to the fifth largest district in the nation. The district had a high number of English language learners, and that number grew each year. As in many large urban districts with racially, economically, and culturally diverse populations, the district was dedicated to improving student achievement and decreasing the achievement gap.

District efforts to enhance mathematics and science teaching and learning for all K-5 students began in the late 1980s. These efforts were expanded with National Science Foundation funding beginning in 1992 for a leadership development project, and continued from 1995-2005 with Local Systemic Change (LSC) initiatives. The LSC Leadership Team implemented a collaborative professional development program – aimed at building a professional learning community among teachers, grounded in inquiry, and connected to classroom practices.

It was apparent to the LSC Leadership Team and administrators that additional leaders were needed at every level of the district to make the vision of high-quality mathematics and science instruction for all students a reality. The Tiered Leadership development model was designed to involve additional teachers in LSC professional development to bring the district vision to fruition.

Tiered Leadership Development

What was it? Who participated? The term tiered leadership was used to describe this model because people with a range of experience and knowledge participated and contributed to the learning of the whole group. Together they engaged in professional development over time to enhance their knowledge and reshape classroom practices using standards-based curriculum, pedagogy and assessment. Experienced leaders, consultants, project leaders and teacher leaders supported teachers as they assumed leadership roles. Everyone was expected to be both a teacher and a learner during this process. For example, groups included experienced and new teachers, teacher leaders, principals and project consultants.

What lessons learned and expectations shaped the design? Over time we learned that all teachers have the potential to learn, lead and change, but that they lead in different ways and change at different rates. Some led by opening their doors and inviting colleagues to observe their classroom lessons, while some led by sharing success stories with colleagues and parents. Selected teacher leaders were hired as Teachers on Special

Assignment, worked full time with classroom teachers, while others became school, region or district workshop leaders providing workshops or study groups on the area of study in which they participated. Still others became principals or took school, region or district curriculum positions. These findings underpinned the project's continuing effort to improve mathematics and science teaching and learning by building leadership capacity.

High expectations were set for session participation. Teachers were expected to implement ideas, strategies and materials in their classrooms, and collect and share their findings with colleagues at their schools and during future workshop sessions. Principals were expected to provide support and collaborate with teachers to effectively implement new instructional approaches and materials.

Who were the teacher leaders? Where did they come from? Teacher leaders were recruited in multiple ways when it became evident that leaders were needed at every level of the work to improve teaching and learning in our large and growing district. Early in the project, teacher leaders emerged during professional development sessions. They were intellectually curious, reflective, focused on children and sought leadership roles. As the project matured, LSC leaders and principals collaborated to identify teachers who could work with others and had the potential to develop as school leaders.

Design Principles of the Tiered Leadership Development Model

Target an area of study. Over the life of the project, many areas of study were targeted. When a new area of study was identified, a recognized expert on that area was hired to facilitate leadership development sessions. Experts, hired as consultants, worked with the LSC project continuously for two to seven years.

Consultants collaborated with a member of the LSC Leadership Team as sessions were planned and implemented. This LSC leader was expected to attend all sessions as an active learner and eventually assume responsibility for the new project component. Consultants brought a breadth and depth of knowledge and experience to the work. This benefited the LSC Leadership Team, participants who became future leaders, and participating teachers. Over time, the Project Leader for each area of study developed expertise and facilitated leadership development sessions.

Some consultants designed sessions around existing professional development curriculum such as Mathematics Assessment Resource Service (MARS) and Developing Mathematical Ideas (DMI). Other project consultants focused on mathematics or science content, how children learn, curriculum units and connections to pedagogy and instructional practice. Both approaches enriched teacher leaders' understanding in one or more area(s) of study.

Link professional development to what is going on in the classroom. A centerpiece of professional development was to engage teachers and LSC Leaders in inquiry connected to their practice. Session activities typically engaged teachers in issues of student thinking, sense making and learning, and instructional practices that could shed new insights about what students were coming to understand. Teachers left sessions knowing how to use high-quality activities and gather richer information about student thinking and reasoning. At subsequent sessions, teachers discussed, analyzed and reflected on their classroom experiences, and then considered the implications for student learning and their own teaching. This professional development format helped all participants enhance their own classroom practices.

