

District Central Office Transformation for Teaching & Learning Improvement

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UW-CEL's Theory of Action

Three Foundational Ideas

- If students are not learning they are not being afforded powerful learning opportunities.
- If teachers are not offering students powerful learning opportunities then this is ultimately a leadership issue.
- High quality teaching is a very sophisticated endeavor – it is an issue of expertise.

There are experts among us!

If improvement of teaching and learning is ultimately an issue of expertise, what do we know about the instructional expertise level of school leaders across the country?

Studying CEL–District Partnerships

- Qualitative case study results show significant changes in leadership and teacher behavior in the first two years of the partnership.
- We also attempted to quantify leaders' learning.
- Specifically we wondered:

Are leaders developing greater expertise in observing instruction and planning feedback to teachers?

5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning Framework and Lesson Analysis Rubric

- Grounded in what we know about how people learn
- Grounded in what we know about best teaching practices
- Corroborated by a panel of expert observers of instruction through a multi-stage process

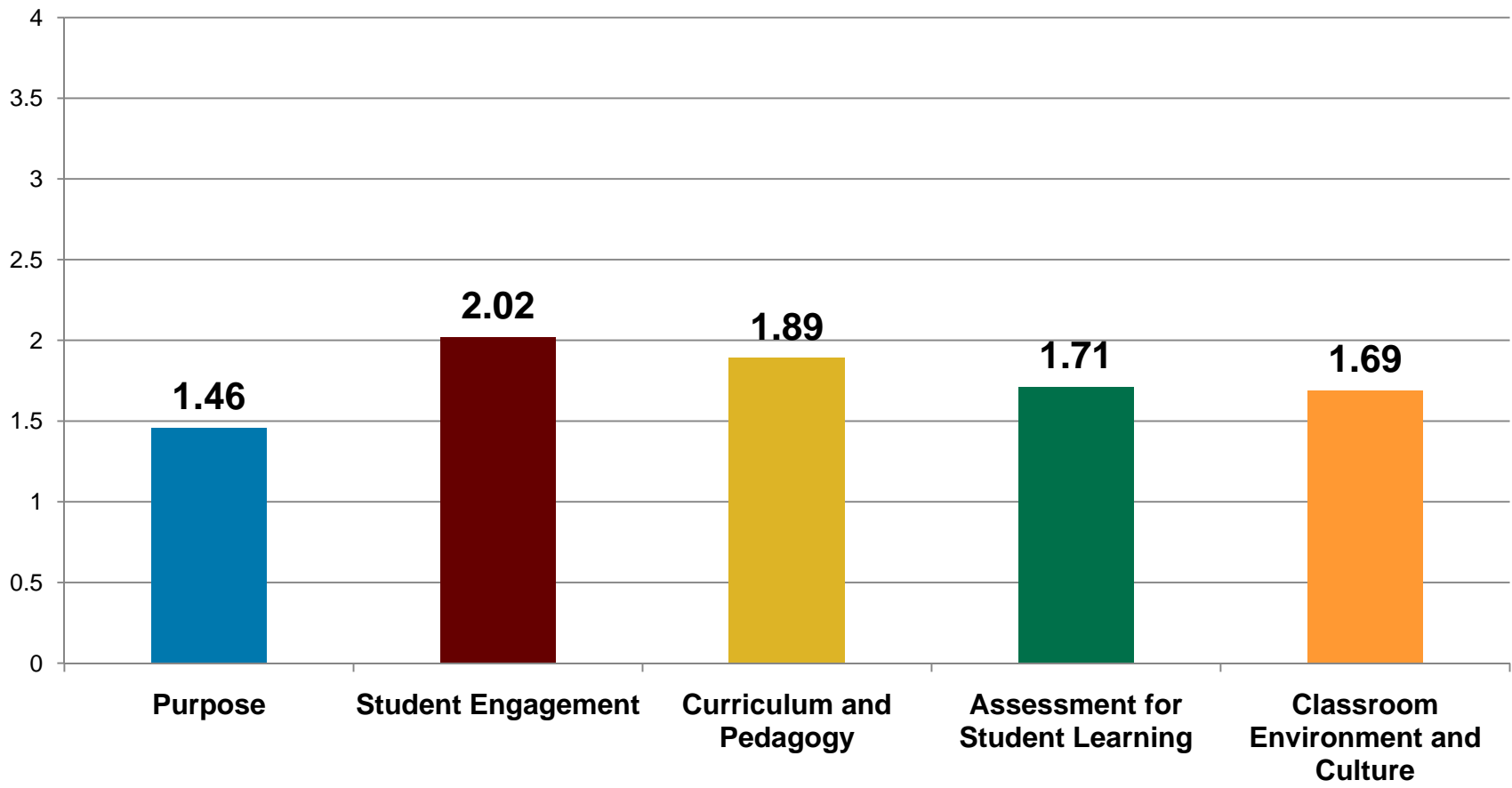
CEL Lesson Analysis Rubric

- Empirical and experiential research effort led to the development of rubric framework.
- Rubric captures 5 general dimensions and 13 sub-dimensions of what expert observers of teaching and learning pay attention to.
- Rubric differentiates novice from expert practice along each of the 13 sub-dimensions.

