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CRC

The Learning Partnership Documentation

Final Report

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February 2008
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Acknowledgements

Research for The Learning Partnership Documentation (TLP) was conducted by the Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) in the Stanford University School of Education. The CRC was founded in 1987 and is co-directed by Milbrey W. McLaughlin and Joan E. Talbert. The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation funded the TLP Documentation. Opinions expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the Foundation.

We are grateful to TLP’s Advisory Group members for providing feedback on an earlier version of this report. We thank Tom Corcoran and his colleagues at the Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) and Warren Simmons and colleagues of the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) for their collegial support of our documentation effort. We are especially grateful to the district and school administrators, staffs, and teachers of the Minneapolis Public School System for generously contributing time and thought to our surveys and interviews over the three years of this research.
Summary

In 2002 the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched a national initiative to improve education for urban youth through a strategy of district system reform. *The Learning Partnership (TLP)* pursued a mission to develop district learning organizations through a collaborative partnership between the Foundation’s national intermediary organizations and selected district partners. Its focus on district system reform, its conception of a high-performing district, and its principles for partnering with districts to achieve system change were grounded in a growing body of evidence concerning effective strategies for educational improvement.

The initiative involved three organizations as national intermediaries: the Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) of University of Pennsylvania and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) of Brown University served successively as TLP “capacity builders;” Stanford University’s Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) was “documenter.” A national advisory group provided both technical support and guidance.

*TLP* intended to partner with 3-4 mid-sized urban districts over a course of 8-10 years in order to support each district’s reform efforts and to test and refine a theory of systemic educational change through these local efforts. The time frame envisioned for district partnerships was based on evidence that education reform takes 3-5 years to take hold and result in improved student outcomes and the assumption that additional time is needed to ensure sustainability of organizational and instructional improvements. With counsel from its advisors during fall 2002, the MacArthur Foundation selected Baltimore Public Schools (BPS) and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) as first partners. Conditions in these districts suggested that they were ready to benefit from the partnership model, and the districts’ contrasting contexts were potentially fruitful for drawing early lessons from the reform work. The districts would benefit from partnering work with TLP’s capacity-building organizations and would receive approximately $2 million annually in support of the co-designed system reform work.

The partnership with Baltimore was put on hold when its superintendent left the district during the planning year. The partnership in Minneapolis was active as designed for nearly three years through the spring of 2005 and for an additional two years without support from an external intermediary organization. Sustained funding to Minneapolis enabled the district to continue its development of high quality professional development in literacy and mathematics that was launched through the TLP initiative.

The Minneapolis partnership made headway on several important outcomes sought by the initiative:
- The district’s professional development system was redesigned to offer higher-quality learning opportunities in mathematics and literacy instruction for teachers;
• Teacher leadership for instructional improvement in these areas developed within the central office and in schools through the partnership and the expert consultants it brokered;
• Instructional coherence in math and literacy increased in the district as teachers and principals developed a common knowledge base and focus for their improvement efforts.

The partnership struggled because of conditions that were unanticipated and uncontrollable and because of the weak knowledge base for building the sort of partnership that TLP envisioned:
• Leadership turnover on both sides challenged the partnership to continually build trust, shared understandings, and commitment to a reform agenda;
• TLP’s theory of action, which specified key elements of an effective district learning system, was developed by the external partner and was never communicated fully or owned by district administrators and leaders;
• TLP lacked policy and tools for negotiating partners’ roles and responsibilities and guiding this new form of partnering practice;
• The partners did not develop a system for evaluating their co-designed work and so lacked a vehicle for learning from and improving their efforts;
• Lacking a knowledge base to ground a theory of changing districts through a partnership, TLP was charting new territory and all parties in the initiative struggled over issues of strategic entry points, developmental process, and the external partners’ role.

In spite of and because of these struggles, TLP contributes lessons and hypotheses for practice and research regarding challenges and potentials for developing a district learning system through a foundation-funded partnership:
• Collaborative leadership and professional networks between system levels is key to instructional improvement; the “middle system” is a lynchpin for system-wide change;
• Unequal school capacity to benefit from district instructional improvement resources calls for differentiated supports that allocate intensive resources to low-capacity schools;
• Diverse external expertise is needed to build instructional reform capacity in a district, and roles shift as internal capacity develops;
• A partnership to lead district reform must establish normative agreements about authority relationships and continually navigate power dynamics entailed in a serious system reform effort;
• Documentation to inform district reform work must be grounded in system leaders’ commitments to tracking change on indicators of their progress.

This report elaborates the conceptual groundings for The Learning Partnership, the intended role of Documentation and our enactment of it; implementation experiences in Minneapolis, and lessons to be drawn from this short-lived experiment.
The Learning Partnership’s Conception

The Learning Partnership (TLP)’s theory of action for district system reform centered on a set of Elements that together describe district conditions for continually improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The theory also included a “co-design” principle for partnering between a district and an external organization to develop strategies and designs for system reform work. TLP set a timeframe of 8-10 years for the partnerships to ensure that significant and sustainable changes in district system conditions could be made. Documentation of the reform work and of its anticipated and unanticipated outcomes was integral to the initiative’s learning agenda.

TLP’s Elements. The set of Elements that formed TLP’s “theory of action” focused on three district conditions held to be essential for continuous improvement:
- collaborative leadership
- professional learning communities
- evidence-based practice at all levels of the system.

Other TLP Elements referred to district policies and conditions that leverage and support district change toward these practices:
- targeted professional development,
- incentives for learning and collaboration,
- reallocation of resources to support system learning,
- district focus and coherence around instructional improvement, and
- public engagement.

TLP’s theory argued that district-wide improvement of student achievement occurs when professional communities of practice use evidence to make decisions about how to improve their practice and that system change to support this vision is implemented through collaborative leadership and public support. In this view, conditions at multiple levels of a district system work together to achieve ongoing system change and improved student outcomes.

TLP’s co-design principle. TLP invested in a new conception for district reform partnerships that was grounded in evidence that district change is limited when an external organization brings in a model to be implemented or when it serves as technical assistant to a district’s reform agenda. The co-design approach to district partnering was intended to build district ownership and accountability for system reform work, to create dialogue between knowledge from research and from reform practice, and to result in plans and change strategies that would be more effective since they were grounded in distributed expertise.

Documentation

The initiative invested in documentation as a vehicle for testing TLP’s theory of action and developing knowledge about district reform, as well as providing ongoing feedback to local partners. Since the initiative’s conception was tested in just one district,
judgments about its wisdom and viability depend heavily upon the documentation and interpretation of implementation experiences in Minneapolis.

Data for *TLP*’s experience in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) come from observations of the partnership and its outcomes from Fall 2002 through Spring 2005. *Implementation and outcomes for TLP Elements* were documented at the central office level through observations and interviews focused on all facets of work co-designed by the partners and at the school level through two-year case studies of ten district schools that represented all grade levels and differed in baseline capacity. *Co-design processes* were documented through observations of planning work and repeated interviews with *TLP* capacity builders and district administrators, staff, and consultants involved in the reform work.

In developing this account of the initiative, the Documentation team was mindful of potential biases that could come from its inside role in *TLP*’s organizational infrastructure and in district partnering relationships. Identification with the initiative might result in an overly-positive view of its merits and accomplishments; on the other hand, up close experience with struggles of partnering with districts could result in exaggerated attention to disappointments on both sides. Documenters used several strategies to ensure balance in the observations and lessons drawn from *TLP*’s experience, including: use of qualitative and quantitative research standards for developing descriptive data, triangulating data to develop findings, and seeking review and interpretation of findings from district administrators and staff and from *TLP*’s capacity builders over the course of the initiative. In addition, Advisory Board members provided quality control through individual reviews and a full-day meeting to discuss a draft of this report. This account represents the Documentation team’s best efforts to achieve a thorough and balanced report on *The Learning Partnership*.

**TLP Implementation and Outcomes in Minneapolis**

The Minneapolis partnership launched its district reform work with a focus on targeted professional development (one of *TLP*’s Elements). The partners co-designed a new professional development system that targeted math and literacy instruction, involved a cadre of teacher leaders from schools in designing and conducting summer institutes, engaged teacher teams from all district schools in a week-long institute, and included follow-up sessions and on-site work that was designed to build communities of practice working to improve instruction.

The initiative fell short of its goals for the Minneapolis partnership in that the system reform work was circumscribed and, although successful in many ways for its targeted goals, failed to significantly redirect the district toward *TLP*’s vision of an effective district system. With a single district partner, it is possible only to focus on conditions in that particular district that mattered for the partnership’s success and to draw lessons from what went well and not so well. Therefore it is important to be clear about the special context conditions of *TLP*’s partnership with MPS.


District context challenges. Several context conditions limited the partners’ ability to co-design additional system reform efforts and presented significant challenges for reform. For one, leadership instability in the district and in TLP undermined trust and collaboration between the partners. Over the course, there were three different superintendents, which created uncertainty over decision authority in the central office. Further, the third superintendent lacked commitment to the partnering work, demoted or moved administrators and staff who had been involved in the professional development institutes, and undermined district morale. The Minneapolis partnership also suffered from a change in TLP’s capacity building organizations during the second year; partnering relationships, shared understandings, and trust had to be developed anew.

Other conditions that constrained progress toward TLP’s vision were facets of district structure and culture that proved highly resistant to change. A strong tradition of school autonomy made it difficult for the district to implement centralized instructional policies. The district’s system of special school programs, choice policy, and school partnerships with local business and philanthropic organizations posed special challenges to system coherence. The diversity of educational programs in the district systematically undermined instructional coherence and limited potential for system reform through central district policy and professional development. At the central office level, the organization was fragmented into the functional silos typical of large urban districts, but divisions among them were reinforced by philosophical disagreements about curriculum, instruction, and assessment; this made collaborative decision-making and action especially challenging.

The lack of a local intermediary organization to work with the district in implementing work co-designed with TLP partners turned out to be a significant liability and perhaps a fatal flaw in the partnership. This context condition placed enormous pressure on the national capacity building organization to provide technical support, and efforts to substitute other organizations from across the country was problematic when the partnership couldn’t be nurtured on a regular basis. The intensity of partnering work that seemed to be required in Minneapolis was one factor that caused the Foundation to back off from its plan to add other partners to the initiative.

Despite all these challenges, TLP helped to develop the district’s capacity for instructional improvement in math and literacy. Footprints of the partnership include TLP Elements beyond targeted professional development – especially growth in collaborative leadership between system levels and professional learning communities in schools.

District outcomes. TLP partners’ work on MPS professional development reform developed district professionals’ appetite and leadership for instructional improvement efforts; at the same time it had some unanticipated negative consequences that contribute lessons to the field. First, the co-designed summer institutes fostered an appetite for high quality learning opportunities among district teachers and administrators. After experiencing sustained, content-focused professional development with school grade-level teams, teachers came to expect this kind of district support for their learning. Institute participation nearly doubled in two years, with half of the teachers returning for a second year.
Second, district leadership at the middle level of the system developed through the institutes in ways that appeared to increase coherence between the central office and schools around content instruction. Teachers who were facilitators in the institutes became liaisons between their school community and the district’s curriculum and instruction staff during the school year. This enhanced vertical communication in the system helped to establish accountability and support for implementing district designs for instruction and teacher learning.

Third, instructional coherence in mathematics and literacy increased through the institutes, particularly in mathematics where teachers and principals developed stronger commitment and ability to implement the district’s elementary and middle school math programs. In literacy, the summer institutes spread ideas about student learning and strategies for reading instruction across district schools, building a common knowledge base that grounded the subsequent development of a district literacy framework.

An unanticipated consequence of the professional development reform was that some schools lacked the leadership and professional capacity needed to benefit from the institutes and its follow-up work. District schools that had weak principal leadership, poor coaching, and novice teacher communities were not able to take advantage of the rich learning opportunities that TLP afforded. Ironically, the reform may have deepened student achievement gaps in the district. The case of a “turnaround” school that we documented offers evidence of the kind and intensity of district support needed for qualitative changes in a school, including selection of a site administrator with strong interpersonal skills and connections to community resources, district administrator presence and support for change, fiscal resources to bring change agents into the school, and district validation of successful moves that create momentum for improvement. These kinds of system investments and incentives were essential to developing a weak school’s capacity to benefit from a reformed professional development system.

Despite the partners’ intention to lead system change on most TLP Elements through MPS professional development reform, other Elements were not systematically engaged through co-designed work and changes may not be sustainable. In effect, the partnership with Minneapolis did not provide a fair test of the initiative’s theory of action. Nevertheless, the case is useful in suggesting principles to guide similarly ambitious system reform initiatives in education.

Lessons for the Field: Implementing an ambitious district reform vision

TLP’s Elements put forth an evidence-based vision of effective district reform and defined critical foci for system reform. However, the Elements were not an effective organizing force for the district, nor did they constitute a theory of action for how a district can move effectively to achieve the vision. Lessons from the Minneapolis experience center on the question of how research-based knowledge of effective district practice might have driven the partners’ reform work. They offer rudimentary principles for a theory of district change.

The initiative needs to communicate its reform vision across the system.

Minneapolis district partners had limited access to the knowledge that grounded the
initiative’s Elements, and confusions over the focus and rationale for partnering work persisted at all system levels.

_TLP_ should have worked more systematically to develop shared understandings with district leaders of the initiative’s vision of a high-performing district. Documents and other tools could have been used to ensure that _TLP_’s theory of action – the eight Elements and evidence about how they operate together to continually improve teaching and learning – was featured as the initiative’s vision for district reform. Regular conversations among core district staff and _TLP_ capacity builders were needed to advance shared understandings and accountability for the ongoing district reform work.

_System reform should focus on developing capacity across Elements._ The MPS partnership focused on professional development to the neglect of other _TLP_ Elements on which the district was particularly weak, such as coherence of instructional improvement efforts and public engagement. Success of the focused intervention depended upon prior capacity at all system levels: the central office units with least experience struggled most; schools weakest in leadership and professional community benefited least.

Closing student achievement gaps in this and similar districts requires systematic attention to inequalities in organizational capacity across the system. Improved student outcomes depend upon coherent, intensive, and sustained efforts focused on all of the conditions represented by _TLP_ Elements.

_Developing collaborative leadership between system levels is key to district reform._ Literature on systemic reform initially focused on the alignment of curriculum and assessments at the top of the system as the primary lever for change. _TLP_’s theory of action saw the problem of change additionally as developing collaboration and coherent action among multiple levels of the system and between the system and communities. System reform in this view involves not just aligning policies and tools for coherent direction to schools, but also changing relationships between the district office and schools to develop coherent system reform action.

Experience in MPS provides evidence that capacity at the “middle” of the system is essential to changing relationships between the central office and schools. Teacher learning and change were greatest where there were strong interstitial units to carry messages, resources, and evidence between the district office and schools. The math team’s greater readiness to lead professional development came from the infrastructure of informal teacher leadership that had developed through prior NSF grants.

_System reform calls for customized support to individual schools._ The experience in Minneapolis revealed that district capacity building efforts can exacerbate school differences in capacity to improve instruction if the change strategy treats all schools equally. In this case, all district schools were required to send teachers to the summer institutes; follow-up expectations were embedded in the professional development. Schools relatively strong on _TLP_ Elements at the beginning of the reform work were able to take advantage of all facets of the district’s new professional development
opportunities, while the weakest schools lacked a minimal level of leadership support and community strength to engage and sustain the work.

Explicit attention to between-school inequalities is essential to a district system reform. A theory of action to address between-school inequalities in capacity will go more deeply into instruction and more broadly into politics than TLP’s Elements signaled and that its national capacity builders could address.

**Lessons for the Field: Co-design partnership as a change strategy**

Although research on education reform points to the importance of forging a partnership between external and internal system actors, evidence from practice or research on how to do this is slim. TLP’s experiences in co-designing work with Minneapolis revealed challenges entailed in this partnering approach and suggest principles to guide future partnering practice in a district reform initiative.

*A co-design partnership needs guidelines for partnering practice.* Because a co-design approach to district reform departs from typical forms of partnership, it was not readily understood by district leaders nor easily enacted by initiative capacity builders. Clear definitions of authority domains for each party and operating guidelines were lacking at the start of the initiative, and questions about the appropriate and effective role of the national intermediary organization became a major concern of TLP leaders and issue for MPS administrators and staff over time.\(^1\)

Contractual agreements and guidelines are needed to scaffold the innovative co-design partnering relationships. Tools to support this understanding might include illustrations of how this model contrasts with the more conventional models and prompts for questions that the partners might ask of themselves and one another to avoid falling into the more familiar roles.

*A viable partnership depends upon shared understandings of the reform vision.* Minneapolis district partners had limited access to the knowledge base that grounded TLP’s vision, and the partnership provided few resources to advance shared understandings.

Such an initiative depends upon the development of shared understandings between external partners and district leaders about the vision and nature of their collaboration. Such understandings can be developed through documents and tools focused on particular elements, forums of teachers, administrators and staff, and community leaders that used media to convey the theory and its evidence base, and the co-design of an indicator system for tracking the system’s change toward each Element. Regular conversations among core district staff and external partners are needed to advance shared understandings and accountability for the ongoing district reform work.

\(^1\) A paper in progress by Cynthia Coburn provides an in-depth analysis of lessons learned from TLP’s co-construction approach to partnering between a district and external organizations.
Co-design system reform entails leading with district initiative to engage core problems. The MPS partnership focused on content areas for instructional improvement that were defined by consensus as important, but attended little to conditions in the central office that constrained progress across district schools or to school conditions that would inevitably limit their progress.

External partners need a theory of action for engaging all parts of the system in change and a design for how to help the district implement it. The evidence base from TLP and related district reform initiatives is not adequate to ground such a theory. Nevertheless, learning theory provides a general principle that dovetails with case observations from this initiative: development can be scaffolded by an agent who models and supports a shift in practice over time. Tailoring collaboration on system reform to district contexts entails detailed attention to local culture, between-school inequalities, and particular schools’ needs. State and federal accountability policies drive a focus on low-performing schools, and external partners can help to design targeted efforts and to guide the change process in those schools.

District and external partners should continually assess and improve their practice. The theory of co-construction assumes that this arrangement will bring the best evidence to bear on problems of district change. The district brings local and practical knowledge to bear on design decisions, and external partners bring knowledge from research and expertise from external networks. However, this assumption was not always met in Minneapolis: sometimes neither partner was highly knowledgeable in a subject domain, and decision rules for judging the partnership’s readiness to reach a particular design decision and seeking outside counsel were lacking.

District reform partners would benefit from having expectations and tools that prompt them to assess their individual and joint expertise for work in a particular area of district reform and to seek additional partners as needed.

Reform is a problem of political, cultural, and social change. Lack of attention to race and class during the Minneapolis reform work revealed how difficult it was for district leaders to name and address issues that pervaded the central office, schools, and community. This was notable especially since race was salient in district-community politics during the course of TLP’s partnership. Silence around race politics seemed to paralyze district reform.

District reform is not just about technical change in the classroom or organizational redesign in the central office. It is also about race and class dynamics in urban school systems and the politics of district change. An external initiative might be an effective catalyst for addressing systemic inequalities, but only if its authority to engage all facets of the district is established at the start.
Lessons for the Field: national capacity for a district reform initiative

The MacArthur Foundation’s decision to pursue an ambitious vision for system change that lacked a pre-specified design for implementation set the stage for all of TLP’s challenges and for the lessons it now offers the field. Among them are those that pertain to a foundation’s decisions and investments. These lessons are distilled from TLP advisors’ and Foundation officers’ reflections on the initiative’s experience and Documentation evidence from Minneapolis.