Involve, empower, and support teacher leaders. At another level, the design of professional development enhanced the capacity of district leadership and the emerging cadre of teacher leaders to extend the reach of professional development to increasing numbers of classroom teachers. Leaders experienced the sessions as learners, joined the planning process with responsibilities to facilitate sessions for colleagues, and then debriefed with the LSC Leader. In some cases, planning included custom-tailoring facilitator guides to fit the local circumstances. In other situations, it meant developing facilitator guides as part of the leadership sessions. The LSC Leader for the area of study mentored teacher leaders as they learned in workshop settings or classroom-based sessions to effectively use the resources and strategies that the outside consultant had modeled. Involvement and support at this level empowered teachers as learners and leaders.

Stages of Leadership Development

Four stages, of flexible duration and format, evolved while building the capacity of local teachers to facilitate professional development for their colleagues. One stage phased into another stage as readiness to lead was evident; not every stage was utilized in every area of study. Duration and format varied based on the entry-level knowledge and experience that the LSC Leader and future teacher leaders brought to the area of study in relation to knowledge and skill session leaders would require.

- Stage One: Consultant-Facilitated Professional Development. The LSC principal investigator and the LSC Leader for the area of study interacted and planned with the project consultant as the consultants facilitated professional development sessions.
- Stage Two: LSC Leader-Facilitated Professional Development. The LSC Leader facilitated sessions with consultant support as needed. Experienced teacher leaders planned with the LSC Leader, and sometimes facilitated small group sessions.
- Stage Three: LSC Leader- Teacher Leader-Facilitated Professional Development.

The LSC Leader and Teacher Leaders teamed to plan and facilitate sessions for new groups of teachers; the consultant was no longer actively involved.

- Stage Four: Teacher Leader-Facilitated Professional Development. The cadre of Teacher Leaders led the professional development with support from the LSC Leader. In some areas of study, the consultant returned over time to continue moving leaders toward deeper levels of expertise. In other areas of study, teacher leaders and the LSC Leader participated in national leadership workshops offered outside the district by project consultants to continue learning and to increase the number of teacher leaders. The LSC Leader and sometimes teacher leaders, continued online communication with project consultants.

Building Leadership Capacity – An Example

The MARS Assessment component for grades 3-5 illustrates how the project utilized external experts as consultants to build leadership capacity in order to scale up professional development for all teachers. MARS consultants worked within the district overtime to ensure the depth of knowledge of new leaders was sufficient to enable leaders to provide high-quality second and third generation professional development. The Balanced Assessment Tiered Leadership development began early in 1999 and the Analyzing Student Responses leadership group began MARS sessions during the 2001/02 school year.

MARS Balanced Assessment Tiered Leadership Model. In the late 1990s, principals and teachers requested assessment aligned with standards-based curriculum that provided information about student conceptual understanding and mathematical reasoning. Since this meant additional testing, the LSC project team took a two-pronged approach: 1) to gain the support of all principals for additional testing; and 2) to prepare teachers and students for high-quality performance tasks that monitor student progress toward the broader learning goals of the curriculum.

During a series of meetings, the LSC Leadership Team and principals met to explore options and establish common goals. They then met with MARS consultants from Balanced Assessment (BA) and the Mathematics Assessment Resource Service (MARS). Based on this meeting, principals and LSC leaders decided to implement MARS assessment with grades 3-5. The MARS team provided two kinds of tools, professional development and custom-tailored assessments.

LSC leaders and principals teamed to select teachers to participate in the tiered leadership process for the MARS Balanced Assessment component. Teachers from grades three through five at each participating school were selected, those who worked well with colleagues and had the potential to develop as leaders in their buildings. During principal meetings, roles for School Team Leaders, principals and the LSC Leader for the MARS

assessment project were clearly defined and then given to all teachers at each MARS school. School Team Leaders, for example, knew they would eventually be responsible for supporting colleagues and teachers new to the building as they implemented MARS assessments.