Cumulative Average – Dimension Scores

1,468 participants; 25 school districts

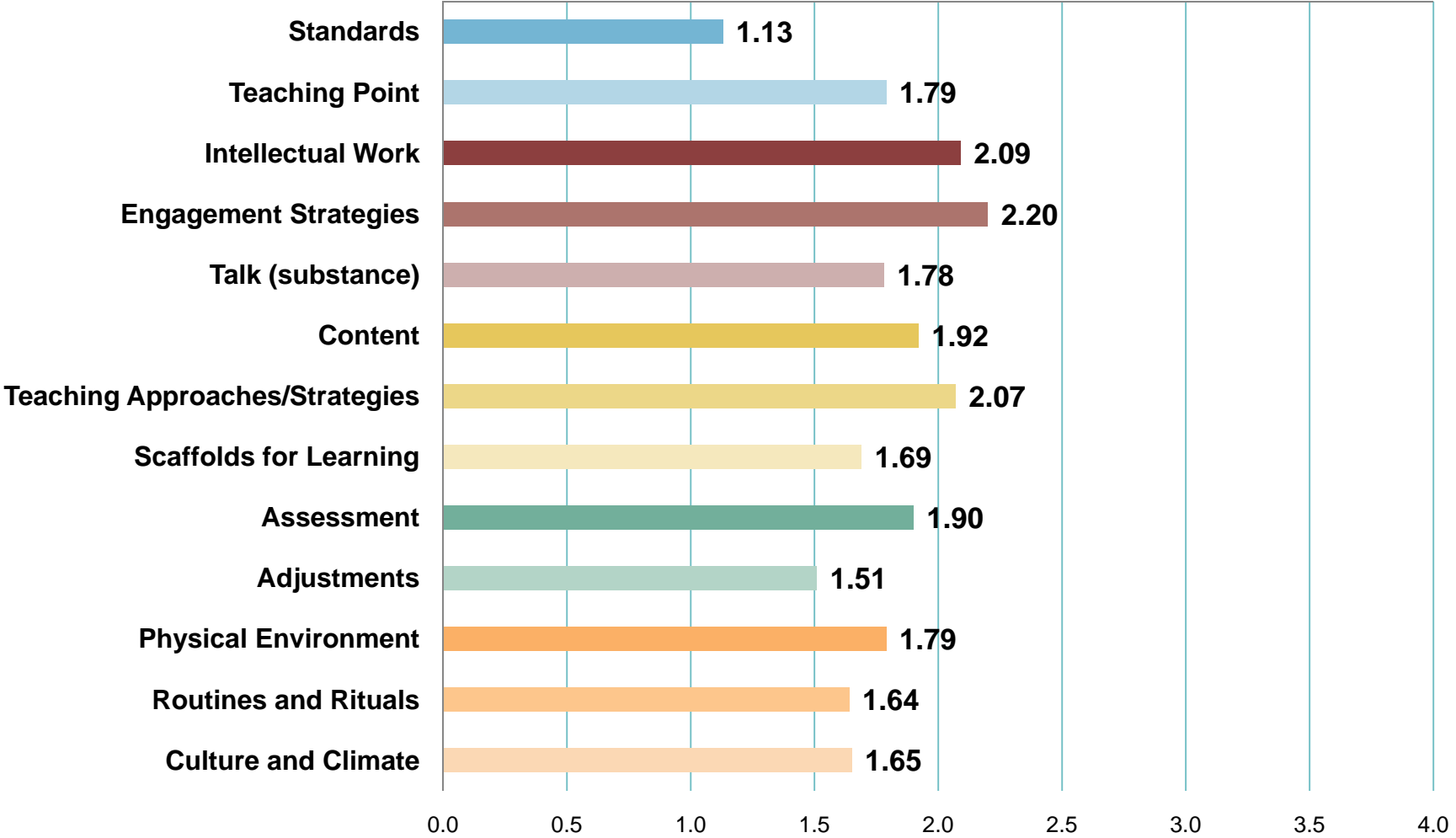
Dimension Averages March 5, 2010



Cumulative Average – Sub-Dimension Scores

1,468 participants; 25 school districts

Sub-Dimension Averages, March 5, 2010



The Research Findings Are Compelling

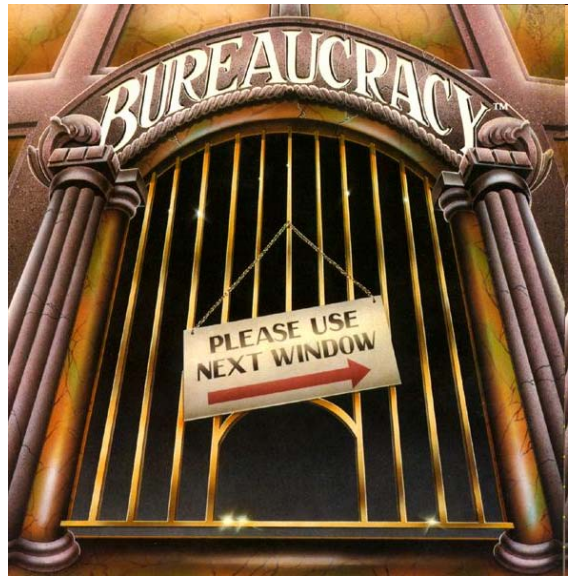
- The level of instructional expertise among school leaders is insufficient to help teachers improve practice to the extent necessary so that all students are successful.
- The primary role of central office leaders is to build the expertise of their leaders and teachers.

Opening Question

When a central office is really supporting the improvement of teaching and learning, what does that work involve?

Why Focus on Central Offices?

School reforms hit a wall: “The district”



Districts as institutions: Not set up to achieve better outcomes

Central Office Transformation

District approach to district-wide teaching and learning improvement that:

- Takes entire central office as the main unit of reform
- Fundamentally remakes central office administrators' work practices and relationships with schools and, particularly, with principals

The Problem with Research

Wave 1: District Effects & Superintendent Reports

> Weak conceptualization of “district”

Wave 2: District Case Studies

- > Empirically thin
 - Principal reports not observations
 - One-time interviews
 - Attribution by coincidence

Wave 3: Studies of Administrators’ Decision-making & Work

(e.g., Spillane, Hannaway, Honig, Hubbard et al.; Kennedy)



2010

Wave 3 Studies

Lessons

- Improvement depends on central office work practices
- All central office administrators must participate
- Practices involve “learning”
- Old institutions not set up for new work

Implications

- Focus on work practices across central office
- Use learning theory for conceptual framework
- Choose cases engaged in “transformation”

Central Office Transformation

- Focuses centrally on teaching & learning
- Engages entire central office in reform
- Fundamentally remakes central office **work practices** and **relationships with schools**
- Is an important reform initiative in its own right

Research Questions

In school district central offices engaged in central office transformation:

1. Who participates?
2. What do they do?
3. With what results?
4. What conditions help or hinder transformation and associated outcomes?

Research Design & Methods

Strategic research sites:

- Atlanta Public Schools (APS)