Getting started on significant, sustainable system change takes time and resilience. District reform is messy work. It engages all levels of the system, an organizational culture that has developed over time in particular state and local contexts, layers of education reform history that shape leaders’ thinking about external partnerships and effective practice, professional union leadership and politics, community leadership and politics, and relationships with local intermediary organizations and foundations. In order for an outside organization to engage effectively in a district partnership, it needs to develop knowledge and relationships that make it possible for them to build upon the strengths and address the weaknesses of the system.

A foundation’s capacity to improve education at the district level includes its willingness to invest in developing intermediary organizations’ knowledge and relationships with districts over several years, its taste for learning from the struggles that are inevitable during the early phases of a reform partnership, and its resilience in the face of setbacks. A district reform funding structure would invest in time for grantees to develop local knowledge and relationships essential to collaborative work, with a developmental view of partnering and system change.

National capacities should be evaluated in terms of initiative demands. The selection of national intermediaries for a district reform initiative should focus on the fit between leadership demands of the initiative and an organization’s capacities. Because judgments are entailed in developing site-specific strategies and designs, the initiative’s intermediary organizations require a strong knowledge base from practical experience and familiarity with research to effectively guide the work. They should be equipped to scaffold the district partners’ understandings of system change by knowing the right questions to ask and having a repertoire of tools designed to support changes in thinking and practice.

Selection criteria for district partners should consider constraints on change. A district’s readiness for reform partnering was a primary criterion for selecting TLP partners. In the selection of Minneapolis, emphasis was placed on superintendent leadership and local philanthropy; yet neither proved to be robust – the superintendent left the district, and local foundations were never seriously engaged in system reform. Conversely, some criteria on which Minneapolis had been rated as weak may have significantly inhibited change: lack of a local intermediary organization to support the partners’ designs, a state with weak support for district improvement, and a strong local tradition of school autonomy.
A district reform initiative needs a strategy for managing superintendent turnover. TLP’s heavy reliance on MPS’s initial superintendent for making and authorizing decisions about district reform work limited the development of collaborative leadership intended by the initiative’s vision for system reform. A local design group was formed in Fall 2002 but was never reconvened. The loss of Superintendent Johnson at the end of the partnership’s first year was a blow to the partnership, since she both owned the district’s vision for reform and managed all of the functional units that should have come together in the reform effort.

CEO turnover is endemic to large urban districts and inevitable during a sustained partnership of the duration TLP intended, yet top leadership is critical to the success and stability of a system reform initiative. Research-based knowledge concerning strategies for sustaining reform through leader succession is needed in education, since incentives seem to work in favor of new superintendents bringing in new ideas and initiatives and derailing existing ones. Evidence that civic capacity plays an important role in educational improvement suggests that actively engaging the school board and civic leaders in a system reform initiative is key to a sustainable district partnership.

Developing local and national knowledge for system reform requires a theory of action. TLP had an ambitious knowledge-development agenda and invested in a national documentation function that would both inform local reform practice and capture lessons across multiple sites. Experience in MPS revealed challenges of engaging district leaders in learning from evidence provided by the national documentation team. District administrators had not been engaged in developing the outcomes, indicators, and interpretations of data relevant to TLP’s Elements and so lacked ownership of the evidence that might have informed their reform decisions.

A theory of action for knowledge development through a district reform initiative would provide a useful guide for documenters and district partners. Such a theory would include strategies through which external and district partners can develop shared conceptions of useful evidence and mechanisms for establishing timely feedback loops. A local documentation partner would be needed to support the ongoing use of evidence at all system levels.

The theory also would inform the initiative’s design for knowledge development across district sites. It would consider trade-offs between breadth and depth of research on district reform to guide decisions about numbers of district partners and the nature of contrasts useful for comparative analysis. And it would consider the nature of cross-site evidence needed to support the development of strategies, tools, and practices for taking a system reform design to scale.

* * * * *

The Learning Partnership underestimated the organizational and knowledge capacities needed to manage the implementation of its ambitious vision for district reform.
and co-design approach to change. As an extended professional learning community, all of the TLP agents—the district, support organizations, documenters, advisory board members—felt challenged by the demands of the initiative. They also felt that the experience of doing, documenting, and advising on the partnership with Minneapolis significantly enhanced their capacity to support district system reform in the future. Hopefully, this account of the initiative’s work will extend its learning opportunities beyond those involved in the initiative.
The Learning Partnership
Final Documentation Report

In 2002 the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation launched a national initiative to improve education for inner city youth through a strategy of district system reform. The Learning Partnership (TLP) aimed to develop district learning organizations capable of continually improving instruction and closing achievement gaps through collaborative partnerships with selected district partners. Its focus on district system reform, its conception of a high-performing district, and its principles for partnering with districts to achieve system change were grounded in a growing body of evidence concerning effective strategies for educational improvement. The Foundation’s initiative was a cutting-edge investment in improving urban public education through partnering with districts to design system reform and to develop practice-based knowledge for wide dissemination. It ended during the spring of 2005.

The initiative involved three organizations as national intermediaries working on behalf of TLP in partner districts and a national advisory group. Stanford University’s Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) was “documenter” of the initiative over the course of its three years. The Center for Policy Research in Education (CPRE) of University of Pennsylvania and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform (AISR) of Brown University served successively as TLP “capacity builders.” A national advisory group – composed of former superintendents, heads of national reform support organizations, a teacher educator, and researchers – provided technical support to CPRE during the initiative’s first year and subsequently served as advisor to the Foundation regarding TLP.

TLP intended to partner with 3-4 mid-sized urban districts over a course of 8-10 years in order to support each district’s reform efforts and to test and refine a theory of systemic educational change through these local efforts. The time frame envisioned for district partnerships was based on evidence that education reform takes 3-5 years to take hold and result in improved student outcomes and the assumption that additional time is needed to ensure sustainability of organizational and instructional improvements. Through a rigorous selection process carried out during Fall 2002, the MacArthur Foundation and its advisors selected Baltimore Public Schools (BPS) and Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) as first partners. Conditions in these districts suggested that they were ready to benefit from this partnership, and the districts’ contrasting contexts were potentially fruitful for drawing early lessons from the reform work. The districts would benefit from partnering work with TLP’s capacity-building organizations and would receive approximately $2 million annually in support of the co-designed system reform work.
The partnership with Baltimore was put on hold when its superintendent left the district during the planning year. The partnership in Minneapolis was active for nearly three years, coming to a close by the spring of 2005. Lessons from TLP thus center on experiences over less than three years with the MPS partnership.

This final report provides an account of TLP as a national initiative and as a partnership with Minneapolis, addressing questions regarding its conception and implementation:

- Was TLP a good idea at the time it was initiated?
- What went well, what not so well, and why?

Separate sections describe and analyze: TLP’s conception, its implementation as a national initiative, and its implementation in Minneapolis. In each, we consider the two key facets of TLP’s theory of action: its principle of a “co-design” partnership and its Elements, which specify conditions of an effective district system. A final section highlights lessons and issues from TLP regarding the design and implementation of an education system reform initiative.

Data used for this analysis derive mainly from observations of the implementation and outcomes of TLP’s partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools from Fall 2002 through Spring 2005. Co-design processes were documented through periodic interviews with TLP capacity builders and district administrators, staff, and consultants involved in the reform work, as well as through ongoing observations of planning meetings that involved both partners. Implementation and outcomes for TLP Elements at the central office level were documented additionally through the Documentation team’s observations of all facets of work co-designed by the partners and interviews with staff involved in implementing the design, including teacher leaders recruited from district schools to facilitate summer professional development institutes. Implementation and outcomes at the school and classroom level were documented through quantitative and qualitative research designed to achieve both breadth and depth of data and analysis, including:

- District-wide surveys that were co-designed with the district’s research and evaluation unit:
  - Principal survey (2003)
- Longitudinal case studies of eight K-8 schools selected to represent contrasts of grade configuration, community demographics, and readiness on TLP Elements (as measured through the baseline survey). These case studies involved several kinds of data collection:
  - Repeated interviews with the principal and other key school leaders
  - Observations of teacher study groups and classroom instruction practices linked to TLP reform designs
  - Interviews with teachers involved in TLP-designed work
Appendix A provides more detail on the Documentation database developed over approximately three years of research in Minneapolis.

In developing this account of the initiative, the Documentation team has been mindful of potential biases that could come from its inside role in TLP’s organizational infrastructure and in district partnering relationships. Identification with the initiative might result in an overly-positive view of its merits and accomplishments; on the other hand, up close experience with struggles of partnering with districts could result in exaggerated attention to disappointments on both sides. The Documentation team used several strategies to ensure balance in the observations and lessons drawn from TLP’s experience. Foremost, we used standards for social science research to develop an extensive qualitative and quantitative database over the course of the initiative. This final report stays close to the data to provide a descriptive account of the initiative. Second, in interpreting these data, the team used triangulation among different kinds of data and engaged members of the documentation team in debating alternative views of evidence to create checks and balances throughout the process of developing inferences from the TLP data. Third, we sought review and input for facets of the documentation analysis from district administrators and staff and TLP’s capacity builders over the course of the initiative. Finally, Advisory Board members provided quality control through their individual reviews of, and full-day meeting to discuss, a draft of this report. This account represents the Documentation team’s best efforts to achieve a thorough and balanced report on The Learning Partnership.

**The Learning Partnership’s Conception**

*The Learning Partnership* (TLP)’s theory of action for district system reform centered on a set of Elements that together describe district conditions for continually improving student achievement and closing achievement gaps. The theory also included a “co-design” principle for partnering between a district and external organization to develop strategies, foci, and designs for ongoing system reform work. Finally, it set a time frame of 8-10 years for the partnerships to ensure that significant and sustainable changes in district system conditions could be made. Documentation of the reform work and of its anticipated and unanticipated outcomes was integral to the initiative’s learning agenda. The documentation facet of the initiative would function to: follow reform work in each district and provide evidence to guide decisions, assess TLP’s theory of action as it played out in partner districts, and capture knowledge about district system reform developed through TLP’s experience working across several districts.

*TLPer*s focus on the district as unit of change was grounded in evidence that school reform fails and state instructional policies are derailed absent district capacity to support effective change processes (for example, CRC, 2002; Spillane & Thompson, 1997) and that districts can manage effective system-wide instructional improvement (for example, Elmore, 1993; Elmore & Burney, 1997; and Stein & DAmico on New York City District #2; Massell & Goertz, 2002, and McLaughlin & Talbert, 2003, on variation in district capacity for instructional improvement).
The particular set of Elements that formed TLP’s “theory of action” represented conditions of a district learning organization capable of continuous improvement, according to knowledge available when the initiative was designed by the Foundation and its advisors. Central in this conception were three elements describing professional practices focused on instructional improvement: collaborative leadership, professional learning communities, and evidence-based practice at all levels of the system. Other TLP Elements referred to district policies and conditions that leverage and support district change toward these practices – including targeted professional development, incentives for learning and collaboration, reallocation of resources to support system learning, district focus and coherence around instructional improvement, and public engagement.

The initiative’s “co-design” principle for partnering with districts was grounded in evidence that conventional modes of district partnerships with external agents are ineffective means to achieve system-wide change, as discussed below. Finally, TLP’s commitment to work in districts for 8-10 years was path-breaking, given foundations’ typical grant-making cycles of 3-5 years. It was grounded in evidence that significant system reform takes at least 5 years and the likelihood that sustainable change takes several additional years of strategic external support (for example, Fullan, 2000; 2001).

**TLP’s Elements**

The initiative invested in a particular theory of how a district would function as an organizational system capable of continually improving student outcomes and closing achievement gaps. The theory derived from research on business as well as education organizations and featured eight Elements that represent levers and outcomes for district system reform:

- **Communities of practice** focused on improving student outcomes and equity at all levels of the system (for example, McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Resnick & Hall, 1998; Wenger, 1998).
- **Evidence-based decision making** to guide improvement plans at all levels of the system (for example, Kennedy, 1982; Supovitz & Klein, 2003).
- **Collaborative leadership** at and between all system levels, and the development of teacher leaders who lead, coach, and model good practices and highly skilled principals who provide instructional leadership within schools (for example, David, 1990; Fullan, 1994; Spillane, Halverson & Diamond, 2001).
- **System focus and coherence** across policies and practices focused on instruction and enhancing the quality and equity of student achievement (for example, O’Day & Smith, 1993; Spillane, 2002).

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2 Originally there were twelve TLP Elements, which were refined subsequently to ten and then to the eight elements listed above. The vision for reform remained intact with these refinements and made for a less cumbersome statement of the initiative’s theory of action. These refinements were outcomes of a co-construction process between the foundation, advisory group, and intermediary organizations and represented advances in TLP’s theory of action and capacity to communicate with future district partners.
• **Targeted professional development** and tools that build knowledge and skills for improving instruction. (for example, Stein & D’Amico, 2002; Thompson & Zeuli, 1999).

• **Resource reallocation** to support change toward organizational learning and instructional improvement (for example, Hightower, 2002; Snyder, 2002).

• **Incentives** aligned with district designs for system-wide school improvement (Resnick & Glennan, 2002).

• **Public engagement and support** of the initiative (for example, Hill, Campbell & Harvey, 2000; Stone, Henig, Jones & Pierannunzi, 2001).

The strength of TLP’s conception of district reform was a growing body of evidence that each element was key to system-wide instructional improvement. Yet the power of TLP’s Elements to frame and focus reform work was inherently limited. Each is an abstract concept that represents a vast research literature and concrete practices, and in order to motivate and guide district change they need to be translated in terms of their evidence base and practical meanings. In order to serve as a conceptual framework for district reform partnering the Elements would need to be explicated in terms of: evidence linking them to improved system outcomes, illustration of what they look like in practice, examples of how they were developed in an effective district, and indicators that could be used to track a district’s progress over time.\(^3\) In other words, the Elements were a viable theory of action for district system reform to the extent that their use in the district partnerships was scaffolded by TLP documents and partners.

**Co-design**

TLP’s co-design principle for partnering with districts called for collaboration between the initiative’s intermediary organizations and a district to develop strategies and plans for system reform that would be adapted to local conditions and capacities. It emphasized the importance of knowledge from research and knowledge from practice as resources for effective decisions about district system reform. Partners would co-construct decisions and share accountability for their outcomes.\(^4\)

The initiative’s principles for partnering with districts were grounded in evidence of how districts’ responses to alternative partnering approaches fail to bring about system change. Often when externally designed policies for district reform enter the local

\(^3\) This observation is based in part on TLP’s experience. As described later, these translations were missing from the partnership with Minneapolis and resulted in confusion over the initiative’s theory of action and meaning of any and all of its Elements. A plan to involve TLP’s advisory group in formulating definitions and research summaries for each of the Elements did not come to fruition. Although advisors were selected to represent expertise in terms of the range of Elements, the board members were not prepared to play the role of explicating the knowledge base for the initiative post hoc. After becoming TLP’s capacity builder, AISR began to develop tools of various sorts that featured TLP Elements and illustrated what they looked like in practice, but the initiative was phased out before they could be used and refined.

\(^4\) The terms “co-design” and “co-construct” were used interchangeably in the initiative, each assuming the negotiation of understandings and plans for system reform work within the partnership.
system, the design is modified in ways that undermine its core principles and result in superficial change or new routines being layered onto existing practices.\(^5\) Alternatively, when a district brings an external partner in to support its reform design, the partner is not in a position to influence broad, strategic decisions about district reform and the work is compartmentalized as a special project rather than becoming integral to the district’s reform agenda. Tony Bryk and colleagues (1996) termed strategies such as these the “engineering” model and the “service bureau” model of school reform.\(^6\)

\(^TLP\)’s co-construction model was defined mainly in terms of contrasts with these typical models, in which one or the other partner determines the focus of their joint work. In a co-design strategy, district staff and external partners work together to identify problems and to develop and implement solutions. It assumes that relevant knowledge for school improvement is not lodged in either place alone, but rather needs to be brought together in a collaborative process to solve particular problems of practice in a particular setting.

Although well-grounded in the negative evidence from research on conventional partnerships, the co-construction model was not well defined initially by \(TLP\) and the literature offered no concrete examples or prescriptions for action. This was not a ‘flaw’ in the conception, but rather a problem for design during implementation. In part, the initiative assumed that the long-term, 8-10 year relationship with a district would enable the development of trust and collaborative working relationships and designs for using both clinical expertise and research evidence to guide system reform work.

As a principle for partnering, the approach promised to build district ownership – to define system reform work not as an “external” reform, brought in by outside reformers, but rather an “internal” reform with authority and accountability held by the district, schools, and teachers. But this partnering strategy was highly ambitious for several reasons. First, it departs from familiar forms of internal-external partnerships, putting forth a new idea about appropriate roles of insiders and outsiders and the nature of relevant knowledge for school improvement. In other words, it challenges habits of mind

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\(^5\) Evidence that districts re-invent externally developed programs and policies comes from research in the 1970’s (Berman and McLaughlin, Change Agent Study) and from Spillane’s recent research on district responses to state instructional policies. Reinvention of external policies and programs occurs as well at the bottom of the system. For example, research on math education reform shows that, absent the opportunity to develop understanding of the principles of math teaching and learning, teachers adopt superficial features of reform math programs (e.g., manipulatives) without changing their instruction (Cohen & Hill, 2001).

\(^6\) In the “engineering” model, a university or reform organization introduces a program or improvement model into the system; the external partner’s role then is to support the implementation of the pre-designed innovation. Here the relevant knowledge for school improvement is seen as existing outside of the school system, and implementation depends upon the capacity and will of schools and districts to accept and integrate the externally-developed model. In the service bureau model, a school or district contracts with an external organization to perform particular roles in support of educational improvement. The district identifies problems and is the ultimate arbiter of solutions proposed by an external provider. Implementation depends on the degree to which districts and schools have the capacity to identify a good fit between potential service providers and their needs and the degree to which they can integrate short-term services into a coherent reform strategy.
and practice. Further, it deeply engages complexities of urban systems and their particular histories, power dynamics, and organizational structures. Finally, in the case of TLP, it required that the district partners make strategic decisions about where to begin work toward all of the Elements – to design a site-specific strategy for achieving TLP’s vision of a high-performing district system. The co-design principle thus placed heavy demands on the partnership to invent new roles and relationships, to customize work to the district context, to engage politics surrounding race and other divisions in the community, and to design a longitudinal strategy for comprehensive system reform.

TLP’s theory of action lacked an evidence-based strategy for staging a district system change process – or a theory ‘changing districts.’ Neither TLP’s Elements nor the co-design partnering principle offered strategies for addressing the challenges of urban system reform or for adapting to local district conditions. Thus, the initiative did not bring guidelines for the partners to use in staging the change process – e.g., how to develop broad district ownership of TLP’s reform vision, what to work on first or what clusters of Elements to engage simultaneously. The research literature on district reform in 2002 was not advanced enough to offer TLP founders a theory of changing districts. Therefore CPRE developed its own approach to partnering in the change process – one which emphasized intensive communication and collaboration with district staff around a narrow focus selected by the district. This entry strategy assumed that work on instructional improvement would begin with professional development in core content areas and build outward to system reform. CPRE’s work with MPS revealed challenges and limitations of this theory of district change in the short run; however, this does not constitute evidence of the theory’s failure, since it was not tested over a reasonable time frame to judge its merits for building ownership and capacity for change among the professional staff.

