Leading the Change:

A Comparison of the Principal Supervisor Role in Principal Supervisor Initiative Districts and Other Urban Districts

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Wallace Foundation's Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI) was a four-year effort to redefine principal supervision in six urban school districts. Launched in 2014, the PSI aimed to help these districts transform the principal supervisor position from a role that traditionally focused on managerial tasks to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to be effective instructional leaders. The PSI encouraged these districts to revise the principal supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership, reduce principal supervisors' span of control (the number of principals they oversee), train supervisors and develop their capacity to support principals, create systems to identify and train new supervisors, and strengthen central office structures to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor's role.

At the same time, other urban districts also were revising their approaches to principal supervision, prompted by national conferences, new principal supervision standards, and other local efforts (Cochran et al. 2020). For example, in 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers released the first national standards for principal supervisors (Council of Chief State School Officers 2015). These standards set new expectations for the principal supervisor role, focusing on supporting principals as instructional leaders.

This report compares principal supervision in the PSI districts with that in other urban districts. It compares (1) the *structures* districts put in place to support the principal supervisor role (including principal supervisors' span of control and districts' approaches to selecting and training supervisors) and (2) principal supervisors' *professional practices*. This comparison can provide greater context for the changes that the PSI districts made during the initiative, highlighting areas where the PSI districts' work aligned with broader national trends and areas where it surpassed or lagged these trends. It can also provide a roadmap for other districts seeking to strengthen the principal supervisor role to better support principals as instructional leaders, by highlighting aspects of principal supervision that districts and states may find easier to change and aspects that may require more deliberate action and focus.

A. Methods

This report presents findings from a 2018 survey of principal supervisors in 54 urban school districts, including the 6 PSI districts. The districts were all members of the Council of the Great City Schools, a coalition of the nation's largest urban public school systems. In total, 343 principal supervisors responded to the survey, including 50 in the 6 PSI districts (a 96 percent response rate) and 293 in the 48 other urban districts (a 64 percent response rate).

B. Findings

The study found several key differences, along with some important similarities, across principal supervisors in the PSI and other urban districts. In general, we found that the PSI districts implemented stronger structures than other urban districts to support principal supervisors in their work with principals, but that supervisors' practices were similar across PSI and other urban districts.

Structures to support the principal supervisor role

The PSI encouraged districts to make several structural changes to support the revised principal supervisor role, including reducing principal supervisors' span of control, implementing training and mentorship for supervisors, creating succession and apprenticeship programs for aspiring supervisors, and creating structures in the central office to support principal supervisors in their work with principals. Consistent with the PSI's emphasis on these changes, we found that the structures to support supervisors in their work with principals were stronger in PSI districts than in other urban districts.

❶ Principal supervisors in PSI districts had lower spans of control than those in other urban districts. Reducing principal supervisors' span of control was a key goal of the PSI, intended to enable supervisors to spend more time working with each of their principals. By the end of the initiative in the 2017–2018 school year, supervisors in PSI districts oversaw an average of 13 principals, compared with an average of 16 for principal supervisors in other urban districts. However, spans of control in both sets of districts were considerably lower than the average span of control of 24 in urban districts in 2012 (Casserly et al. 2013), suggesting that both PSI and other urban districts made structural changes to better support the principal supervisor role.

❷ Principal supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to oversee groups of principals organized by grade level. Same-grade-level groups can be advantageous in that they allow supervisors to focus on a narrower set of content standards, curricula, and assessment data. Principal supervisors in PSI districts were more likely to report that their principals were grouped based on grade level. In contrast, supervisors in other urban districts were more likely to indicate that their principals were grouped based on attendance feeder patterns (groups of elementary, middle, and high schools serving the same students over time), which required supervisors to work with principals across the K–12 spectrum.

❸ Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to receive role-specific training and rated their training more highly. Role-specific, dedicated training for principal supervisors was more prevalent in PSI districts than in other urban districts. Furthermore, although the trainings emphasized similar skills across PSI and other urban districts, supervisors in PSI districts rated the quality of their training more highly than did those in other urban districts.

❹ PSI districts were more likely than other urban districts to offer programs for new and aspiring supervisors. Principal supervisors in PSI districts were significantly more likely than those in other urban districts to report that (1) their district had a program to train aspiring supervisors, (2) their district had a mentoring and induction program for new supervisors, and (3) they themselves had entered their position through participation in a program for aspiring principal supervisors.