- New York City (Empowerment Schools Org.)
- Oakland Unified School District (OUSD, CA)

Qualitative, comparative case study:

- Interviews: 240
- Observations: ~220 hours
- Documents: ~200

Example from Atlanta

Atlanta's work in supporting teaching and learning improvement through a transformation of the central office has been featured nationally.

Central Office Transformation Framework

1. Learning-focused partnerships with school principals to deepen principals' instructional leadership practice
2. Assistance to the central office–principal partnerships
3. Reorganization and reculturing of each central office unit to support the central office–principal partnerships and teaching and learning improvement
4. Stewardship of the overall central office transformation process
5. Use of evidence throughout the central office to support continual improvement of work practices and relationships with schools

Findings

Central office transformation:

- is a promising reform strategy
- requires fundamental change in the institution of the central office
- distributes leadership (and responsibility) for learning improvement across the system
- strikes a different relationship with schools, focused on partnering around joint work
- involves flexible and dynamic support
- is uncharted territory that requires new learning and support

Resources & Applications

- **Partnerships with districts and states** to support action on study findings focused on ways central offices work productively to improve teaching and learning.
 - Current examples:
 - Seattle School District
 - Idaho Superintendents Network
- **Tools**, in the form of frameworks and district self-assessment rubrics, to help inform the work on central offices from the UW Center for Educational Leadership.

Discussion

At tables, questions for discussion:

- How does what you just heard about central office transformation inform your work with your district team, if at all?
- For those of you in smaller districts, to what extent do these ideas apply?
- Where and how are you and other central office leaders “leading” instructional improvement in your district currently?



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The Center for Educational Leadership's (CEL) mission is to improve learning for all students while eliminating longstanding academic achievement gaps. We believe that in order to support excellent teaching, school leaders and teachers need to acquire and develop expertise about what constitutes powerful instruction.

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