The Foundation’s original commitment to working with TLP districts for 8-10 years would have afforded the partners sufficient opportunity to learn from cycles of implementation and evaluation. Its investment in Documentation research promised to advance practice-based knowledge of the strategies and practices that evolved to achieve district system reform. Further, through several sustained district partnerships, the initiative promised to develop an evidence base for co-design partnerships and for a theory of action for building system-wide capacity for continual improvement. Sustained reform work guided by TLP’s elements, coupled with the emphasis on evidence-based practice within the partnership and within the district, could have significantly advanced knowledge for the field. Even the short period of time partnering with Minneapolis afforded opportunity for TLP to learn from its successes and mistakes – to develop knowledge that significantly improved its capacity to undertake future partnerships.7

7 A design for TLP “Phase Two” was developed to take advantage of lessons from the experience in Minneapolis and from growing knowledge for district reform; however the Foundation ultimately decided not to go forward with the refined initiative.
**Documentation**

*TLP*’s architecture included documentation as a function that would help build knowledge of effective district reform practices within the initiative – through feedback loops to support *TLP*’s evidence-based practice – and beyond the initiative. The roles envisioned for this research arm contrast with the traditional role of evaluation in foundation initiatives – to assess the impact of an initiative as a whole on pre-specified outcomes, typically student test scores. Rather, *TLP*’s conception of documentation built upon a theory of action evaluation model which asks ‘where did the initiative’s assumptions hold and fall apart?’ – an approach that foundations had begun to regard as a way to refine their knowledge base for designing and investing in change efforts. *TLP*’s documenters were charged with using a theory of action approach to track reform work in partner districts, analyzing change processes and contributing feedback to the partners, and developing knowledge for the field and foundations about the efficacy of *TLP* and effective approaches to district reform.

Challenges for Documentation within the initiative centered on how to balance the three roles of providing feedback to partners in ways and times that could inform their decisions, evaluating *TLP*’s theory of action by examining outcomes of the core elements, and contributing knowledge to the field about district reform processes. The initiative considered that its learning about district system reform would be a key contribution to the field, beyond improved conditions and outcomes in particular *TLP* districts. Challenges of implementing this vision come from both district expectations and capacities for documentation so conceived. First, districts are used to evaluations that assess outcomes of a reform program to satisfy demands of a funder, while *TLP* documentation placed primacy on providing feedback to the district to inform their decisions on system reform. The latter role requires both mutual understandings and ownership of reform outcomes and trust to enable communication about negative, as well as positive results. Second, the knowledge base and professional skills for documentation of the sort *TLP* envisioned are quite specialized. Most documenters are likely to have developed skills in one or two of the functions, but not all three. In particular, researchers generally are not experienced in managing feedback loops in the political environment and changing conditions of an urban district; or in managing feedback with a variety of stakeholders, including multiple districts, external partners, advisory boards, and a foundation. Further, documentation in *TLP*’s vision encounters trade-offs between investing in deeply contextual data for ongoing formative feedback in a particular site and investing in systematic data collection and analysis for testing a theory of action and/or developing theory of change processes across multiple sites. In short, the initiative defined new frontiers for documentation, as well as for district reform partnerships.
Implementation of TLP as a National Initiative

TLP’s implementation moved through several stages. First was the Foundation’s selection of the CPRE as the national capacity-building organization for the initiative early in 2002. Next came the selection of TLP’s national advisory group to serve as a design team for the initiative. Then came a long process of site selection conducted by CPRE and TLP’s advisory group, followed by initial planning work with both Baltimore and Minneapolis (the sites selected ultimately by the Foundation as first district partners). Then came continued work in Minneapolis from fall 2002 through spring 2005. During this period there were three phases of TLP in terms of capacity-building partners: CPRE alone (approximately 18 months), CPRE and AISR together (about 8 months), and AISR alone (about 10 months). In the middle of this period TLP’s advisory group shifted from a technical support role to an advisory role. During the final year of the initiative, the foundation assumed an active role in the co-construction of work with MPS, through weekly conference calls with AISR, CRC, and TLP’s advisory board chair.

Selection of TLP’s intermediary organizations

The MacArthur Foundation’s selection of CPRE to lead TLP’s implementation can be seen as an outcome of the initiative’s historical development. Initially the Foundation was developing ideas for a teacher quality initiative and Tom Corcoran of CPRE was a consultant. As knowledge for education improvement advanced, the initiative’s focus shifted toward evidence-based practice and district system reform, with teacher learning and improved teaching quality embedded in these conceptions. Corcoran’s involvement in designing the initiative, and his knowledge and interest in district system reform with a focus on professional learning and capacity building, made him a prime candidate for leadership in implementing TLP. CPRE had a strong reputation for policy-oriented research and seemed viable as TLP’s national intermediary organization.

The Foundation’s initial selection of a capacity-building organization to partner with districts was a critical decision because its theory of action created great dependence upon individuals’ judgments and capacity to support system reform work. Both the ambitious vision for comprehensive system reform and the principle that the reform work would be co-designed with each partner district called for considerable leadership from TLP. Identifying the best professional practice in reform work was important to TLP’s success and, in hindsight, warranted a selection process as rigorous as that used to select district partners.

Ultimately, the choice of CPRE as TLP’s capacity-building organization was regarded by some within the initiative as a source of implementation problems in Minneapolis and a constraint on scaling up the initiative. As a policy research organization, CPRE lacked experience in leading day-to-day system reform and relied heavily on consultants for on-the-ground work. Further, after co-designing professional development reform as a strategy for system change in Minneapolis, CPRE took an active
role in implementation processes. Its technical assistance approach to partnering further limited CPRE’s capacity to take on work with additional TLP districts.

During TLP’s second year, CPRE and the Foundation invited AISR to be a second intermediary organization to support the work in Minneapolis and also to enhance the initiative’s capacity to move into new district sites. AISR’s director Warren Simmons was an original member of TLP’s design team/advisory group and therefore was deeply knowledgeable about the initiative’s theory of action. AISR was a national leader in district system reform and had developed considerable capacity to support work toward TLP’s vision. After several months of collaborating with CPRE on the Minneapolis partnership during 2003-04, AISR assumed full responsibility as the national capacity-building organization. In this role, AISR developed tools to support the work of TLP, including an indicator system aligned with the Elements, and conceived a new design for possible ‘Phase Two’ work in additional districts. Also, the Foundation funded AISR’s communications unit to develop media for representing TLP’s vision and to support its work with districts on tool development and communication.8

Stanford’s Center for Research on the Context of Teaching (CRC) was selected by the Foundation as the national intermediary organization for TLP Documentation soon after the work in Minneapolis and Baltimore had begun. CRC’s Co-Director Joan Talbert was an original member of TLP’s Design Team and, based on the Center’s track record of theory of action evaluations and its ongoing research on district reform, the Foundation invited CRC to submit a proposal for a Documentation project. CRC’s orientation toward knowledge development for the field and its limited experience with fast-turnaround formative evaluation and partnering with district units at all system levels meant that it was challenged to develop new principles and practices for meeting the full range of functions and roles defined for TLP Documentation.

**District site selection**

The selection of Minneapolis and Baltimore as initial TLP district partners resulted from an elaborate process that included systematic data collection, ratings of districts on a set of Readiness Criteria, and informal deliberations within the Design Group and Foundation. A key issue in the aftermath of the initiative concerns whether different selection criteria and processes would have resulted in more successful partnerships and outcomes for the initiative.

The Foundation set three constraints on the selection of initial TLP districts: that they be mid-size urban districts (50,000-100,000 enrollments, with high proportions of poor students of color), that two be selected initially and one or two additional districts be selected at a later time, and that the districts be geographically dispersed in order to represent a national initiative. In consultation with colleagues in the field and the Foundation, CPRE identified five promising districts out of nearly 50 districts nationally.

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8 This growing capacity to implement TLP did not significantly change the course begun in MPS, and the Foundation decided not to move forward on the initiative.
that met these conditions, with promise defined in terms of their reputation for strength on one or more of TLP’s Elements and commitment to systemic reform. Teams of Design Group members, including CPRE staff and two Foundation officers, made site visits to seven districts in five communities – Baltimore, Denver, El Paso (three districts), Minneapolis, and Wake County. The site visit protocol included five Readiness Criteria:

- Effective leadership at all levels of the system
- Superintendent and central office staff focus on student performance and performance gaps
- Coordination of improvement initiatives and commitment to continuous improvement
- Effective use of resources
- Civic leaders and the community effectively engaged

Summaries from these site visits created a rich evidence base for evaluating potential district partners. They documented: district demographics, system performance, literacy and math curricula, and the site team’s evaluation of the district on an elaborated set of Readiness Criteria. Considered were: quality and stability of the Board, district leadership and quality of the central office, management-labor relations, the teacher force and contract, teacher salaries compared to the region, fiscal pressure, performance pressure, other improvement initiatives underway, TLP Elements being addressed, track record of implementing initiatives, investment in professional development, long-term relationship with knowledge partners, district will, civic interest and support, state policy environment, and opportunities and issues. Each district’s report revealed substantive strengths and challenges for partnering and gaps between district realities and TLP’s elements.

The Design Team reviewed these reports, queried the teams, and developed a rating system for site selection during a meeting in June 2002 in Providence, RI that was attended by two Foundation officers and President Fanton. The rating system emphasized the five Readiness Criteria used by the teams in their site visits and yielded a ranking of El Paso as first, Baltimore as second, Denver as third, Minneapolis as fourth, and Wake County as fifth. Wake County was dropped on the basis of low scores across categories, and Denver was dropped to fourth position on grounds that the presence of another major national intermediary organization (IFL) might present problems for creating the partnership. The meeting ended with Minneapolis ranked third, after El Paso and Baltimore. Ultimately, the Foundation chose not to partner with El Paso in the first cohort on two main grounds: this site included three districts, two of which were recruiting new superintendents, and it was not typical of mid-size districts in the nation. Also, El Paso contrasted sharply with Baltimore, and it was thought that more could be learned during TLP’s initial phase by following the work in two similar districts (Baltimore and Minneapolis). This process and logic produced the two district partners.

TLP moved forward with Baltimore and Minneapolis simultaneously during early months of the 2002-03 academic year in a planning phase that involved CPRE and CRC in collecting baseline data in both districts. However, when Baltimore Superintendent Russo announced her departure, the Foundation decided to put the district ‘on hold’ for
future partnering. This left Minneapolis as the sole site for testing and developing TLP’s theory of action. \(^9\)

With only one district partner, it is impossible to disentangle TLP’s experience and viability from conditions encountered and enacted in that district. Pros and cons of partnering with Minneapolis that were discussed during the site selection process clearly shaped TLP’s experiences. Conditions in favor of partnering with Minneapolis included: Superintendent Johnson (strong commitment to equity-oriented reform and leadership in the district and community), Minneapolis Federation of Teachers (MFT) President Louise Sundin (national leader of professional reform to create school learning communities and stable union leadership in the district), strong local philanthropic community, and lack of a major national reform initiative in the district. Negatives included: the absence of a local intermediary organization working with the district on education reform, a state context that was promoting choice versus capacity-building strategies in education, a particularly fragmented central office, and a district culture that prized individual teacher learning and promoted entrepreneurial school initiatives. As discussed later, some of the strengths proved to be unreliable or were not used advantageously. Importantly: the Superintendent left the district within the first year, neither union leaders nor community leaders were engaged in collaborative design of district reform plans, and the lack of a local support organization to support and sustain instructional improvement limited the partnership’s capacity to implement its reform designs.

The fact that only one district partnership was sustained and the initiative ended after less than 3 full years of work in Minneapolis meant that TLP was not implemented as intended. Reliance on a partnership with just one district made the initiative fragile in that it was vulnerable to this district’s idiosyncratic culture and new superintendent’s impact. The Foundation’s thinking about the viability of a district reform initiative was inevitably framed by particulars of this single partnership.

**Implementation in Minneapolis**

TLP’s partnership with Minneapolis from Fall 2002 through Summer 2004 provided opportunity for an initial assessment of the initiative’s innovative co-design approach to district change and a theory of action for system reform embodied in its Elements. Documentation of this partnership points to particular kinds of implementation challenges and also to positive and potentially lasting outcomes for some parts of the district system.

\(^9\) A professional development review and curriculum audit that were conducted by TLP advisory group members in Baltimore during the planning period yielded recommendations that impacted district budget allocation decisions and may have had lasting effects. Because the partners did not move into a co-design phase of the work, it is impossible to compare what would have happened in Baltimore with what evolved in the Minneapolis partnership.
Context conditions constrained progress on system reform

Conditions in Minneapolis Public Schools (MPS) came together in a way that complicated TLP’s work and inhibited success. Although each of the conditions is not unusual in large urban schools districts, their coincidence with high turnover of the superintendency created a particularly constraining syndrome of conditions.

MPS conditions that worried TLP advisors during the site selection process –its fragmented organization culture and tradition of school autonomy – figured prominently in the initiative’s implementation phase. TLP’s efforts to work with and around these challenging context conditions were successful in some respects, but they posed major challenges for partnering and for system improvement.

Fragmented central office authority. District functional units responsible for instruction lacked a common focus and communication, and this proved to be quite resistant to change. There were three centers of instructional authority – the teaching and instruction services unit (TIS), the research, evaluation, and assessment unit (REA), and grade-level superintendents. Little communication or coordination occurred between them. The organizational chart effective during 2002-03 revealed the district “silos” of functional units and lack of accountability for cross-unit coordination; lines of responsibility were largely vertical in the chart, with few drawn across units. Significantly, the REA unit was not linked to either TIS or to the grade level superintendents.

The fragmented central office structure created uncertainty among key leaders on the district side of TLP’s partnership with Minneapolis regarding decision-making authority over instructional improvement efforts. Many administrators and staff in the central office expressed concern over these problems in interviews, but they lacked structures and leadership for change. The prolonged absence of a literacy director in the district reflected and exacerbated the problem of weak district leadership for instructional improvement, as did long-standing disagreements among district administrators about the nature of district assessments that can guide the improvement of teaching and learning.

Philosophical disagreements over curricula, instruction, and assessment. District administrators and staff differed in their views of what improved instruction and outcomes would look like, and the differing views had become entrenched in particular central office units – expressing and enforcing the district’s organizational fragmentation. The existence of factions that held differing philosophies of effective math and literacy instruction and conceptions of evidence undermined the development of resources for system change and resulted in inconsistent messages being sent to schools.

Although competing views of effective instruction are endemic to education and common in large urban school districts, the fact that they became housed in different units responsible for working with schools created tensions between the units and thwarted communication and collaboration. These differences were rooted in district
administrators’ professional histories (for example, those with a special education background promoted particular views of effective assessments and their use in instruction) and in the district’s reform history (for example, Arts in Education, NSF, and myriad school-based instructional initiatives).

During the first and second year of the partnership, an “assessment summit” aiming to address and resolve these issues was in the works. The key focus of this district forum was to be the assessment system needed to support teachers’ use of data to improve their instruction. The fact that this summit was scheduled and re-scheduled twice, and never held, testifies to political contests surrounding the assessment of student learning outcomes.

**Culture of school autonomy.** Further undermining coherent system policy for instructional improvement was a strong tradition of school autonomy in Minneapolis. This was reinforced by the ‘choice’ culture and policies of the State Education Agency. Minnesota has led the nation in public school choice policy formation for the better part of two decades. Within the district, an Office of Civil Rights court order for district desegregation in the late 1980’s spurred magnet programs and an elaborate busing plan that redirected students to various schools outside of their neighborhoods. Special school programs were the driver for desegregation, creating many distinctive instructional programs within the district. School choice options in MPS contributed to incoherent district instructional policies, since central office units were responsible to support schools’ special programs, operating more as service providers to the schools than supporters of a district instructional program.

In choosing urban districts for TLP partnerships, the initiative expected challenges of the sort that Minneapolis posed. However, the selection criteria emphasized superintendent leadership for change and assumed that it would be stable in the districts chosen for initial partnerships. This turned out not to be the case in Minneapolis. Also the initiative assumed that the co-design strategy and long-term commitment of the Foundation would provide the shared ownership and time needed for significant and sustainable district reform. However, instability in the TLP’s leadership and uncertainty about the initiative’s future undermined the partnership.

**Leadership instability in the district.** TLP’s partnership with Minneapolis Public Schools from Fall 2002 through Spring 2005 involved three different superintendents and two TLP capacity-building organizations. Partnering relationships were disrupted further by turnover of the MPS Teaching and Instructional Services director during this same period (see Appendix B.1 for a timeline of leadership change within the initiative). These changes meant that partnering relationships and shared understandings had to be recreated several times during this period. This demand presented considerable challenges to the national capacity-building organizations working with the district, as well as to district leaders invested in the co-designed reform work.

During the course of CPRE’s work with MPS, much of the co-design partnering and implementation took place at the middle level of the system responsible for math and for literacy. Yet changes in leadership at the top of the system created uncertainty at all
system levels. For example, superintendent turnover interrupted the development of the literacy and math frameworks, as well as plans for the 2004 institute follow up sessions (late-start days for professional development). District messages to schools regarding the frameworks and follow-up sessions were inconsistent and somewhat erratic in nature. During the last year of TLP in Minneapolis, the new superintendent’s firings and transfers of leaders who had been involved in TLP’s work on literacy and math reform and leadership development most likely undermined district capacity for instructional improvement that had been built during the previous two years.

Change in TLP leadership. The Minneapolis partnership also experienced a change in TLP’s capacity-building leadership. During 2003-04, the Foundation brought AISR on as the TLP capacity-building organization and phased out CPRE’s work in Minneapolis in Spring 2004. This decision was made in the context of planning for additional district partnerships and was based on indications that CPRE lacked capacity to expand its support to include additional districts, while AISR had a track record of working simultaneously with multiple districts on system reform. An effort to smooth the transition of TLP’s leadership in Minneapolis by establishing a co-director relationship between the organizations created confusion for the district about the nature of the partnership and uncertainty between the organizations about how to coordinate the work. After some months, AISR was designated as sole capacity builder. This transition occurred during a time when the district was recruiting a new superintendent, and there was a leadership vacuum in the central office. In effect, there was no district administrator who could effectively negotiate and manage the development of a new partnership relationship.

Further, the transition in TLP leadership brought new expectations for reform focus and roles that district administrators and staff perceived as inconsistent with negotiated understandings and relationships. AISR emphasized the full set of TLP Elements, while CPRE had led with a focus on targeted professional development (one of the Elements). District leaders were only vaguely familiar with TLP’s theory of action and did not own it as the framework for the partnership. Further, the change effectively brought to an end collaborative work between CPRE and the district, such as a “Beat the Odds” research project to identify demonstration sites for professional development. Thus, many leaders in the district expressed the view that they were starting over in the partnership when AISR came on board, and some felt that their investment in working with CPRE had been betrayed by the foundation.