During MARS professional development with project consultants, participants solved the MARS assessment tasks, identified the core mathematics content within the tasks, and learned to carefully examine student work for evidence of mathematical understanding. Within this process, they learned how to use rich assessment tasks in classrooms, what they could learn about student reasoning and understanding from students' engagement with the tasks, and how they could use that information to help them make ongoing instructional decisions. Teachers then tried Balanced Assessment tasks with their own students and brought samples of student work to subsequent workshops for analysis, discussion and reflection.

As the MARS professional development is described below, the nature of support the external consultant provided in the Tiered Leadership Model is evident as is the support and empowerment of local leaders. The Balanced Assessment model varies from the Analyzing Student Response model, demonstrating the flexibility of duration and format of the stages within the model and how it was adapted based on the nature of the content and expertise of participants.

Cohort One. The first cohort of school teams participated in the MARS Balanced Assessment professional development beginning in February 1999. MARS consultants facilitated this series of sessions (48-contact hours). The LSC Leader shadowed the MARS consultants, with the understanding that she would assume leadership of the MARS assessment component as it was expanded and the consultant was no longer involved with on-going professional development. The LSC Leader identified six teachers from cohort one school teams to become part of the MARS District Leadership Team. This team, six school leaders and the LSC Leader, would ultimately provide MARS professional development for three additional cohorts of school teams within the LSC project and district. They continued to support schools implementing MARS assessment.

The six teachers selected for the district team displayed strong mathematics content knowledge, exhibited potential for leadership within the project and engaged in reflective practice, but they had little experience as workshop leaders. As part of the MARS District Leadership Team they committed to a two-year leadership process beginning with additional professional development with the MARS staff at Michigan State University. They continued leadership development as the LSC Leader mentored them and by participating in the MARS sessions.

During the second year of implementation, these five leaders observed and reflected on

session content and facilitation strategies used by project consultants. In debriefing sessions with the LSC Leader, they reflected on strategies used and began to think about tailoring the professional development model to the needs of the LSC and MARS School Team leaders.

Cohort Two. The LSC Leader assumed leadership of MARS professional development sessions as the second cohort of school teams began MARS professional development in March 2000. She continued to mentor the MARS District Leaders by teaming with them to adapt previously scripted MARS Leadership Guides to meet local needs. In the process they interacted with MARS consultants through phone conferences and email. The MARS District Leaders brought classroom experience with the MARS assessment and their enthusiasm for developing their leadership capacity to team meetings. District MARS Leaders each began to facilitate session components and debrief with the LSC Leader after each session. The MARS consultants had become advisors to project leaders.

Cohorts Three and Four. Over the two-year period, the MARS District Leadership Team developed their assessment expertise. The LSC Leader organized planning sessions, supported and mentored the five leaders as they increasingly assumed responsibility for the professional development sessions for Cohorts three and four. Over time the MARS District Leaders took the prominent role in the facilitation of the MARS professional development sessions, which included facilitation of a planning day after each school team cohort completed the MARS professional development course. These sessions focused on how to provide a meaningful experience for colleagues at the school level, how to bring teachers new to the building each year into the process, and how to implement MARS assessments and use data to shape instruction. The LSC Leader became a reflective observer for the team, and then as needed, their advisor.

Annually, teachers were added to the MARS Leadership Team to expand the core group of leaders to sustain and grow the MARS grade 3-5 assessment component within the district. The LSC Leader mentored new leaders as they participated in the MARS Leadership Institutes at Michigan State and progressively assumed responsibility for MARS professional development.