❺ Principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar perceptions of central office support and structures. Overall, fewer than half of principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts agreed that the central office understood their work, facilitated their work with principals, was organized to support principals, or scheduled

meetings to maximize their time in schools. However, supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to agree that they were involved in the deployment of instructional support staff to their schools. This involvement helped principal supervisors in the PSI districts direct central office support to schools based on each school's specific needs.

6 **Principal supervisors in PSI districts had more favorable views of their own evaluation systems than did those in other urban districts.** Principal supervisors in the PSI districts rated the quality of their district's supervisor evaluation systems higher than did those in other urban districts in terms of clarity of the evaluation process, usefulness of feedback, and alignment of the evaluation with their work.

Principal supervisors' professional practices

The PSI aimed to change supervisors' daily work and practices, particularly their work to support principal leadership. As the supervisor role shifted from a focus on management and compliance toward developing principals' instructional leadership, supervisors were expected to adopt the mindsets and practices necessary to support principals. These practices included visiting schools, coaching and providing feedback to principals, conducting structured classroom walkthroughs and observations with principals, modeling and role-playing leadership behaviors, and guiding principals in analysis of and reflection on their school's program of teaching and learning. Despite the PSI's emphasis on these practices, we found that, in general, supervisors' practices were similar across the PSI and other urban districts.

1 **Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts spent much of their time visiting schools and focusing on instructional leadership.** On average, supervisors in both sets of districts reported spending about half of their time on the job visiting schools and working with principals on instructional leadership. However, principal supervisors in PSI districts made more frequent visits to both their most- and least-visited schools than did supervisors in other urban districts, although these differences were not statistically significant. This may have been a result of their smaller spans of control.

2 **Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts used similar instructional leadership practices with principals, although supervisors in PSI districts were less likely to work on operational issues with principals.** Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts used instructional leadership practices with principals, such as visiting classrooms and analyzing data, with similar frequency. However, consistent with the PSI's attempts to shift supervisors away from operational issues, supervisors in PSI districts focused less on issues such as hiring and facilities than did supervisors in other urban districts.

3 **Principal supervisors in PSI districts had more positive views of their districts' principal evaluation systems than did those in other urban districts.** The PSI districts focused on aligning their principal evaluation systems with supervisors' work to support principals. Compared with principal supervisors in other urban districts, supervisors in PSI districts expressed more positive perceptions of their districts' principal evaluation systems

and were more likely to report that the systems aligned with their work, although the latter difference was not statistically significant.

C. Summary

The PSI focused on developing a new role for principal supervisors as drivers of instructional leadership among principals and creating the district context to support the new vision of principal supervision. At the same time as the PSI unfolded, districts across the United States also were rethinking principal supervision, prompted by national conferences and workshops, new principal supervision standards, and other local efforts. However, the more intensive, sequential approach the PSI districts used to shift the focus of their principal supervisors' work may have led to some changes above and beyond those in other urban districts.

The biggest differences between PSI and other urban districts were in the structures to support the principal supervisor role. Compared with other urban districts, the PSI districts had lower spans of control, were more likely to provide unique and dedicated training for supervisors, and were more likely to offer programs for aspiring supervisors. In contrast, principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar perceptions of the support they received from the central office. Supervisors' practices with their principals also were similar across PSI and other urban districts—supervisors reported spending more than half their time on instructional leadership and visiting schools.

Our finding of similar supervisor practices across PSI and other urban districts is consistent with two other recent studies, one focused on PSI districts and one on a broader set of urban districts, that examine how principal supervisors' work with principals has evolved. The first study, Goldring et al. (2020), found that supervisors' work with principals in PSI districts changed over the course of the PSI. Principals reported increased frequency of supervisor practices such as coaching, feedback, and data use. Principals' perceptions of their supervisor's effectiveness improved over the course of the initiative as well. Principals recounted how, over the course of the initiative, their relationships with their supervisors had improved and deepened because supervisors better understood their contexts and specific needs. The second study, Cochran et al. (2020), examined trends in principal supervision in a broader set of urban districts. It suggests that principal supervisors in urban districts have changed their practices to focus more on instructional leadership in recent years. Together these findings suggest that it is possible for districts to change the principal supervisor role to better support principals.