Experience with the co-design partnership principle

TLP’s co-construction approach was not well specified at the start of the initiative, as noted earlier, and the partnership in Minneapolis had a difficult time enacting it. TLP policies to support co-design – requirements that a local design team be created to work with the external partners and that the capacity builder be a member of the district cabinet – were not well implemented in Minneapolis. A local design group was convened in Fall 2002 – involving all district administrators, union leaders, selected principals and teacher leaders – but it did not include community members and was never convened again. And,
while significant in theory, the Foundation’s requirement that a \textit{TLP} representative be included in district cabinet meetings was neither practical (since the national organization could be there only periodically) nor sufficient to establish authority in internal deliberations. (See Appendix B for further detail on the evolution of \textit{TLP}’s partnership with Minneapolis.)

People in the district brought various interpretations of co-design to partnering work, leaning toward one or another of the conventional partnership models. Some expected that CPRE would tell them what to do and were disappointed that they did not bring an institute design for them to implement. Others expected CPRE to serve as consultant to the district, making \textit{ad hoc} requests for advice on the fine-tuning of extant district policy. District staff members who had learned the general principle of co-construction partnering came to expect equal influence over all decisions that affect the partnership, including staffing decisions related to external partners.

Exacerbating uncertainties surrounding the notion of “co-construction” in the partnership was CPRE’s limited focus on \textit{TLP}’s theory of action defined by the Elements. During the first critical year of the partnership, CPRE leadership did not sufficiently scaffold or nurture shared understandings of \textit{TLP}’s vision for district reform. After a planning retreat, communication and relationships between CPRE and district leaders focused on math and literacy professional development and related research and leadership projects. Although the union was squarely on board with \textit{TLP}’s agenda, its grassroots leadership in the district was not effectively engaged in system-wide reform. For one, co-planning for summer institutes overshadowed an initiative for teacher research that the union had begun prior to \textit{TLP}, thus undermining the union leaders’ efforts. More fundamentally, many people in the district central office avoided communicating and collaborating with union leaders. In effect, the union and its considerable work toward professionalizing teaching in the district constituted another silo in the Minneapolis system.

The fact that there had been little communication between \textit{TLP} agents and district leaders about the initiative’s theory of action, and that the initial work in MPS focused on professional development, meant that many in the district, including the MPS School Board, believed that \textit{TLP} was a professional development initiative only. This initial frame became a source of confusion and reluctance among district leaders to engage system reform more generally. District administrators were puzzled when CRC presented documentation findings for MPS relevant to all \textit{TLP} Elements after the first year, for example; and they did not welcome AISR’s contribution of a framework for assessing district progress on indicators aligned with the Elements during the second year of the partnership.

In terms of decision processes, CPRE leaders and Foundation officers consistently emphasized a balanced influence of internal and external partners in decision-making and the use of clinical expertise and research evidence to inform decisions. This principle for partnering proved to be inadequate and, in some respects, misleading. Roles of internal and external partners were not clear, and district administrators and staff were uncertain
about how much and for what they could count on the external capacity-building organization. They were confused also about the kinds of decisions over which they would have equal influence. During the second year of the partnership, TLP’s district liaison initiated an Alignment Committee with the goal of increasing communication and coordination across the multiple units involved in one-on-one partnering with CPRE. At a meeting with Foundation officers in Spring 2004, district leaders expressed their frustration over the vague concept of “co-construction” and asked for clarification from the Foundation about authority relationships in the partnership. This experience suggests that the novelty of a co-design approach to district partnerships calls for clearer definition and guidance for implementing it, perhaps with an intermediary organization that is on site more often than CPRE or AISR could be.

Further, the fragmented organization structure of the MPS central office meant that change from a “silo” model of reform work to one that entailed coordination across units presented a threat to district leaders’ autonomy. CPRE’s approach of working one-on-one with the heads of several different divisions adapted to this condition but also reinforced, rather than challenged, central office fragmentation. This tack adapted to habits and preferences in the district culture, but undermined the goal of building coherence – revealing a tension between the co-design partnering principle and a system reform strategy that would lead with TLP’s Elements as a model to be implemented.

For all of these reasons, district ownership of the intended comprehensive system reform initiative was never established in Minneapolis. District leaders and staff regarded TLP as “the MacArthur project,” rather than “our” reform work. District leaders took the typical view of grant-funded initiatives as supporting a piece of work with limited accountability. This view was perhaps encouraged by CPRE’s initial partnering with Superintendent Johnson, since she decided for the district to focus on professional development, and certainly was supported by limited engagement of a local design group and ultimately by the absence of a local leader with authority to carry a more ambitious system reform view. Further, the legacy of a strong site-based management culture constrained district leaders’ ability to create a system agenda for reform, especially with leadership turnover at the superintendent level.

TLP’s experience in Minneapolis points to another challenge of implementing co-design as a principle for partnerships with districts. In theory, co-design works because it builds upon research knowledge and expertise brought by the external partner and clinical knowledge and expertise existing within the district. However, this assumption was not always met in the partnership with MPS. For example, in literacy reform work, leaders on both sides of the partnership lacked knowledge and experience adequate to ensure coherent, high-quality professional development. Even when CPRE brought in local university professors with expertise in literacy to work with district staff, their initial lack of knowledge of, and respect for, one another’s expertise inhibited collaborative work. They had very different ideas of what good reading was and what good professional development looked like and were unable to find ways to work with one another initially.
Finally, the assumption that co-construction would create shared responsibility and mutual accountability for results did not hold up. Experience in MPS suggests that district leaders regarded this stance as unrealistic. Particularly in the context of high-stakes accountability to federal and state authorities for improved student outcomes, district leaders saw accountability for reform success as heavily weighted in their direction. An external partner does not share consequences that districts and schools bear for falling short of their outcome goals. In this circumstance, district folks felt that they had to be the ultimate decision makers even when others may have had greater expertise in a given area. This imbalance between partners created by external accountability pressures suggests a need for greater clarity about the meaning and boundaries of mutual responsibility and accountability in a partnership of the sort that TLP promoted.

Despite troubles encountered in enacting the co-design principle over time and limited district understanding of the theory of action, TLP’s partners’ initial decision to concentrate initial system reform efforts on district-wide professional development was made jointly by Superintendent Carol Johnson and Tom Corcoran of CPRE and focused through a decision process that involved a broad constituency. A two-day retreat to establish TLP professional development priorities involved a local “Design Team” that included all central office administrators, union presidents, and several principals and teacher leaders. Decisions were reached to establish sustained, high-quality professional development in literacy and math. Collaborative design of professional development resulted in 2003 summer literacy and math institutes and follow up work involved grade-level teams from all district schools (see Appendix B for detail).

**District system outcomes of TLP work**

Outcomes of the partnership’s efforts go well beyond the improved quality of district professional development. The decision to begin with professional development reform was made with shared understandings among Superintendent Johnson, Union President Louise Sundin, and CPRE’s Tom Corcoran that other system conditions essential to continuous improvement would be engaged by the design for summer institutes. For example, the decision to require school teams to participate in the institutes and follow up sessions was made with the goal of developing teacher communities of practice in district schools (one TLP Element), and the decision to include teachers as facilitators was intended to further collaborative system leadership (another TLP Element).

Levers and footprints of TLP’s work in Minneapolis thus involve several Elements that were enlisted in support of professional development system reform or were seen as intended outcomes, even though most district leaders were not aware that they were central to the initiative’s vision. These are described for three levels of the system, in turn: central office administration, the middle system—including district staff and teacher leaders, and schools.

**District capacity for professional development and related Elements grew.** Capacity development in Minneapolis centered on professional development reform, but also entailed shifts in district resource allocation and incentives to promote professional learning communities in schools and collaborative district leadership. Professional
development reform also promised gains in *system focus and coherence* as units with instructional authority were called upon to coordinate their work in support of the summer institutes and school-based follow up work. In short, *TLP*’s initial focus on developing a district professional development system aimed to leverage change on several of the initiative’s Elements.

Professional development designs featured intensive summer institutes, which were well attended and enthusiastically received, and follow up work throughout the year. Coherence and quality were greater in math than in literacy, because the math institutes were grounded in instructional standards and texts and math leaders and facilitators had developed effective working relationships and experience doing professional development with peers through the district’s NSF grant. The literacy team started afresh and struggled to develop institute content and collaborative relationships. Nonetheless, both literacy and math institutes received very high ratings from teachers on exit surveys, and the ratings for math were only slightly higher than for literacy.

Both district teams made improvements in the design and implementation of the institutes between Summer 2003 and Summer 2004. The design for follow up work with schools included: off-site sessions, school-based study groups, coaching from school coaches and district staff, professional development for coaches, and principal support. These design features were implemented in varying degrees and quality, as elaborated in the next section on school outcomes. The 2003-04 follow up work was generally poor: off-site sessions were of uneven quality and not well attended, study groups were implemented unevenly across schools, school coaching was generally very weak if implemented at all, district staff support varied in quality, coach professional development in literacy was partially and poorly implemented, and most principals had not been prepared to support school teams’ work to improve literacy or math instruction. Given evidence that follow up sessions were poorly attended and that principals in many schools did not take the work seriously, the district redesigned the 2004-05 follow up work to address some of the problems encountered during the first year: time was created for on-site follow up sessions, and principals were required to attend the summer institute and were prepared to provide better support of their teachers’ improvement efforts in math or literacy.

During this period, the district moved toward a more *systemic view and approach to professional development*, as evidenced by several design changes between the first and second summer institutes. For one, a strategy for spreading and sustaining teacher learning in math and literacy was implemented. The institute designs included separate curricula for new teachers and continuing teachers from each school, with curriculum for the returning teachers designed to build upon and deepen content from the prior year. Second, the partners co-constructed a new summer institute in secondary literacy, including high school teams for the first time. This responded to growing district recognition of teachers’ professional development needs in the area of adolescent literacy; strategically, it extended the reach of district literacy reform to all grade levels. Third, principals were required to participate in content-focused professional development during the first two days of the institutes. This strategy for engaging
principals in the substance and support of institute work was a major change from the 2003 institutes, which included principals only on the last day and drew about one-third of the district principals. Sessions with literacy and math experts were designed to develop principals’ understandings of current evidence regarding effective math or literacy instruction and to engage them in conversation about how to promote and support improved teaching and learning in their schools.

**Resource reallocation** to support high-quality, district-wide professional development entailed mainly the redirection of roles and time of Teaching and Instructional Services (TIS) staff that previously existed, as well as staff expansion with TLP resources. Institute planning consumed the effort of district math and literacy teams during spring and summer of 2003 and of 2004\(^{10}\). Also, according to the institute follow up designs, district support to schools was reallocated disproportionately to meet the needs of the district’s lowest-performing schools. This design was not well implemented, however, since TIS staff tended to concentrate their work in schools that were most hospitable and promising; some of the weakest schools received little district support for literacy or math instructional improvement. Professional development and evaluation resources from an NSF grant were reallocated to support TLP-designed summer math institutes and follow up work.

The partners created or leveraged several kinds of incentives for schools’ and teachers’ involvement in literacy and math institutes and development of school-based professional communities of practice focused on improving instruction. Incentives included stipend for summer institute participation, course credit option, salary step increase option, and policy that allowed teachers to link their mandated individual professional development plan to institute follow-up work.\(^{11}\) The incentives were effective in achieving desired levels of participation in the summer institutes, though not in sustaining follow-up effort or developing teacher communities or collaborative school leadership for instructional improvement. The latter depended upon school-based leadership, incentives, and support.

The district’s **professional capacity** for designing and implementing the high-quality professional development institutes developed over the two years, with teacher facilitators from 2003 taking lead roles in the 2004 institutes. Supporting this transition was the collaborative leadership and community of practice that had developed in the math and literacy teams through the institutes and follow-up work. Another step forward was the collaboration of literacy and math teams with ELL and Cultural Diversity units of TIS to develop institute content to guide teachers’ instruction with under-performing students in the district. Although we lack quality indicators of the resulting content, this

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\(^{10}\) Superintendent Johnson left the district in Summer 2003; continued work on professional development reform depended upon leadership within the Teaching and Instructional Services unit and its strategic use of resources to support the institutes and follow up work in district schools.

\(^{11}\) Corcoran worked with MFT president Sundin and university authorities to establish these incentives. Over 400 teachers from all district schools (excepting the eight Read First schools) participated in the 2003 institutes, and the majority took advantage of the link to MFT-MPS Professional Pay Plan for salary step credits and/or the University credit option. The number of participating teachers jumped to 700 in 2004.
represents progress in the units’ capacity to share knowledge and collaborate to advance instructional improvement in the district.

District leadership and responsibility for the institutes grew between the two years. Particularly in literacy, CPRE had taken primary responsibility in 2003 for facilitating the planning and design process and brokering expertise resources. In the second year, both math and literacy teams took the lead, and TLP capacity builders played a limited support role. This transition was not entirely smooth, however. Given some difficulty working together as a full literacy team, the grade-level groups broke out and developed their own designs, resulting in plans that were somewhat inconsistent in content pedagogy and quality. Both teams called upon individuals from TLP-developed expert panels to participate in the institutes; in other words, district leaders independently pursued relationships with the math and literacy experts that CPRE originally had mediated.

Each of these changes signaled increased district capacity to design and support professional learning opportunities in support of improved math and literacy instruction across the system. Given the dismal state of MPS professional development that CPRE and consultants had documented in 2002-03, the extent to which strategies and leadership for systemic and targeted professional development evolved over two years was striking and well received by district teachers, as noted earlier and elaborated below.

Collaborative leadership to support district-wide instructional improvement grew more broadly within the district central office. The launching of district-wide professional development in math and literacy put forces into motion that demanded greater communication and collaboration among central office units. For example, in response to weak principal turnout for the 2003 institutes, TIS and the Elementary and Middle School units worked together on designs to include principals in content-focused professional development in the 2004 literacy and math institutes. Over the course of the second year, district administrators increasingly began to share responsibility and ownership of professional development reform. An important move toward collaborative leadership in the central office was the introduction of school case investigations as part of regular Executive Leadership Team [cabinet] meetings during 2003-04. The case discussions were designed to promote problem solving across divisions in support of TIS coaching with schools in follow up to the institutes. One low-performing district school was the focus for each meeting, and the principal was present. All TIS staff who were working with the school, including literacy, math, ELL, special education staff, prepared information about the school and their work with the school. This practice advanced capacity on several TLP Elements – collaborative leadership, use of evidence to guide practice, and professional community in the central office. While initiated to support professional development reform, it had more far-reaching effects for communication across units and between schools and the central office.

The professional development design aimed to increase the focus and coherence of math and literacy instruction in the district – since schools and teachers would become more committed to, and proficient in, implementing the district curriculum. This appears to have happened to some extent in mathematics, in that more schools became committed
to using the district-adopted elementary and middle school math programs and teachers reported that they better understood the principles embedded in them. Prior NSF-funded professional development had been limited to short workshops and voluntary Saturday sessions that reached small numbers of teachers; and the district office was aware that the Everyday Math curriculum was being implemented unevenly and often poorly across schools. The summer math institutes, with required participation of teacher teams from half the district schools, were a significant jump in quality of learning opportunities and reach. Schools got the message that Everyday Math was not a voluntary program; one principal in our sample who had previously discouraged teachers’ use of the program began to mandate its use in all grades. Teacher teams learned in much greater depth how to use the curriculum well with their students.

In literacy, the lack of a district framework for curriculum and instruction constrained the development of a coherent instructional program. Nonetheless, teachers who participated in the institutes developed shared language and views about the reading strategies that their students should develop. Evidence from school case studies suggests, however, that only those schools with strong teacher leadership were able to develop more coherent approaches to literacy instruction through their institute experiences.

Significantly, the Minneapolis partnership did not attend to the matter of public support of reform, one of TLP’s core Elements. Community members were not involved in conversations about, or in the design of, system improvement efforts. Notably, the school board remained largely uninformed about the theory of action for TLP’s partnering with the district, even though MacArthur Foundation officers met with Board leaders at strategic moments in the initiative’s work in Minneapolis. One unanticipated negative consequence of this neglect is that the Board was neither able to use TLP’s vision for system reform as a criterion for selecting a new superintendent nor was it committed to defining the initiative’s partnership as core to the district’s improvement efforts. During Superintendent Peebles’ tenure (2004-05), TLP’s work in the district was not sustained at either the central office level or the division level.

*The middle system developed through TLP work.* In TLP’s vision of system capacity for continuous improvement, professionals at all levels of the system collaborate in using evidence to evaluate and improve their practice to achieve quality and equity in student outcomes. While MPS professional development reform was designed to nurture these practices in district schools, it also had intended and unintended positive consequences for the development of the district’s ‘middle-system’ infrastructure for instructional improvement. This concept refers to the professionals who work between the central office administrative units and district schools and classrooms, the soft infrastructure that is essential to system change.12

*Professional communities of practice* in TIS literacy and math units were strengthened and expanded. Staff and teacher leaders’ ability to support one another’s learning developed through the joint work entailed in developing, implementing, and reflecting on the summer institutes and follow up work. A middle system infrastructure

had developed to some extent prior to TLP, through staff and teachers’ collaborative work on the district’s NSF grant, but the intensity and scale of summer institute work was a stronger setting for professional community development. A middle level infrastructure for leadership in literacy simply did not exist when TLP started, and the development of leadership among the teacher facilitators who were involved in the summer institutes significantly broadened and deepened the system’s capacity for improving literacy instruction.

TLP’s efforts to promote evidence-based literacy and math institutes resulted in an expanded community of practice including external experts. During the first planning year, the partners brokered relationships between the planning teams and literacy experts at University of Minnesota and math experts at WestEd and also, in year two, Mills College. The use of these expert resources differed for the two content areas. Through their NSF work, members of the math team had deepened their content knowledge and developed collegial ties that helped them to make good use of expert support in developing the institute curriculum. The literacy team was newly formed and had weaker capacity to use expert knowledge and to create a focused and coherent institute curriculum. However, by the second year, the boundaries of the literacy community of practice had expanded to include content experts outside the system. As their content knowledge grew, literacy team members’ skepticism about ‘experts’ shifted to a stance of trust and respect, and during the second year’s institute planning they sought knowledge and specialized support from external advisors.

TLP-initiated expert panels helped to develop the district’s capacity to use evidence to guide professional development and instruction in math and made it possible for literacy and math leaders to address long-standing disagreements over instruction. The partners enlisted literacy and math experts as presenters in the institutes and as members of expert panels formed to advise the district on instructional improvement, make presentations to principals and other district leaders, and review draft content instruction frameworks. The presentations introduced research-based evidence calling for balance between approaches to literacy and math that some in the district regarded as competing, e.g., emphasis on phonics versus comprehension in literacy. These messages provided an opening for new dialogue among district leaders whose views had been pitted against one another and the potential for greater consensus and more coherent communications to teachers. They helped legitimize the role of math and literacy leaders – the district’s “middle system” – to lead efforts to improve instruction in district schools.

Research on district reform suggests that growth in middle-system capacity for leadership is critical to instructional improvement across schools. Central office staff who work with teacher teams, principals, and on-site coaches play vital roles in mediating between district and schools. Patricia Burch and James Spillane (2004) note that district offices “are primarily responsible for cultivating the exchange of information and expertise within and across schools, between schools and third parties, and between leaders working at the very top of the system and those running reforms from inside the
schools. TLP’s work with Minneapolis helped to develop literacy and math teams that could broker a district vision of quality instruction and support its implementation.