The Tiered Leadership Model was illustrated on the chart. Pathways followed the transition of leadership from the consultant to the LSC Leader to teacher leaders. It showed how the LSC Leader led the Balanced Assessment sessions during stage two while mentoring the MARS District Leaders. It also showed how the MARS District Leaders gradually assumed full leadership as they worked with cohorts three and four. The role of future leaders as learners was evident, beginning in stage one as members of their school team. The Analyzing Student Response component, when compared to the Balanced Assessment component, illustrated how Tiered Leadership Model could be adapted based on the nature of the area of study and expertise of future leaders.

Mathematics Assessment Resource Service (MARS) Leadership MODEL: TIERED LEADERSHIP

Purpose

Build leadership capacity to facilitate 3-5 assessment component
Advance teacher and student learning

Need

Align assessment and standards-based instruction
Develop site-based professional development

Getting It Going

Principals, project staff, consultants develop roles for project participation
Principals, project staff identify school and district leaders
Project staff and consultants plan workshops

Tier of Learners

Classroom Teachers	School Administrators
3-5 teacher leaders	Project staff
Consultant	

Learning Together

Share knowledge, experience, and questions
Interact with each other through varying perspectives
Learn from and with each other

Outcomes

Capacity to provide MARS PD district wide
Competent and confident MARS workshop leaders
School specific implementation plans

		Stage One	Stage Two	Stage Three	Stage Four
MARS Balanced Assessment	<i>PD Session Leaders</i>	CONSULTANTS (LSC Leader)	LSC LEADER (Teacher Leaders)	TEACHER LEADERS (LSC Leader)	TEACHER LEADERS
	<i>Participants</i>	Site Administrators School Teams LSC Leader	School Teams Teacher Leaders	Classroom Teachers	Classroom Teachers
MARS Analyzing Student Responses	<i>PD Session Leaders</i>	CONSULTANT	CONSULTANT (LSC Leader)	LSC LEADER	LSC LEADER (Teacher Leaders)
	<i>Participants</i>	Teacher Leaders School Teams LSC Leader	Teacher Leaders School Teams	Teacher Leaders Classroom Teachers	Classroom Teachers

MARS Analyzing Student Responses Tiered Leadership Model. During the first two years of the MARS Balanced Assessment component, teachers were learning to implement Balanced Assessment mathematical tasks with students. They also applied informal scoring rubrics to student work during the professional development process.

During the 2001/02 school-year, the LSC began a second tiered leadership model, MARS Analyzing Student Responses, to build leadership capacity required to formally score MARS assessment for annual tests to establish data sets for a student achievement study. MARS staff custom-tailored the annual tests, aligned with local standards, to monitor student achievement.

As illustrated in the chart above, the Consultant and LSC Leader provided leadership throughout the first two stages of leadership development. The LSC Leader, MARS District Team Leaders and Teachers Leaders working with MARS consultants learned to carefully examine student work on the tests, interpret and apply scoring rubrics, and lead scoring sessions for colleagues. In Stage Three, the LSC Leader replaced the Consultant as the lead facilitator of the Analyzing Student Responses sessions. Teacher Leaders and classroom teachers attended these sessions together as learners. Unlike the MARS Balanced Assessment leadership model described previously, the LSC Leader maintained a prominent role by continuing to facilitate the Analyzing Student Responses sessions throughout Stage Four, with the support of the Teacher Leaders.

In both components, MARS Balanced Assessment and MARS Analyzing Student Responses, the Tiered Leadership model was applied to build leadership capacity. Through the Tiered Leadership model, all participants including the consultants, Teachers Leaders, the LSC Leader and principals contributed to the whole from their perspective as they engaged in collaborative professional development aimed at building leadership capacity.

Epilogue

After the Local Systemic Change Initiative ended, teachers and principals involved with the MARS tiered leadership project continued to influence and shape mathematics teaching in their schools and throughout the district. The majority of the professional development in mathematics across the district shifted to the individual school site.

The tiered leadership model was instrumental in building leadership capacity among teachers and administrators. These leaders continued efforts to improve teaching and learning to achieve the vision of high quality mathematics instruction for all students.