**Schools differed in their experiences and outcomes.** MPS district reform work aimed to improve the quality of math and literacy instruction and, further, to leverage and nurture the development of several key TLP Elements across district schools. Designs for the summer institutes and follow up aimed to increase evidence-based practice in literacy and math, develop collaborative leadership in math and literacy, and create teacher communities of practice—all of which would support continued improvement of teaching and learning across all district schools. Since these school-level outcomes are the bottom line for TLP, this report includes some of the fine-grained evidence from documentation research in a sample of MPS schools. Findings show that, while teacher enthusiasm for the institute experience was common across schools, the intended school culture outcomes were realized only in some schools.

*Teachers were unanimously positive about the literacy and math institutes.* The summer institutes were a radical departure from the kind of district professional development MPS teachers had experienced in the past. This contrast was a source of enthusiasm over the institutes. Teachers felt that they were “treated as professionals!” This assessment meant several things to the teachers we talked with during and after the institutes – being greeted by the superintendent and institute leaders, participating as a school team with the goal of collaborating in the coming year, having an active role in grade-level sessions rather than being talked at, having time to reflect and share with colleagues, and having plenty of good food. One TIS leader summed up the institute feedback this way:

> Across the board, the feedback was really good. Everybody is aware that these institutes were an experiment, a risk, because they were doing such different things, but they came off successfully. Teachers really enjoyed collaborating with others from other schools, and it taught us that some cross-school work matters—even though site based is important—it’s good to work with teachers from the grade level from other buildings... Teacher feedback was very strong. They seemed to really value the four days. I thought they’d say, “At least you fed us and paid us well,” but the response was far more positive than I thought.

School principals and the union president echoed the strong teacher endorsements and were ready to forge ahead on the agenda of establishing a new paradigm of professional development for the district after the success of 2003 institutes.

Beyond expressing enthusiasm over the new form of professional development, teachers also reported learning new ways of thinking about instruction and reported making changes in their content instruction. Teacher learning in mathematics was geared to the Everyday Math (EM) and Connected Math Program (CMP) curricula, as

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13 Burch, Patricia and James Spillane (2004). Leading from the Middle. Chicago: Cross City Campaign.  
14 Evidence of instructional outcomes comes from follow-up interviews and focus groups with teachers in case study schools. Classroom observations are consistent with the reports on practices, however we lack baseline data for documenting change.
featured in the institutes, and to exemplars (assessment tools) featured in follow up sessions. In literacy, teacher learning was geared to reading strategies emphasized in the institutes and follow ups.

**Mathematics.** Teachers involved in the mathematics summer institute uniformly said that they had developed a stronger grasp of the EM or CPM mathematics curriculum. They contrasted the practicality of the institutes to other professional development opportunities that had provided few concrete ways to manage the curriculum. In a focus group of middle school teachers, one teacher remarked that “there were definitely ideas that you could take out of there…and what I like about some of it was there was a lot on how to initiate conversations [with students] about math.”

In particular, teachers learned critical facts and understanding of how the EM curriculum is organized for instructional pacing. Many teachers commented in interviews that prior to the institute they had the misconception that they should cover, and students should master, all content in each unit: however the curriculum spirals concepts and specifies grade-appropriate levels of mastery (called “secure” concepts and skills). The district had not provided adequate prior professional development on the underlying logic of instruction embedded in the curriculum and the ways in which curriculum materials are to be used in instruction. One teacher told us that “Understanding the curriculum and spending time to get to that understanding was so crucial for me.” Her grade-level team reported that the EM concept of “secure” goals that was covered at the institutes helped them gain confidence, adjust their pacing, and refine student testing. A teacher from another school commented that as a result of attending the math summer institute, she finally “got it:”

*When the district bought this curriculum (Everyday Math), I had gone to a four-hour training ...[T]hey never explained how that (curriculum) works ... But when they told me there are secure goals ...the developing [goals]....boom. I can get through this unit on this scale...I wasn’t stressed then. But they had never shared that with us. And it was this institute where we learned some of those things.*

In math institute follow up sessions teachers learned how to use rubrics for exemplars (math tasks aligned with items on the state’s assessment), mandated for inclusion in math instruction by the district beginning for 2003-04. Our observations of their use in school study groups revealed that teachers’ comprehension of the process was quite variable; some teachers did not understand, for example, that students should use the rubrics to assess their own performance and, instead, treated the rubric simply as a grading tool. Since the district had mandated that all K-8 teachers use the exemplars and rubrics with their students, it is likely that such misconceptions were common; the institutes were thus critical for implementing this new assessment policy.

Another general outcome was teachers’ renewed interest in strengthening their practice in mathematics. Some teachers commented that they had felt math to be a weakness of theirs and had gained knowledge and confidence that helped in their teaching. Many teachers spoke of their increased enthusiasm for mathematics instruction
after seeing how to make it more engaging for students. A middle school math teacher commented that the experience gave a “spark” to the new school year:

_We did a problem every day and they [institute facilitators] would kind of model a way to present it and to go through the problem...And, I mean, with us it was pretty easy because we love it so, and we all have ideas ... it was nice to find a way to spark conversation [among students] regarding certain problems, and I think I carried a little bit of that into the class this year._

**Literacy.** The institute’s focus on reading strategies aimed to provide teachers with new conceptual tools to help students improve their reading comprehension. Most of the teachers we interviewed reported that they were trying out the strategies with students in their classrooms. Limited observational data confirm that some teachers used comprehension strategies in their reading instruction, bringing in specific ideas such as ‘using one’s own prior experiences to interpret and appreciate text’. Some teachers reported that the new ideas had caused dramatic change in their practice, though all felt that this was work in progress. “Just using the thinking strategies is really pretty different from things that I have done in the past,” one teacher said. “So I feel really like I am at the very beginning of something.” Some teachers had written up literacy strategies on colorful construction paper signs and posted them on the walls for their students to use as guides.

Even when they could not point to changes in their teaching, teachers reported that the institutes had transformed their beliefs about literacy instruction. In developing a new perspective on reading, they had begun to reflect on their teaching and student learning in new ways, arguably an important outcome of professional development.

**Schools differed in capacity to benefit from the institutes.** Minneapolis schools did not benefit equally from the district’s new professional development paradigm in part because they did not implement the design uniformly. Teachers’ engagement in the institute follow up work during 2003-04 and 2004-05 differed between schools in terms of attendance and the extent and quality of collaboration with institute colleagues in school study groups, access to quality coaching, and use of TIS staff support. Differences were related to two factors:

- school readiness, in terms of *TLP* Elements
- whether or not the school had a special instructional program

Schools with very low levels of readiness on teacher community and collaborative leadership and schools with special educational programs that diverted their attention from the district’s core curriculum benefited least.

**Design for following schools.** The eight K-8 schools followed by the Documentation team spanned the range of MPS school readiness on *TLP* Elements in the spring of 2003. In order to investigate whether and how these differences matter for school experiences with district reform, CRC developed teacher survey indicators to measure and track professional communities of practice, collaborative leadership, and evidence-based
practice. Using school scores on these measures, documenters defined readiness levels as “Beginning,” “Emerging,” or “Advanced.” According to these criteria, in Spring 2003 the district’s K-8 schools include 27% at the Beginning level, 47% at the Emerging level, and 26% at Advanced level. By design, the sample over-represents the most challenged district schools: in 2003, four case study schools were at Beginning level, three at Emerging, and one at Advanced levels in 2003. Figure 1 shows how the case study schools differed from the district average on professional communities of practice.15

These schools also differed in whether or not they had a special instructional program. Three schools in the sample had magnet programs or Comprehensive School Reform Designs (CSRDs) that were established for the school and enforced by the principal and through relationships with school stakeholders (parents who chose the program and professional or organizational partners). One was a fine arts magnet, one had an arts partnership for math instruction, and one had a Direct Instruction CSRD grant that promoted a form of instruction that was out of sync with the district’s Everyday Math program and the institute’s content. Table 1 locates the case study schools in terms of their readiness and program mission.

Figure 1. Case Study School Scores on Professional Community of Practice: 2003 baseline data

15 School scores on this measure correlate in the range of r=.6 to .8 with measures of other TLP practice Elements.
Role of school readiness. Differences in professional culture in 2002-03 affected how schools responded to, and took advantage of, district professional development opportunities designed by the partnership. The beginning, emerging, and advanced schools varied in whether and how they supported teachers’ involvement in planned follow-up work and provided a professional culture to support ongoing learning and change.

In Beginning schools, baseline survey and interview data revealed little or no teacher collaboration around instruction. Some of these schools had a strong team at a particular grade level or in a subject area but no forum for expanding constructive work school-wide. A teacher in one school described the priorities in his school as “me first, team second, the rest of the building third.”

Teacher teams who went to the institutes from these schools were no less enthusiastic than those from other schools in the district. In fact, teams from three of these four schools left the institute believing that they could work together to turn around their school, at least in mathematics or in literacy. However, momentum from the institute was quelled by weak school professional community. Participation in follow up activities fell

Table 1. Case Study Schools: School Program Type and TLP Readiness

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TLP Readiness(^1) (2002-03)</th>
<th>Regular School Program</th>
<th>Special School Program(^2)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Beginning</td>
<td>School F</td>
<td>School A</td>
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<td>School D</td>
<td>School B</td>
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<td>Emerging</td>
<td>School I</td>
<td>School G</td>
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<td>School E</td>
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<tr>
<td>Advanced</td>
<td>School H</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

1 School readiness is measured by teacher survey indicators of TLP Elements: Professional Communities of Practice, Collaborative Leadership, and Evidence-based Practice. Across all MPS schools, 27% are classified as Beginning, 47% as Emerging, and 26% as advanced, according to our groupings of schools by scores on these measures.

2 Special program missions include a magnet program or Comprehensive School Reform design that affect the whole school program or instruction in literacy or math. Schools with other grants, such as Annenberg Arts for Achievement, are not classified as having a special school program.
off in the face of daunting teaching challenges, a culture of isolated practice, and weak administrative support. In all but one of the schools, the team professional learning communities (PLCs) that were meant to support ongoing content-focused improvement efforts faded out over the course of the school year. One teacher cited the lack of principal leadership as a key factor in the demise of the PLC:

I mean there hasn’t really been an emphasis, ‘Look, that is really important that you guys attend these follow-ups. It’s really important that you guys observe each other and learn from each other. I want you to spend one time a month learning from one another and doing these lesson studies.’ And that hasn’t happened.

Collaborative leadership was notably weak in these schools, with high teacher turnover and unstable administrative leadership. In two of the schools the principal provided weak leadership around instruction; in one, teachers perceived the principal as making unilateral decisions about their instruction. In each of these schools, teachers gave low ratings to collaborative leadership in the spring 2003 survey.

While School A’s baseline profile in spring 2003 matched that of other schools in this group, a new principal and intensive district support during 2003-04 turned the professional culture around. Therefore its pattern of response to district professional development differed from other schools at this baseline level. We feature this school as a case later in this section.

With the exception of School A, these schools also had relatively weak on-site coaching and took little advantage of TIS personnel assigned to their school. Teachers were accustomed to working in isolation and principals did not support the follow up work, so they were not hospitable sites for the TIS staff assigned to them. TIS staff, in turn, tended to invest their time and energy in working with more promising school communities. The district institutes and follow-ups did not leverage change in the professional communities of Beginning schools, except when combined with substantial additional supports as was the case in School A.

In Emerging schools, many teachers had begun their summer institute work with prior experience having formal and informal conversations with their colleagues around instruction. The grade-level teams that attended the institutes were ready to collaborate on improving instruction. Two of these three schools made significant progress over the year, according to their testimony and our on-site observations; while the special program school, as described later, disengaged from the institute work. These schools had previously developed the conditions of collaborative leadership and professional communities of practice that enabled them to benefit from the learning opportunities and resources afforded by the institutes.

16 Stability rates for Beginning school faculties between 2003-04 and 2004-05 were lower than for the other schools; 67% of the teachers remained in the school, compared to 77% in Emerging schools and 81% in the Advanced school.

17 By all indicators, this school had moved to an Emerging level of school culture by the end of the year (see Appendix B data for School A).
At one Emerging school, literacy institute work provided both the structure for strengthening teacher community and the content around which teachers collaborated. The school’s study group met regularly between follow-up sessions; they were routinely joined by the intern assistant principal and the literacy coaches, and quite regularly joined by their TIS support person. This group developed into a strong community of practice during the course of the year. They talked about learning strategies in reading, and teachers reported bringing questions about their own instruction to their colleagues for discussion. When asked where a teacher might go if she has questions about literacy instruction, a teacher pointed to many avenues for collegial support and learning in her school:

Oh, the Literacy Study Group and, also, we have a collaborative model. We meet every Wednesday morning. And in the hall or over the phone, call and ask questions. Or [the 2nd grade teacher]...because she’s going to the [follow-up] class, also. And one of the third grade teachers who didn’t go to the class, but joined the study group. We all develop our questions. We ask, “What if, why not, when to?” Or let’s call [TIS] because [they are] always in the building, or call [the assistant principal].

The institute work was integrated into a viable professional community and appeared to significantly deepen its content focus and expand its learning resources.

At the other progressing school in this category, teacher teams began to examine student work together through their institute work. Prior conditions in the school of collegiality and mutual trust supported their move deeper into content. A teacher described the change in these terms:

We talk about things all the time at lunch and we’re talking specifics. That’s never happened. I mean, it’s happened a little bit. But now, it’s almost like the expectation as we realize that if we all help each other, we all do better. We all do better. I think that as times get tougher, you are called on to do that. But good or bad times, it’s a nice thing to do because you feel less alone.

This school benefited from an outstanding literacy coach who was active in the institutes and nurtured the development of teacher community around literacy instruction.

In fact, both of the Emerging schools that benefited from the institutes had teacher leaders who were involved in a district network of strong literacy teachers; one had been recruited as an institute facilitator and developed expertise in literacy and peer education. These individuals became the hub of the teacher communities that formed around improving literacy instruction, and they served as liaisons between the school and the district central office. They were proactive in seeking and communicating district professional development opportunities for teachers in the school, and they helped to ensure the ongoing support of TIS staff assigned to their schools. In turn, as discussed elsewhere, the TIS staff opted to work with schools where they had established “rapport”
with teachers. In these schools, district professional development reform appeared to be making a qualitative difference in teacher community norms and coherence of instructional standards between the school and district office.

The Advanced school was an exemplar of TLP’s Elements at the school level. It had one of the poorest student populations in the district (90% eligible for free meals, 63% African American, 44% English Learners) and one of the strongest school professional cultures in the district (see Figure 1). Over several years, with strong and stable principal and teacher leadership, the school had developed professional norms and practices that supported strong academic achievement for a student population with high annual turnover of 39% in 2003-04.

Most notable in the school was its use of data on individual student performance on monthly assessments to focus improvement efforts. It developed routines whereby teachers reviewed student performance data with each other and the principal, and the principal shared data with parents when their student was below grade level. The principal described the school’s transition to evidence-based practice as starting a few years ago with monthly assessments of students’ decoding skills in early grades and developing lists with names of children who are not reading. The routine they established made the diagnosis public and “not a shame” for either students or teachers. The principal described the resulting shift in school culture in this way:

There are no secrets... So you get the data. You look at it. You have some conversations surrounding who is making improvement and who is not and what is it that we need to do. The mere fact that teachers now know where their children are every month removes the mystery. It’s almost like in the past, I would have to have conversations; now they can have conversations.

This principal put trust in the knowledge and judgment of the school’s teachers. Her message to teachers was, “You know how to do this better. Tell me. If anyone has any ideas, I need to know. I need to have your ideas. Put it in writing so it doesn’t get lost…And when we make changes, I always give credit where credit is due.” Teachers responded well to this kind of collaborative leadership, showing a willingness to invest in the school. As one teacher described teachers’ work lives in the school:

Almost everybody has got some kind of extra thing that they do, whether they are the head of a committee, or they do mentoring of a kid, or they are in charge of PDPs [professional development plans]. Almost everybody has an extra job. There is a lot of work to be done, and a lot of people are doing it.

In this strong school community, teacher teams from 1st and 5th grades that participated in the math institutes took advantage of the learning opportunities afforded. Since the school made AYP, it did not receive coaching from the TIS staff. The teams attended the follow-up sessions and devoted their shared prep time or team meetings to discussions of student work. While they appreciated the content learning afforded by the institute, and felt that their EM instruction benefited, they were very critical of the
“lesson study” component of the follow-up sessions. In their view, the protocol was artificial and created a ritual format that inhibited their normal collaboration; their practice had matured beyond the need for structured prompts. Informally, these teachers talked about lesson plans in the hallways or before and after school, and new ideas about math instruction were valued learning resources. The institute work added to, but did not transform, learning in this school’s professional community. Yet, a 20-year veteran at the school said that the level of sharing and collegiality among teachers is at an all-time high.

Role of special school programs. In case study schools with special program missions – a fine arts magnet program, dance math program, and direct instruction CSR design – principals and teachers are juggling priorities when they respond to district professional development opportunities. Their responses to the literacy and math institutes thus were affected by these other priorities. Grants associated with the special program often are the focus of the school community. A teacher in one school listed her school’s grants, plus the school’s AYP status and staying in compliance with the OCR, as “what’s burning on everybody right now,” not district institute work.

In these schools, the district’s effort to bring coherence to literacy and math instruction and to professional development encountered the school’s effort to maintain its special program integrity. School responses to this collision of district and school programs differed in interesting ways, however. Among the three special program schools we followed, we found different patterns of responses. In one case, the school focused on institute work and carried out special program work in tandem (School A, discussed later). In another, the school incorporated the institute work into its dominant instructional philosophy, adapting it to fit the school’s program. Rather than changing its program, which was quite out of sync with the district design, the school incorporated materials and activities from the institute into established instructional routines. In the third school, the special program eventually squeezed out the coaching and study groups linked to institute literacy work. According to that school’s literacy coach, her plans for showing the videos of the district’s literacy expert panel discussion were repeatedly postponed to accommodate other events or priorities. She described the role of the special program grant in professional development: “That’s probably the biggest thing that we do here is the grant. I think everyone I know, everyone at this school has done something this year involved with that grant.” In contrast, the district institutes provided “stuff that I think good teachers already know. So I think they [teachers] are bored.” This school focuses teacher professional development on their specialized program.

An exception: Extraordinary district support enabled change in School A. One case study school illustrates the potential for intensive district support to make a substantial difference for school improvement on TLP Elements and, in turn, teaching and learning. The experience of School A during the 2003-04 school year points to the kind of district action it takes to move a school from Beginning to Emerging stages of professional community. In this case, teacher participation in the math institute was one of several interventions that worked synergistically to change the school culture and improve teaching and learning.
At the beginning of 2003-04, School A was in its 3rd year of AYP status and was among the weakest professional communities in the district. The district had assigned a new principal to the school – a novice principal who was committed to turning the school around and who requested necessary district support. He described the school community he entered as resistant to learning and to collaboration. Over the course of the year, with this principal’s leadership and significant supports from the district office and community partners, the school changed qualitatively. On survey measures of teacher community, the school moved from Beginning to Emerging (see Figure 2), and student test scores on the MCA improved dramatically.18 These data are consistent with teachers’ comments in spring interviews that the school culture had become much more positive under the new principal.

Figure 2. School A: Change on Measures of TLP Elements

From the beginning of the year, the principal received intensive and ongoing support from the district to support his own learning and capacity to turn the school around. He was assigned a half-time mentor, who also was a leader in the math institute; she was

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18 Between 2003 and 2004 MCA testing, student performance increased from 28% to 39% proficient in reading and 22% to 41% proficient in math. The school’s institute focus was math, which suggests that the extra professional development and district support in this area paid off beyond the benefits of school culture change.
hired by the district as a consultant to provide half-time curriculum support to the school. District office administrators and staff provided on-site consultation and support. The principal used school resources to contract with a local organization with a track record in supporting organizational change processes in business. He attended the one-day 2003 Leadership Institute, and TIS staff regularly visited the school to work with teachers on math institute follow-up and instruction. Further, he adopted the principal of nearby School H (the Advanced school in our sample, discussed above) to serve as an informal mentor, and he took teachers to the school to observe classes and grade-level team meetings and their use of assessment data to design instruction for individual students.

To encourage teachers to look at school performance and to start a dialogue about improvement, the principal organized staff development centered on evidence-based practice. He brought in district staff to go over test scores, to teach teachers how to use the district’s OCR database, and to group students for instruction. School H’s exemplary use of data to adapt instruction to students guided this focus. Although the principal faced resistance from teachers who preferred the old way, he persevered and reported a dramatic change by the end of the year: “People actually sit and work with each other and then talk about students, talk about data, and to be open to that. The focus now is on students versus on the principal or on the adults in the building.” Teachers reported that the principal’s message about TLP and the need for improvement was clear and consistent.

This case of school change offers evidence in support of TLP’s theory of action. Improved teaching and learning resulted from the school’s progress toward professional norms and practices represented by the Elements. Development of professional communities of practice, collaborative leadership, and evidence-based practice was accompanied by significant gains in student learning. The dramatic change in School A’s culture and student outcomes offers evidence that multiple and coherent district supports at the school level and collaborative leadership between levels of the district system can result in dramatic change. Conditions for change included the assignment of an energetic instructional leader as principal, provision of an expert mentor, central office encouragement and presence, intense professional development in math, and an outside consultant to help manage the organizational change process. This proactive principal engendered a level of central office support that was considerably beyond the district norm of school support, and evidence of its success could have been used by district leaders to define what it takes to turn a school around.19

However, School A was an exception in Minneapolis Public Schools; and the district lacked central office capacity and the political support it would need to invest heavily in transforming its weakest schools. This exception is also evidence of the district culture rule that site administrators are in the driver’s seat of school reform; this principal acted

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19 This school was featured in a session in the 2004 Leadership Institute. The principal highlighted his work with the organizational change consultant as key in turning around the school culture; and he used TLP Documentation data as evidence of school change. The district’s use of this case for principal professional development is evidence of its move toward using practice-based knowledge to support district-wide school improvement.
on his vision for district support needed to turn around his school. In general, the strongest schools serving poor students of color developed their capacity through exceptional principal leadership and local community engagement, rather than through district system policy and support.\(^{20}\) The weakest schools functioned in a leadership vacuum, and the district design for additional support to the AYP schools did not come close to the kind of infusion of resources it would take to turn around these schools.

This finding dovetails with evidence from other reform initiatives that show systematic inequalities in schools’ benefit from capacity-building efforts. For example, schools involved in the Bay Area School Reform Collaborative over a five-year period differed in their participation and benefits from this initiative. Schools with weak professional communities prior to the initiative benefited less than strong school communities; they were less engaged in activities designed to promote their use of evidence for school reform and, in turn, showed less growth in professional community and student achievement over time.\(^{21}\)

During the course of TLP’s work in Minneapolis, the state’s choice policy encouraged parents dissatisfied with their neighborhood school to leave the system. Public data showing unequal student outcomes across district schools fueled parent interest in equity, in particular their students’ access to well-prepared teachers who stay in their school.\(^{22}\) The local union publicly stated its willingness to address seniority policy related to the pattern. But middle-class communities pushed back on the district’s proposal to redress the inequities, including plans to close costly small schools in their neighborhoods, threatening to leave the district for local private schools.\(^{23}\) District inaction contributed to the steady exodus of students, especially from the lowest-capacity schools, under state legislation promoting inter-district choice. Minneapolis Public Schools was deeply entrenched in the class and race politics that swirl around equity-oriented reform efforts, and its failure to mobilize middle class support for change in resource allocation resulted in a steady loss of enrollment-based revenue and a growing fiscal crisis. TLP did not engage the community in its partnership with the district and so was not able to serve a leadership role to address issues that deeply divided the community and constrained system reform.

**Summary: Anticipated and unanticipated consequences**

TLP partners’ work on MPS professional development reform appeared to impact the district system in several ways. First, the co-designed summer institutes fostered an appetite for high quality learning opportunities among district teachers and

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\(^{20}\) This is the case for the “Advanced” school in our case study sample and, by all accounts, for other high-performing schools in the district.


\(^{22}\) Teacher turnover is highly related to neighborhood demographics in the district. Across district schools, average teacher experience is correlated -.54 with percent students eligible for free and reduced price meals and -.46 with percent African American students.

\(^{23}\) A recent proposal to the Board of Education to redirect state choice dollars from magnet school programs to “racially isolated” schools was put on hold. Such policy action would disrupt a set of other conditions associated with the local system of choice, including class size.
administrators. After experiencing sustained, content-focused professional development with school grade-level teams, teachers came to expect this kind of district support for their learning. Institute participation increased between 2003 and 2004 institutes from approximately 400 to 700 teachers, with 209 returning for a second year.

Second, district leadership in the middle system level developed through the institutes in ways that appeared to increase coherence between the central office and schools around content instruction. Teachers who were facilitators in the institutes became liaisons between their school community and the district TIS staff during the school year, thus enhancing vertical communication in the system and accountability to implement district designs for instruction and teacher learning.

Third, instructional coherence in mathematics and literacy increased through the institutes, particularly in mathematics where teachers and principals developed stronger commitment and ability to implement the district’s elementary and middles school math programs. In literacy, the summer institutes spread ideas about student learning and strategies for reading instruction across district schools, building a common knowledge base that grounded the subsequent development of a district literacy framework.

Fourth, schools’ unequal capacity to fully benefit from district professional development was an unanticipated negative consequence of the reform work, one that could ironically have deepened student achievement gaps in the district. The weak principal leadership, poor coaching, and novice teacher communities in the Beginning schools studied pointed to unequal distribution of professional capacities across district schools. The case of a “turnaround” school showed how a strong site administrator and intense district support to build stronger school communities were essential to developing a weak school’s capacity to benefit from a reformed professional development system.

Fifth, the district’s system of special school programs and choice policy posed special challenges to system coherence. The diversity of educational programs in the district systematically undermined instructional coherence and limited potential for system reform through central district policy and professional development.

Despite the partners’ intention to lead system change on most TLP Elements through MPS professional development reform, other Elements were not systematically engaged through co-designed work and changes might not be sustainable. In effect, the partnership with Minneapolis did not provide a fair test of the initiative’s theory of action. Nevertheless, the case is useful in suggesting principles to guide similarly ambitious system reform initiatives in education.

**TLP’s Lessons for District Reform**

A district capacity-building initiative like TLP is broadly focused, inherently complex, and not amenable to pre-specified designs to be implemented with fidelity. Its goal of system change means that the district’s history and culture, and capacities in all parts of the organization, must be considered in designing focus and strategies for change. The MacArthur Foundation and TLP leaders and advisors took on the ambitious challenges of district system reform, recognizing at the onset that the design of reform work would be customized and would be continually guided by evidence from research, knowledge from
practice at all levels of the system, and feedback from the documentation of change efforts.

*TLP’s experiences in Minneapolis help to identify the nature of national and local roles and capacities that are needed for a district reform initiative like *TLP* to succeed and ways in which they might be developed. The partnership revealed challenges of using research to define a vision for district reform, of implementing principles for a co-design relationship, and of sustaining a national district reform initiative.

**Implementing an ambitious district reform vision**

*TLP’s* Elements put forth an evidence-based vision of effective district reform and defined critical foci for system reform. However, the Elements were not an effective organizing force for the district, nor did they constitute a theory of action for *how* a district can move effectively to achieve the vision. Lessons from the Minneapolis experience center on the question of how research-based knowledge of effective district practice might have driven the partners’ reform work. They offer rudimentary principles for a theory of district change.

**The initiative needs to communicate its reform vision across the system.**

Minneapolis district partners had limited access to the knowledge that grounded the initiative’s Elements, and confusions over the focus and rationale for partnering work persisted at all system levels.

*TLP* should have worked more systematically to develop shared understandings with district leaders of the initiative’s vision of a high-performing district. Documents and other tools could have been used to ensure that *TLP*’s theory of action – the eight Elements and evidence about how they operate together to continually improve teaching and learning – was featured as the initiative’s vision for district reform. Regular conversations among core district staff and *TLP* capacity builders were needed to advance shared understandings and accountability for the ongoing district reform work.

**Developing collaborative leadership between system levels is key to district reform.**

Experience in MPS provides evidence that capacity at the “middle” of the system was essential to advancing the district theory of action for improved math and literacy instruction across district schools. Teacher learning and change were greatest in schools where there were teachers who were connected to district leaders and who carried messages, resources, and evidence between the district office and schools. The math team’s greater readiness to lead professional development came from the infrastructure of informal teacher leadership that had developed through prior NSF grants.

Literature on systemic reform initially focused on the alignment of curriculum and assessments at the top of the system as the primary lever for change. *TLP*’s theory of action saw the problem of change additionally as developing collaboration and coherent action among multiple levels of the system and between the system and communities. System reform in this view involves not just aligning policies and tools for coherent
direction to schools, but also changing relationships between the district office and schools to develop coherent system reform action.

**System reform calls for customized support to individual schools.** The experience in Minneapolis revealed that district capacity-building efforts can actually exacerbate school differences in capacity to improve instruction, rather than redress them. Schools relatively strong on *TLP* Elements at the beginning of the reform work were able to take advantage of all facets of the district’s redesigned professional development, while the weakest schools lacked a minimal level of leadership support and community strength to sustain the work.

Explicit attention to between-school inequalities is essential to a district system reform. A theory of action to address between-school inequalities in capacity will go more deeply into instruction and more broadly into politics than *TLP*’s Elements signaled and that its national capacity builders could address.

**Co-design partnership as a change strategy**

Although research on education reform points to the importance of forging a partnership between external and internal system actors, evidence from practice or research on how to do this is slim. *TLP*’s experiences in co-designing work with Minneapolis revealed challenges entailed in this partnering approach and suggest principles to guide future partnering practice in a district reform initiative.

*A co-design partnership needs guidelines for partnering practice.* Because a co-design approach to district reform departs from typical forms of partnership, it was not readily understood by district leaders nor easily enacted by initiative capacity builders. Clear definition of authority domains for each party and operating guidelines were lacking at the start of the initiative, and questions about the appropriate and effective role of the national intermediary organization became a major concern of *TLP* leaders and issue for MPS administrators and staff over time.24

Contractual agreements and guidelines are needed to scaffold the innovative co-design partnering relationships. Tools to support this understanding might include illustrations of how this model contrasts with the more conventional models and prompts for questions that the partners might ask of themselves and one another to avoid falling into the more familiar roles.

*A viable partnership depends upon shared understandings of the reform vision.* Minneapolis district partners had limited access to the knowledge base that grounded *TLP*’s vision, and the partnership provided few resources to advance shared understandings.

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24 A paper in progress by Cynthia Coburn provides an in-depth analysis of lessons learned from *TLP*’s co-construction approach to partnering between a district and external organizations.
Such an initiative depends upon the development of shared understandings between external partners and district leaders about the vision and nature of their collaboration. Such understandings can be developed through documents and tools focused on particular elements, forums of teachers, administrators and staff, and community leaders that used media to convey the theory and its evidence base, and the co-design of an indicator system for tracking the system’s change toward each Element. Regular conversations among core district staff and external partners are needed to advance shared understandings and accountability for the ongoing district reform work.

**Co-design system reform entails leading with district initiative to engage core problems.** The MPS partnership focused on content areas for instructional improvement that were defined by consensus as important, but attended little to conditions in the central office that constrained progress across district schools or to school conditions that would inevitably limit their progress.

External partners need a theory of action for engaging all parts of the system in change and a design for how to help the district implement it. The evidence base from TLP and related district reform initiatives is not adequate to ground such a theory. Nevertheless, learning theory provides a general principle that dovetails with case observations from this initiative: development can be scaffolded by an agent who models and supports a shift in practice over time. Tailoring collaboration on system reform to district contexts entails detailed attention to local culture, between-school inequalities, and particular schools’ needs. State and federal accountability policies drive a focus on low-performing schools, and external partners can help to design targeted efforts and to guide the change process in those schools.

**District and external partners should continually assess and improve their practice.** The theory of co-construction assumes that this arrangement will bring the best evidence to bear on problems of district change. The district brings local and practical knowledge to bear on design decisions, and external partners bringing knowledge from research and expertise from external networks. However, this assumption was not always met in Minneapolis: sometimes neither partner was highly knowledgeable in a subject domain, and decision rules for judging the partnership’s readiness to reach a particular design decision and seeking outside counsel were lacking.

District reform partners would benefit from having expectations and tools that prompt them to assess their individual and joint expertise for work in a particular area of district reform and to seek additional partners as needed.

**Reform is a problem of political, cultural, and social change.** Lack of attention to race and class during the Minneapolis reform work revealed how difficult it was for district leaders to name and address issues that pervaded the central office, schools, and community. This was notable especially since race was salient in district-community politics during the course of TLP’s partnership. Silence around race politics seemed to paralyze district reform.
District reform is not just about technical change in the classroom, or organizational re-design in the central office. It is also about race and class dynamics in urban school systems and the politics of district change. An external initiative might be an effective catalyst for addressing systemic inequalities, but only if its authority to engage all facets of the district is established at the start.

National capacity for a district reform initiative

The MacArthur Foundation’s decision to pursue an ambitious vision for system change that lacked a pre-specified design for implementation set the stage for all of TLP’s challenges and for the lessons it now offers the field. Among them are those that pertain to a foundation’s decisions and investments. These lessons are distilled from TLP advisors’ and Foundation officers’ reflections on the initiative’s experience and Documentation evidence from Minneapolis.

Getting started on significant, sustainable system change takes time and resilience. District reform is messy work. It engages all levels of the system, an organizational culture that has developed over time in particular state and local contexts, layers of education reform history that shape leaders’ thinking about external partnerships and effective practice, professional union leadership and politics, community leadership and politics, and relationships with local intermediary organizations and foundations. In order for an outside organization to engage effectively in a district partnership, it needs to develop knowledge and relationships that make it possible for them to build upon the strengths and address the weaknesses of the system.

A foundation’s capacity to improve education at the district level includes its willingness to invest in developing intermediary organizations’ knowledge and relationships with districts over several years, its taste for learning from the struggles that are inevitable during the early phases of a reform partnership, and its resilience in the face of setbacks. A district reform funding structure would invest in time for grantees to develop local knowledge and relationships essential to collaborative work, with a developmental view of partnering and system change.

National capacities should be evaluated in terms of initiative demands. The selection of national intermediaries for a district reform initiative should focus on the fit between leadership demands of the initiative and an organization’s capacities. Because judgments are entailed in developing site-specific strategies and designs, the initiative’s intermediary organizations require a strong knowledge base from practical experience and familiarity with research to effectively guide the work. They should be equipped to scaffold the district partners’ understandings of system change by knowing the right questions to ask and having a repertoire of tools designed to support changes in thinking and practice.

Selection criteria for district partners should consider constraints, as well as capacities, for change. A district’s readiness for reform partnering was a primary criterion for selecting TLP partners. In the selection of Minneapolis, emphasis was placed
on superintendent leadership and local philanthropy; yet neither proved to be robust – the superintendent left the district and local foundations were never seriously engaged in systemic reform. Conversely, criteria on which Minneapolis had been rated as weak appeared to be inhibitors of change: lack of a local intermediary organization to support the partners’ designs, a state with low support for district improvement, and a decentralized system with fragmented central office authority.

Several conditions missing in Minneapolis may represent capacities for district system reform: a state policy system with education standards and some modicum of support for struggling urban school systems, a district whose central office has some legitimized authority over instruction (versus a tradition of decentralization), and a local partner to support work on instructional improvement.

**A district reform initiative needs a strategy for managing superintendent turnover.** TLP’s heavy reliance on MPS’s initial superintendent for making and authorizing decisions about district reform work limited the development of collaborative leadership intended by the initiative’s vision for system reform. A local design group was formed in Fall 2002 but was never reconvened. The loss of Superintendent Johnson at the end of the partnership’s first year was a blow to the partnership, since she both owned the district’s vision for reform and managed all of the functional units that should have come together in the reform effort.

CEO turnover is endemic to large urban districts and inevitable during a sustained partnership of the duration TLP intended, yet top leadership is critical to the success and stability of a system reform initiative. Research-based knowledge concerning strategies for sustaining reform through leader succession is needed in education, since incentives seem to work in favor of new superintendents bringing in new ideas and initiatives and derailing existing ones. Evidence that civic capacity plays an important role in educational improvement suggests that actively engaging the school board and civic leaders in a system reform initiative is key to a sustainable district partnership.

**Developing local and national knowledge for system reform requires a theory of action.** TLP had an ambitious knowledge-development agenda and invested in a national documentation function that would both inform local reform practice and capture lessons across multiple sites. Experience in MPS revealed challenges of engaging district leaders in learning from evidence provided by the national documentation team. District administrators had not been engaged in developing the outcomes, indicators, and interpretations of data relevant to TLP’s Elements and so lacked ownership of the evidence that might have informed their reform decisions.

A theory of action for knowledge development through a district reform initiative would provide a useful guide for documenters and district partners. Such a theory would include strategies through which external and district partners can develop shared conceptions of useful evidence and mechanisms for establishing timely feedback loops. A local documentation partner would be needed to support the ongoing use of evidence at all system levels.
The theory also would inform the initiative’s design for knowledge development across district sites. It would consider trade-offs between breadth and depth of research on district reform to guide decisions about numbers of district partners and the nature of contrasts useful for comparative analysis. And it would consider the nature of cross-site evidence needed to support the development of strategies, tools, and practices for taking a system reform design to scale.

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*The Learning Partnership* underestimated the organizational and knowledge capacities needed to manage the implementation of its ambitious vision for district reform and co-design approach to change. As an extended professional learning community, all TLP agents felt challenged by demands of the initiative – by its management, communication, learning, and support demands. They also felt that the experience of doing, documenting, and advising on the partnership with Minneapolis had significantly enhanced their capacity to support district system reform in the future. This account of the initiative’s work hopefully will spread its learning opportunities beyond those involved in the initiative.
References


APPENDIX A

Documentation Data
Appendix A
Documentation Data

The Learning Partnership Documentation team developed qualitative and quantitative data to track the work and outcomes of the Minneapolis partnership from October 2002 through June 2005. These data are summarized below in terms of research methods and numbers of observations each year. Qualitative field data were coded and analyzed using N6 software, and survey scales were developed using principal components analysis.

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<td>8 days of observation (4 days at each math and literacy institutes); 2 days of observation of institute planning (includes high school observations)</td>
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<td>2 days of observation at high school retreat; 2 days of observation at literacy and math expert panel discussions</td>
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## Surveys

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APPENDIX B

*TLP* Co-design Experience
in Minneapolis Public Schools

APPENDIX B.1
*TLP*- Minneapolis Partnership:
Leadership during Fall 2002 – Summer 2004
APPENDIX B

_TLP Co-design Experience_
_in Minneapolis Public Schools_

This appendix provides an historical record of _The Learning Partnership_’s collaboration with Minneapolis Public Schools over nearly two years. It describes the ways in which CPRE and MPS enacted _TLP_’s co-construction theory, during the entry phase when initial design decisions were made and in subsequent implementation of designs. This historical account provides context for assessing system outcomes of the co-constructed work and for drawing lessons from the initiative. We use _TLP_’s theory of action as analytic lens, tracing connections of the work to the Elements – in particular the use of evidence to inform decisions.

**Co-construction theory and brief history of co-construction relationships in MPS**

_TLP_’s theory of action for district change calls for the co-construction of system reform -- collaboration between a district and external partners to identify problems and develop and implement solutions. The framework for analysis of system conditions and co-construction work is _TLP_’s Elements and theory of action for improving instruction. The co-construction approach assumes that district and national partners bring different kinds of knowledge and resources to the challenges of district system reform. While local partners have deep and detailed knowledge of their students’ performance and system strengths and weaknesses on _TLP_ Elements, national partners bring knowledge of system reform from research and practice and networks through which to broker resources for designing and implementing reform plans. According to _TLP_’s theory of action, collaboration on designing, evaluating, and refining designs around the Elements should result in the development over time of the district’s capacity to continually improve teaching and learning across the system.

_TLP_’s approach to district reform contrasts with more conventional ways that external organizations collaborate with schools and districts. More common partnering models are of two general types: in one, an external agent brings a pre-determined design for reform that is to be implemented; in the other, external agents are hired by the district or school to provide targeted support for their predetermined reform design.25 _TLP_’s partnering approach builds upon evidence of problems inherent to each of these conventional models.26 Because the approach is innovative and under-specified in _TLP_ documents, district and external partners have had to invent norms and roles for their collaboration, while attempting to resist the tendency to slip into more familiar modes of interaction.

25 Anthony Bryk has referred to these conventional approaches to partnering as the “engineering model” and the “service bureau model”, respectively.
26 As attested by decades of district reform experience and research, neither approach significantly challenges the status quo, develops the system’s capacity to continually improve, or engenders accountability for results.
During the initial phase of TLP, co-construction mainly involved CPRE and district leaders in Minneapolis.\textsuperscript{27} CPRE leaders regularly communicated that co-construction involved an equal partnership between internal and external partners, the use of evidence to reach design decisions, and the use of expertise within and outside the district. Significantly, the use of TLP’s Elements to guide decisions was not featured in these communications about partnering with district leaders. Beyond an initial Design Team retreat, described in the next section, district leaders did not learn about the Elements, the theory that unifies them into a reform strategy, or the evidence base that grounds them.\textsuperscript{28} Absent this theoretical frame, the partner’s early decision to focus first on the professional development system had the unanticipated consequence that many district administrators and staff came to regard TLP as a professional development initiative.\textsuperscript{29}

Partnering relationships and co-construction in Minneapolis can be described in terms of several phases. During an entry period (Fall 2002), Tom Corcoran of CPRE worked with Superintendent Carol Johnson to plan a Design Retreat and to decide the focus of initial work in the district; this period included the formation of a Design Team that included a broad group of stakeholders and this team’s two-day retreat in November 2002.\textsuperscript{30} The decision to focus on professional development was made during this period, and this had the unintended effect of narrowing the substance and range of district partners involved in subsequent co-construction decisions. CPRE began a long period of design work with the Teaching and Instructional Services (TIS) unit, which housed the literacy and math teams charged with developing plans for 2003 summer institutes. We describe these partnering relationships and design decisions in the next section.

During 2002-03, CPRE also developed one-on-one partnering relationships with other district units. The Research Evaluation and Assessment (REA) department was involved in co-constrcuting an evidence base to support demonstration classes and schools in the district. The Elementary School superintendent, who was responsible for principal professional development, was engaged in the co-construction of a summer leadership institute that was intended to support the literacy and math institutes for teachers. There was little dialogue across these district units and leaders during this time period, except as Corcoran communicated messages between them. Co-construction with the union to establish incentives for teachers’ institute participation was concurrent.

\textsuperscript{27} We define this phase as October 2002 – June 2004, prior to the entry of Superintendent Peebles. However, professional development that was co-constructed during the first phase was implemented in August 2004.

\textsuperscript{28} TLP’s Advisory Board at one point urged the development of documents describing the evidence base for core Elements for use with districts. However, such tools for understanding TLP’s theory of action had not yet been developed during this phase of partnering with MPS.

\textsuperscript{29} Only one or two people in the central office had the bigger picture in Spring 2004 when AISR, as new external partner, began to emphasize TLP Elements as framework for co-construction.

\textsuperscript{30} The next section describes the Design Team formed by Superintendent Johnson and the decision making process that occurred in its November 2002 retreat. This group was never reconvened. When Superintendent Peebles took office in July 2004 she decided to convene a new, broad-based TLP Design Team to plan future partnering work on system reform. The membership of this group has little overlap with that of the original group, with the exception of several central office administrators and the teacher union president.
Carol Johnson’s departure as superintendent in August 2003 created a leadership vacuum within the district. Deputy Superintendent Jennings had no prior involvement in TLP work and was not an educational leader in the district. While work continued within central office units, through one-on-one consultation between Corcoran and department heads, there was not longer an overarching vision and leadership for the work or understanding of TLP Elements. During fall 2003 the district established TLP Alignment Committee was created to establish regular communication across units that were partnering with CPRE in order to increase the coherence and coordination of plans.\(^{31}\) This committee included TLP’s capacity builders (CPRE and CRC) and all central office units that received funds from the grant. This group met several times over the course of the year. Its discussions generally focused on the TLP work plans and division of labor among the units. While information about the units’ work was being shared with the committee, design decisions were not being made collectively. In general, the director of TIS set the meeting agenda, received on-the-spot reactions from the group, and then moved forward. The meetings were often conducted as perfunctory, at best, for there was very limited penetration of the TLP Elements within the system. Because discussions or decisions that came from the Alignment Committee had little effect on the efforts of other participating units (for example, ELL, Special Education, Academic superintendents), the committee members remained largely uninvolved.

AISR joined CPRE as capacity builder in Minneapolis in January 2004.\(^{32}\) Warren Simmons began to raise issues in Alignment Committee meetings about problems for co-construction presented by central office fragmentation and uncertain decision authority. The group acknowledged that these conditions existed and that they posed problems for co-construction, however they felt stymied by a leadership vacuum at the top of the system and wanted to wait until the arrival of the new superintendent before moving forward on TLP co-construction for the future.\(^{33}\)

In April, when the MacArthur Foundation made the decision to appoint AISR as the sole TLP capacity builder,\(^{34}\) district members of the alignment committee complained that this unilateral decision was inconsistent with the “equal partners” principle. During a May meeting with the committee, Connie Yowell explained why the decision had been made and, further, that this kind of decision was the Foundation’s prerogative, similar to the district’s authority to hire its

\(^{31}\) By fall 2003 it had become clear that the lack of communication between units working with schools had undermined the institute success (in particular, low principal support) and that the isolated co-construction work was reproducing fragmentation of district reform efforts.

\(^{32}\) This change in leadership on TLP’s side of the partnership was made by the Foundation in terms of their planning for the initiative’s future work with additional districts. The decision took into account a) indications that CPRE lacked the capacity to take on additional district partners, b) AISR’s track record in working with multiple districts on system reform, and c) the Foundation’s desire to maintain continuity of TLP leadership in Minneapolis by creating a co-directorship involving both organizations.

\(^{33}\) Deputy Superintendent Jennings did not become involved in TLP work after Carol Johnson’s departure in August 2003; by April 2004 it had become clear that he would not be appointed superintendent and also that the Acting Academic Superintendent Cheryl Creecey would be retiring. No one in the central office was in a position to lead the group to address the difficult issues underlying district fragmentation, since each party was identified with a particular ideology or position.

\(^{34}\) This decision was made on the basis of evidence that the co-director arrangement in effect January-April 2004 was not viable; it was confusing to the district partners and not effective in extending the partnering efforts to focus on Elements and strategies beyond professional development reform.
superintendent without consulting the Foundation. This event signaled uncertainty over the meaning of TLP’s collaborative partnership model, as well as the group’s sense of loss over Corcoran’s departure. It also had the positive consequence of creating a new dialogue about TLP’s Elements, principles for co-construction, and what AISR brought to the partnership. The plan to continue this dialogue in June 2004 was aborted after the new superintendent arrived and decided to use the scheduled date instead for a meeting of a newly constituted Design Team. Thus ended the first period of the TLP-MSP partnership.

During this period, the leadership on both sides of TLP-MPS’s partnership changed twice during less than two years, and there was also turnover of administrators of units involved in co-constructing professional development designs. (See Appendix A.1 for a timeline showing leaders involved in the partnership.) It is impossible to know how much the leadership turnover affected co-construction processes and outcomes in the district, but certainly it created uncertainty about decision authority on both sides of the partnership and challenges to collaborative work on system reform.

The evolution and nature of TLP-MPS work to reform the district professional development system, and the co-construction processes entailed, are described in the following sections. We provide considerable detail so that the context and substance of the reform work are apparent when outcomes are assessed.

**TLP entry and initial design decisions**

As mentioned earlier, TLP’s work in Minneapolis initially focused on redesigning the professional development system for the district. The decision to focus efforts in this way was an outcome of co-construction with the district superintendent and a broad-based Design Team. The district and CPRE used considerable evidence regarding conditions of professional development in the district to ground the decision, and CPRE drew on research evidence and their experience with professional development programs to develop the design for reform.

**Use of local data.** TLP’s entry phase involved several kinds of data-collection and review efforts that were conducted by CPRE. These included:

- inventory of teacher professional development programs in effect in MPS at the start of 2002-03 academic year
- CPRE interviews with district and union leaders involved in teacher professional development

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35 By this time Corcoran had been working in the district for eighteen months and had developed relationships and trust with individuals on the committee. Some felt that their investment in the partnership was devalued by this change of TLP leadership.

36 Superintendent Peebles reconstituted the Design Team, convening a new broad-based group whose membership has little overlap with that of the original group, with the exception of three central office administrators and the teachers’ union president.

37 Partner combinations over two years included: Superintendent Johnson with Tom Corcoran/CPRE (Fall 2002 - August 2003); Deputy Superintendent Jennings with CPRE (September 2003 – January 2004); Deputy Superintendent Jennings with CPRE and Warren Simmons/AISR (January – April 2004); Deputy Superintendent Jennings with AISR (April – July 2004); and currently Superintendent Peebles with AISR.
• Design Team retreat to review professional development programs and set priorities for TLP work
• audit of professional development expenditures
• meetings with TIS leaders and staff to discuss current professional development work and future prospects

These data pointed overwhelmingly to the conclusion that the district lacked a coherent approach to developing teachers’ and administrators’ abilities to improve instruction.

For one, it became apparent that the union had been playing a strong role in shaping professional development policy and practice in the district and, further, that this had created tensions between the union and district administrators responsible for instruction and schools. Contract provisions in support of teacher learning – such as the required annual Professional Development Plan – were unevenly implemented across schools, and some principals perceived the union to be undermining instructional improvement. In a quarterly report, Tom Corcoran commented on the dual professional development system in Minneapolis: “It is almost as though there [are] two overlapping professional development systems—one operated by MFT with limited resources, and one operated by the district…There is not a concerted system-wide effort to improve teaching, and the pieces in place are not well implemented in all schools” (CPRE Quarterly Report, June 2003, p. 11).

Fragmentation and incoherence of professional development in Minneapolis also came from links to external grants. Lack of coordination across grant-related professional development had resulted in a menu of staff training opportunities that sometimes conflicted in schedule and in substance. As one district administrator lamented: “Everyone is just getting whatever grants they can instead of developing a holistic plan to change.” In part because of the potpourri approach to professional development in the district, the system lacked standards and accountability for the content and quality of learning opportunities provided to teachers and school administrators. Further, the existence of many specialized school programs in the district – such as a fine arts program, IB programs, direct instruction program – has created diverse professional development needs and support providers across district schools.

In November 2002, TLP held a two-day design retreat in which participants reviewed major professional development programs in the district in order to set priorities for focused district reform efforts. Major district stakeholders participated – Superintendent Johnson, presidents of the teacher’s union and principals’ association, all Executive Leadership Team members, key district staff, several principals and teacher leaders; TLP participants included Connie Yowell of the MacArthur Foundation, Tom Corcoran and consultants from CPRE, and Joan Talbert from CRC/Stanford. The retreat featured a collaborative review of eleven district initiatives, which CPRE had uncovered in its inventory and for which two-page summaries had been prepared. Break-out groups reviewed these programs in terms of four questions: a) how well is this program/initiative aligned with other things going on in the district, other initiatives?; b) how could the program/initiative be more effective?; c) what would it take to spread or travel within

38 In our 2003 principal survey, only 27% of the principals rated the MFT as working to advance educational improvement efforts in the district (compared to 52% positive ratings for the principal’s forum and 66% for the Board of Trustees); yet the MFT is nationally reputed to be a progressive leader in education (for example, Learning First Alliance Report, 2003).
the district?; and d) what would it take to sustain? Ultimately, each program was assessed on these issues by several groups and, through this review process and discussion, the whole group developed priorities for professional development in the district.

This process enacted TLP Elements of evidence-based practice and collaborative leadership. The system used its own data to make strategic planning decisions. However, this was the only time that the district engaged in this kind of conversation during the two-year period, and representatives from the parent and civic community were not included. In fact, the partnership paid little if any attention to TLP’s Element Public Support during this period.

Priorities that emerged from the retreat included: leadership roles for principals and teachers to implement the district curriculum with support from the central office; identification of best practices in each instructional area; focus on literacy and math across the grade levels; and a research-based professional development continuum linked to student learning outcomes. Following the retreat, Superintendent Johnson and Corcoran of CPRE decided to focus the partnership’s work on literacy, math, and leadership institutes and began a several-month planning process for 2003 summer institutes.

CPRE’s data collection on professional development conditions in MPS continued through the 2002-03 academic year. A professional development audit conducted by CPRE consultant Mark Fuhrman identified patterns of district spending that have resulted in incoherent and unstable professional development for MPS teachers. The Spending Inventory report39 pointed to:

- large investment in professional development targeted to school sites for specific purposes,
- high dependence on external and unstable funding sources,
- reliance on district staff and particularly TOSAs to provide professional development,
- high concentration of literacy professional development through a grant involving eight schools (Read Excellence grant),
- fragmented professional development programs and management,
- majority of professional development spending targeted to schools with little integration or accountability,
- wide differences between school grade levels in sources of professional development funding, and
- largely voluntary teacher participation in the range of district professional development initiatives.

Documentation data. While CPRE was conducting audits and interviews regarding professional development policy and expenditures in the district, the documentation team was interviewing central office administrators and staff regarding their perceptions of the culture and practices of the district more broadly.40 District administrators and staff working closely with

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39 This report (in the form of a power-point presentation) was presented to the Superintendent in March and to the Executive Leadership Team in May 2003. Our documentation team observed no further distribution or use of the report or its findings.

40 Findings from this initial round of data collection are summarized in CRC’s September 2003 report (in the form of power-point presentations and an executive summary).
schools and teachers provided a consistent account of the district’s professional development system. Many commented that MPS professional development has been abundant and shallow; the term “sit ‘n git” was used repeatedly to describe the dominant format. There was a general awareness that the district norm of ad hoc training events that lack follow-up or supports for change runs counter to evidence of best practice in professional development. Further, according to one central office staff member, the existence of myriad district initiatives and tools engendered a cynicism among teachers about learning and change:

“There’re so many resources... There are so many programs and protocols that we can get into but we tend to jump around and we don’t need to jump around. We just need to focus and stay with one thing and test it. And that has made a lot of educators in Minneapolis very leery with the whole, “This too shall pass, so let’s just sit quietly because everything will pass and we’ll be able to just keep going with what we’re doing” type of attitude. But I can see why because there have been so many things that have come down the pike....

Widespread agreement about the absence of central office planning and coordination around a MPS professional development system created buy in and some sense of urgency around TLP’s focus on creating high-quality learning opportunities focused on literacy and mathematics. One administrator pointed to the challenge ahead: “Instead of a workshop model, or a delivery approach for professional development, we need something systematic.”

Planning and implementing professional development: 2003-04

Once TLP’s focus on the professional development system was established, Tom Corcoran worked with district leaders to establish a design for MPS professional development that was grounded in research evidence on teacher learning and established standards for professional development. The evidence-based standards call for intense and sustained learning focused on content, opportunities to work with school teams, norms of reflection, and on-site coaching supports for instructional change. These principles for professional development were used as the basis for co-constructing plans for MPS summer institutes and follow-up in math and in literacy. Superintendent Johnson decided that all schools would be required to send a team to either the math or the literacy institute during summer 2003 and to continue through the following year; given requirements of the NSF grant, schools that had not previously been served by the grant were required to participate in the math institute.41

Corcoran worked with the superintendent and TIS leaders to establish basic parameters of the institute design: math and literacy institutes to be run in parallel for four days in two consecutive weeks (first two weeks of August), teachers to receive stipends for their participation, four follow-up sessions to be held (Thursday evening and Saturday morning options, common location), a teacher coach to be selected in each school, and TIS staff to provide on-site coaching to schools differentiated according to their AYP status (three levels of support). Corcoran worked with union president Sundin to establish policy whereby participating teachers could satisfy part of their requirements for the Professional Pay Plan through the summer institute

41 The district’s eight Read Excellence Schools were exempted from required participation in the TLP-MPS summer institutes.
work; he negotiated with the University of Minnesota to obtain course credit options for teachers’ involvement in the institutes. Thus multiple incentives for teacher participation were built into the design.

The challenges of creating a new paradigm for professional development in the district went to the Teaching and Instructional Services (TIS) division, which at the time occupied a building several miles away from the central district offices. Primary responsibilities for designing the content of institutes in literacy and mathematics fell to teachers serving in temporary positions (teachers on special assignment, or TOSAs). Capacity to take on this responsibility differed significantly between the literacy and math teams. In literacy, the TOSAs were new to the job and had never worked together as a team, while the math team benefited from their prior work together through the district’s NSF grant. Many of the teachers on these teams had never experienced high-quality professional development, and few had been a leader in conducting it. In short, the learning demands for creating high-quality content-focused professional development for a four-day institute were substantial. Further, the decision to include teacher facilitators from district schools—in order to develop the district’s teacher leadership—expanded the number of people that were engaged in the challenge of learning-while-developing the institute curriculum and plans.

CPRE participated in the co-construction of institutes in two ways. CPRE consultants with expertise in professional development helped facilitate the design process (Maren Reeder, Bill Stroud, and Susan Elko). Corcoran brokered relationships for MPS with experts in literacy and math outside the system to bring content knowledge to bear on the institute designs. Outside experts for literacy included a consultant from Public Education Business Partnership (PEBC) and two University of Minnesota professors (Deborah Dillon and David O’Brien); for math, they were two staff members from the North-Central Regional Educational Lab (Nancy Berkas and Cynthia Pattison). In addition, four of the literacy TOSAs participated in PEBC’s four-day National Spring Study, identified by Corcoran as an exemplar of a high-quality literacy institute.

The kind and degree of challenge for developing high-quality professional development for district teachers differed between the TIS math and literacy teams, given their different histories of leadership and resources and their different curriculum contexts. During a June 2003 design retreat—involving TIS teams, teacher facilitators, CPRE consultants and outside experts in two days of planning for the August institutes—it was evident that the math group had a significant

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42 The relocation of TIS to the central offices at 807 Broadway in January of 2004 was a significant move toward district coherence. Not only do schools now see TIS as part of the central office (which they refer to as “807”), but also communication across units is easier and improves the prospect for increased collaborative leadership and coherent designs for system improvement.

43 This experience had a major impact on the literacy institute design, since the literacy team essentially replicated the PEBC design. While this was not intended by Corcoran, the TOSA’s had little other experience to draw upon, and they considered the powerful learning experience they had in Denver as evidence to ground their decision to replicate most of its content for MPS teachers. However, facets of the content were influenced by Deborah Dillon and David O’Brien of University of Minnesota, who introduced the team to an article by Cambourne on conditions of learning and developed an overarching framework that guided the design of the institute. The literacy institute’s “four pillars” derived from this research. Other contributions from these outside experts that were not well aligned with assumptions underlying the PEBC work were rejected by the literacy planning group.
advantage over the literacy group. The math team was able to move steadily and collaboratively toward a high-quality design because they previously had developed relationships and shared knowledge of content instruction. The literacy team started from scratch as an organizational unit and as a professional community charged with improving literacy instruction across district schools. In addition to their capacity differences, math and literacy also had different state and district policy contexts to contend with.

Math context of TLP. MPS mathematics came to TLP work with some degree of capacity in terms of several TLP Elements. The math team had formed a community of practice with collaborative leadership through work under the district’s NSF grants over several years. There was a math director with strong content knowledge and connections to national networks of math educators. There were district curricula for K-8 and 6-8 mathematics – Everyday Math and Connected Math Program, respectively – that were evidence based and aligned across grade levels. Superintendent Johnson was strongly committed to the programs, to developing teachers’ capacity to implement them, and to holding district schools accountable for consistently using them. Further, external accountability pressure was coming from NSF – through the district’s Math/Science Matters grant – to align professional development to the reform math curricula.

Nevertheless, not all flags were flying in the same direction. Even in the context of a standards-based mathematics curriculum, strong superintendent backing of the curriculum, and substantial funding to support its implementation, the central office did not provide consistent support for a district vision of math teaching and learning. The math team was up against the district tradition of school-based decision-making about instructional programs. District administrators and staff told us in interviews that schools were not uniformly implementing the Everyday Math curriculum; some commented that the books were still in shrink-wrap on school shelves. They pointed out that some principals believed that the programs were not effective for their student populations, and this sometime was taken as evidence that the district’s curriculum was inadequate or inappropriate. Instead of providing more support for these schools in using the district curriculum, some administrators advocated for the adoption of a supplemental math program.44 This central office strategy both responded to, and further legitimized, the district’s highly decentralized instructional culture.

Further, the community had not been well informed about the district math curriculum and some leaders had taken a stand against it. Politics surrounding mathematics became quite heated in the spring of 2003, prompting Superintendent Johnson to write a four-page letter to the public that provided rationale and evidence for the district’s adoption of Everyday Math. Politics regarding math instruction within the district and in the community were at odds with TLP’s vision of a focused and coherent grounding for the district professional development system. Still, the infrastructure needed to improve K-8 math professional development was in place, and TLP was an effective vehicle for change.

The math institute design was aligned with the Everyday Math curricula for Grades 1, 3, and 5 and with the CMP Grade 8 curriculum. To accommodate the political controversy, the team devoted some time to Accelerated Math, adopted as a supplemental program by the district for

44 The inconsistent use of a mathematics curriculum across district schools is a significant problem in a district like MPS where inter-school mobility is substantial.
2003-04. With overarching direction and guidance from the district math director, grade-level teams of TIS staff and teacher facilitators designed the four-day institutes. The teams were challenged to change their professional development practice – to move away from the district norm of short sessions and didactic modes of delivery to develop sustained and hands-on learning opportunities for institute participants. However, their strong content knowledge and experience working together on NSF grant professional development workshops were solid ground for designing and implementing a high-quality institute. They were able to translate principles and practices of high-quality math instruction for students into their instruction with teachers.

The math follow-up sessions and on-site study groups were intended to support school teams’ use of “lesson study” and the district-adopted “exemplars.” The lesson study protocol and assignments to the teams were intended to promote teachers’ collaborative, evidence-based practice (TLP’s practice Elements). The exemplars were adopted to promote math teachers’ use of assignments and assessments that are aligned in format and task demands with the MCA (Minnesota’s standards-based assessments). The coaches selected in each school were supported through five professional development sessions throughout 2002-2003 with Cathy Carroll of WestEd. Evidence from school case studies, discussed later, indicates that the school coaches did not uniformly attend these sessions or regularly work with study groups on the follow up curriculum. Implementation of the coaching facet of institute follow-up design was generally weak, especially in literacy.

**Literacy context of TLP.** In contrast to math, literacy professional development reform in MPS did not have to contend with local public controversy regarding reading instruction. However, its challenges were substantial. The district’s capacity to support teacher learning in this subject context in 2002-03 was extremely weak. The district did not have a literacy director (and still did not have one in September 2004) or a curriculum framework beyond Houghton Mifflin texts. When the partnership began, the literacy team was composed of accomplished teachers new to their assignments and with no history of working together. They had little authority to implement a curriculum. Further, turnover of leadership within TIS over recent years had produced swings in philosophies for reading instruction.

Beyond the weak organizational capacity of MPS literacy, efforts to focus and support professional development in this content area were challenged by disagreements between district units about how to improve reading instruction in the district. While the REA unit and grade level superintendents have tended to emphasize phonics and CBM assessments of reading speed and accuracy, the current TIS leadership prefers an “early literacy” approach, which is promoted by their instruction guide. These differences resulted in incoherent district communications about

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45 Prior to TLP’s entry, the district had what the literacy team calls “the purple book,” which they regarded as their framework; however it was more a guide to instructional strategy (promoting what is known as the four-block approach) than a framework in the traditional sense.

46 According to interviews with literacy team members, other district administrators, and school principals, the TOSAs are not granted authority to direct schools’ literacy instruction. At best, they are regarded as specialists or expert colleagues valuable for supporting the school’s efforts.

47 The TIS had four different directors in three years, including the year (2002-03) that TLP began its partnership with MPS; they took radically different positions on controversy within the district over guided reading versus direct instruction as a preferred emphasis in reading instruction.
reading instruction to schools and undermined the development of formative assessments to support instruction.

The district literacy team’s accomplishment in designing and implementing the summer institute within a few months’ time entailed enormous effort and learning among the team. With the help of TLP consultants, the team designed a four-day session focused on reading strategies featured in the book Mosaic of Thought (Keene & Zimmermann, 1997) and supplemented by Cambourne’s (2002) article “Conditions of Learning;” they provided teachers with a choice of seven different novels to read through the lens of one of the reading strategies (this replicates the PEBC institute design). The institute was a form of professional development unlike anything the district teachers had previously experienced and thus represented a significant challenge for the literacy staff and facilitators to design and carry out. Relative to the math team, the literacy team was limited in content knowledge and so was highly influenced by resources that were introduced by external partners. The resulting institute content was not as coherent or aligned with best literacy instruction practice as it ideally would have been. Nonetheless, the 2003 literacy institute was a significant move toward research-based standards for professional development practice, and it established a new paradigm for the district.

Literacy follow-up sessions and school study groups were intended to deepen and extend the teachers’ knowledge of reading strategies learned in the institute and to support their use in instruction. At the end of the institute each school team met to design its own plan for follow-up work, which would be supported by a TIS staff person assigned to the school. Some of the groups also made commitments and plans to lead efforts to improve literacy teaching and learning in their school. The follow-up design intended for school teams to become communities of practice working to improve reading instruction for their students, with support from on-site coaches and TIS staff. However, the coaching design was very poorly implemented, and coaching roles varied widely in quality across schools.

Literacy coach training (designed as five sessions over the year) was aborted after two sessions: the school coaches complained that the PEBC-run sessions were of very poor quality; the organization was disengaged and not replaced. District teachers and TIS staff have had little opportunity to develop expertise in content coaching, apart from a mentor program previously run through the MFT. As a result, on-site support for building teacher learning community and instructional change in the classroom was weak. Significant district investment in coach professional development would have been required to effectively implement the coaching design.

Use of evidence to refine institute designs. Both math and literacy teams used evidence of participant response and their reflections to refine plans and practices for the institute. They met daily to debrief and refine the next day’s plans. They used participant feedback data from the first week to make modifications to the institute for the second week. For the most part, the data considered were teachers’ affective responses, rather than evidence of what they had learned. However, the teams also reflected on their skills in working with content and made efforts to

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48 Weak content knowledge at the leadership level of the partnership—on both district and capacity builder sides (CPRE does not claim expertise in literacy instruction) — meant that neither partner was capable of assessing nuances of the experts’ knowledge and approaches, nor the coherence of institute designs the team developed.
improve their practice. For example, the literacy team arranged to get coaching from one of the consultants on how they as facilitators could model think aloud strategies in their work with teachers, since they had identified this as a weakness in the first session. Further they used feedback and reflection on the institute and follow-up sessions as input for the design of 2004-05 professional development. For example, the limited involvement of principals was noted as a problem, and next year’s design included required sessions for principals and content-focused curriculum.49

A major issue that surfaced during the 2003 math and literacy institutes was the limited attention paid to diverse student learners, and particularly to the instructional needs of low-performing African American students and English Language Learners. Teacher participant feedback focused attention on a problem that district administrators repeatedly noted in interviews: MPS teachers are not well prepared to succeed with all students in their classroom. Efforts to close achievement gaps in the district certainly would entail professional development targeting this weakness, however the math and literacy teams lacked the capacity to address this need during the 2003 summer institute. As one TIS leader put it:

*But to be truthful, the facilitators [at the Institutes] did not have the knowledge about urban populations that they would need to pull something like instruction for diverse populations off in depth, they just didn’t. And our TOSAs have been given very little training on those things, and while they are individually successful at working with diverse learners, it’s because of their individual experience, it’s not from formal training they’ve had that’s transferable. So like [at the Institutes], one person asked a presenter, “One-third of the kids in MPS don’t speak English, what are we going to do about that?” And the response was, “Well, we’re not going to fix it today, and we’re not going to fix it in a four day institute.” But nobody’s doing enough. We have a long way to go on that.*

Evidence of both teacher demand for professional development in this area and district staff’s lack of preparation to provide it directed math and literacy teams to develop new knowledge in the area and revise their curriculum for the subsequent summer institutes. One institute facilitator commented: “I think that [institute] planners in the future need to plan the pieces of differentiation to flow all the way through…”

During the 2003 Summer Leadership Institute, a keynote address by Warren Simmons further mobilized district leaders’ commitment to developing policy responses to student achievement gaps. Simmons presented extensive data from research in other districts on the nature and degree of achievement gaps involving race and language groups and evidence that districts like Minneapolis vary widely in effectiveness of addressing the gaps. Not only the data presented, but also the enthusiastic response from the principals and their school leadership teams, encouraged district leaders to focus on student achievement gaps in designs for the 2004 literacy, math, and leadership institutes.

49 One reason for principals’ limited participation in the 2003 institutes was poor communication between the TIS teams and the academic superintendents about the institute content and design. Absent the superintendents’ strong endorsement of the institutes and emphasis on the importance of principal participation with their school team, many principals opted to not attend.
During spring and summer of 2004, the literacy and math teams collaborated with district staff in ELL and Cultural Diversity units and with individuals on the TLP expert panels to incorporate attention to students’ “cultural competencies” in the 2004 literacy and math institutes. This refinement of institute content responded to evidence from prior institutes and began to develop collaborative leadership between the previously isolated TIS units.

The evolution of co-constructed reform work in Minneapolis shows how the partners’ initial decision to focus on professional development reform—one of TLP’s Elements—had ramifications for other, though not all, of the Elements. Other Elements were engaged by design, such as developing collaborative leadership in literacy and in math, nurturing communities of practice in schools, and pursuing evidence as the basis for literacy and math instructional guidance.
## APPENDIX B.1

*TLP*- Minneapolis Partnership: Leadership during Fall 2002 – Summer 2004

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<tr>
<td>Fall</td>
<td>Winter</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Superintendents</strong></td>
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<td>Superintendent Johnson</td>
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**Assistant Superintendents**
- Interim CAO (Creecey)
- 3 Academic Superintendents
  - K-5 (Jackson)
  - 6-8 (Coleman)
  - 9-12 (McCaulley)

**Teaching and Instructional Services**
- Director Felt
- Director McLean
- Assistant Superintendent Baumtraug (New position)

**TLP Capacity Building Organizations**
- CPRE (Corcoran)
- AISR (Simmons)
APPENDIX C

TLP System Reform Design, Implementation, and Outcomes in Minneapolis
## APPENDIX C

### TLP System Reform Designs, Implementation, and Outcomes in Minneapolis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DESIGN</th>
<th>PURPOSES</th>
<th>DEVELOPMENT SOURCES AND PROCESS</th>
<th>SYSTEM LEVEL AND ACCESS DESIGNED</th>
<th>USE AND CONDITIONS FOR USE</th>
<th>OUTCOMES ON TLP ELEMENTS/ SUSTAINABILITY</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-designed system reform work</td>
<td>Provide high-quality, system-wide professional development to build school communities of practice for improved literacy and math instruction.</td>
<td>Literacy institute was modeled after Denver-based PEBC summer institute (CPRE brokered access) and modified through a planning process involving CPRE consultants and U of MN literacy faculty. Math institute was designed locally with consultation from NCREL staff.</td>
<td>District schools were assigned to either literacy or math institutes; grade-level teams participated; teacher incentives (stipend, U of MN course credit option, follow-up work eligible for PPP credit)</td>
<td>Wide teacher participation (400 teachers in 2003; 700 in 2004); principal participation low in 2003, high in 2004. Professional development quality varied within the institute venues, given limited training for facilitators and their uneven prior experience with high-quality professional development.</td>
<td>Strong central office commitment to developing a high-quality professional development system through district literacy and math institutes. School outcomes varied widely by readiness in terms of collaborative leadership and teacher communities of practice. Sustainability depends upon superintendent endorsement and fiscal commitment to this design for improving MPS teaching and learning (beyond MacArthur funding).</td>
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Professional development system reform: Institute design for math and literacy: summer sessions
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<tr>
<td>Professional development system reform: Institute follow-up sessions</td>
<td>Support school teams’ continued work to improve literacy/math instruction; develop school communities of practice.</td>
<td>District staff in math and literacy designed follow-up curriculum and sessions; limited CPRE support.</td>
<td>Teacher teams required to attend off-site follow-ups, tiered design for on-site support by district staff during 2003-04.</td>
<td>Teacher team participation in off-site sessions and on-site support from district varied widely across schools.</td>
<td>School outcomes varied substantially according to school readiness and engagement with district support staff.</td>
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<td>Teacher teams required to attend off-site to on-site institute follow-up work responded to evidence of uneven team participation in evening and weekend session.</td>
<td>Year 2 shift from off-site to on-site institute follow-up work responded to evidence of uneven team participation in evening and weekend session.</td>
<td>District staff capacity to provide tiers of on-site support not developed.</td>
<td>No off-site support during Year 2; late-start days for follow-up work.</td>
<td>School readiness was a key factor in use and benefit of this resource; district staff worked where opportunity to make a difference was greatest.</td>
<td>MPS strategy reveals trade-off between scaling up teacher participation and providing valuable follow-up support: expanding numbers of teams spread thinner the available staff support time.</td>
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<td>Professional development system reform: Beat the Odds analyses</td>
<td>Identify exemplary teachers for “demonstration classrooms” in the district.</td>
<td>REA worked with CPRE on design; other units not engaged.</td>
<td>Conceived as resource to serve all district schools and teachers.</td>
<td>Analysis partially completed; design not implemented. Use depends upon broader ownership of design for evidence-based reform.</td>
<td>Sustained work on design depends on superintendent authorization and engagement of central office community.</td>
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| Curriculum and instruction resources | Establish instructional outcomes and guidance for literacy and math instruction at the school and classroom level | Literacy: Sources included existing district documents, state standards, experts, and teachers.  
Math: Using funds from NSF and experts brought in by TLP, the district math team created a document that received national attention (being developed by NCREL as a web-based tool). | Drafts made available to 2004 summer institute participants during the session only (they were told to return copies) | MPS central office teams in literacy and math saw these as valuable resources; however the new superintendent requested substantial revision of the literacy framework, and neither math or literacy frameworks have been made available to all district teachers. | Value and sustainability for schools and teachers depends on superintendent authorization and plan for deepening professional development aligned with the frameworks |
| Literacy and math frameworks | Provide research-based knowledge for math and literacy instruction and consultation with experts. | CPRE identified and contacted national experts in literacy and math to be involved in local panels. | Panel session with central office and school leaders in February 2004; videos made available to schools | Many district leaders attended.  
Use of videos and knowledge by teachers depended on school leadership. |                                                                 |
<p>| Expert panels          | Provide research-based knowledge for math and literacy instruction and consultation with experts. |                                                                                               |                                                                                               |                                                                                               | Value to schools and teachers depends on leadership brokering the knowledge resources. |</p>
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<td>System analysis resources</td>
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<td>Professional development inventory</td>
<td>Assess professional development expenditures in the district; guide future planning.</td>
<td>Inventory was conducted by CPRE consultants using tested instrument.</td>
<td>District cabinet (presentation of findings)</td>
<td>No apparent use, though findings supported development of district institutes in math and literacy. Politics of resource reallocation were not addressed. Weak district coherence and collaborative leadership undermined the use of this evidence to guide district decisions.</td>
<td>TLP funds have been used to support the summer institutes and follow-up work, and district professional development funds were not significantly reallocated.</td>
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<td>Documentation reports (CRC)</td>
<td>Document system conditions and TLP efforts; provide feedback to partners on the implementation of TLP elements.</td>
<td>Draft reports were reviewed by TLP Advisory Board, capacity building organizations, and the Foundation; revised drafts were then 2003 report: Alignment committee (presentation) 2004 report: eight K-8 case study schools;</td>
<td>Lack of broad district engagement in the documentation process undermined central office interest in feedback from the reports.</td>
<td>District leaders became clearer about the problem of weak focus and coherence; some effort was made to increase communication and coordination across units.</td>
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<td>reviewed by district leaders, and final versions were prepared for dissemination within the district.</td>
<td>Curriculum and Instruction unit</td>
<td>Limited district knowledge and understanding of <em>TLP</em> elements undermined use. Schools used feedback sessions as occasion to comment on district conditions [C&amp;I use pending]</td>
<td>Central office leaders and schools became more focused on organizational conditions related to <em>TLP</em> elements.</td>
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