Deep changes to the principal supervisor role require clearly articulated expectations for the focus of the supervisor role, including strong expectations for consistency of practices; alignment with central office culture and capacity; and continued opportunities for principal supervisors to learn and refine practices. District leaders, practitioners, and researchers should continue to actively identify how and under what circumstances districts can promote these conditions to strengthen principal supervisors' knowledge and practices.

I.   INTRODUCTION

The Wallace Foundation's Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI) was a four-year effort to redefine principal supervision in six urban school districts. Launched in 2014, the PSI aimed to help districts transform a position that traditionally focused on managerial tasks to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to be effective instructional leaders.

The theory of action for the PSI emphasized two types of changes. First, districts made structural changes to create the context and conditions needed to change the principal supervisor role and supervisors' professional practices. These changes included revising the official job description for principal supervisors, reducing the number of principals each supervisor oversaw, creating apprenticeship programs for aspiring supervisors, and training supervisors to better support principals. The PSI

> Six districts participated in the PSI:
>
> 1. Baltimore City Public Schools, Maryland[a]
> 2. Broward County Public Schools, Florida
> 3. Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Ohio
> 4. Des Moines Public Schools, Iowa
> 5. Long Beach Unified School District, California
> 6. Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota
>
> [a] DeKalb County School District (Georgia) was an initial participant in the PSI but withdrew after the first year, following a change in district leadership. Baltimore City Public Schools joined the initiative after DeKalb withdrew.

also restructured the central office to better support supervisors' work with principals. Second, through these structural changes, the PSI districts focused on shifting principal supervisors' mindsets and practices from management to coaching and support. Districts expected supervisors to implement new professional practices such as coaching principals, conducting walkthroughs, and observing classrooms. They also tried to align their principal evaluation systems to support supervisors in their work with principals.

The PSI had five core components to guide districts' changes to the principal supervisor role, but it gave districts leeway to interpret, adapt, and implement each component according to their local context and needs. The five components were:

1. Revising the principal supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership

2. Reducing principal supervisors' span of control (the number of principals they oversee) and changing how supervisors are assigned to principals

3. Training supervisors and developing their capacity to support principals

4. Developing systems to identify and train new supervisors (succession planning)

5. Strengthening central office roles to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor's role

By the time of the launch of the PSI in 2014, urban districts around the country also were considering changes to the principal supervisor role (Cochran et al. 2020). For example, in 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers released the first national standards for principal supervisors (Council of Chief State School Officers 2015). These standards set new expectations for the principal supervisor role and focused on supporting principals as instructional leaders.

Technical assistance providers, such as the New York City Leadership Academy, began offering programs for principal supervisors. Other districts and foundations hosted leadership summits and workshops for principal supervisors. Today, principal supervision has become a profession distinct from that of other central office administrators.

This report, "Leading the Change: A Comparison of the Principal Supervisor Role in Principal Supervisor Initiative Districts and Other Urban Districts," is one of three reports sponsored by The Wallace Foundation that examine districts' experiences with the PSI and its effects on principals' performance. In our first and second reports—"A New Role Emerges for Principal Supervisors: Evidence from Six Districts in the Principal Supervisor Initiative" (Goldring et al. 2018) and "Changing the Principal Supervisor Role to Better Support Principals: Evidence from the Principal Supervisor Initiative" (Goldring et al. 2020)—we investigated the PSI districts' progress during the four years of the initiative. We found that all six PSI districts revised their principal supervisor job descriptions, reduced principal supervisors' span of control, and provided supervisors with role-specific training. In addition, some districts addressed succession planning by creating apprenticeship programs for aspiring supervisors. Some districts made greater strides than others in strengthening central office supports for principal supervisors' work with principals, the most challenging component for districts to implement.

The goal of this report is to compare principal supervision in the PSI districts with that in a sample of other urban districts to provide greater context for the changes that the PSI districts made during the initiative. It compares two broad aspects of principal supervision: (1) districts' *structures* to support a redesigned role for principal supervisors and (2) *principal supervisors' roles and practices* (Figure I.1). Specifically, the report compares the districts' structures to support the principal supervisor role, including supervisors' span of control, supervisor selection and training, and supervisors' perceptions of the support they received from the central office. It also compares principal supervisors' daily work and practices and their perceptions of how well their districts' principal evaluation systems aligned with their work with principals. The findings offer insights into the challenges districts face when revising the principal supervisor role to better support principals as instructional leaders.

Figure I.1. Two broad aspects of principal supervision

Structures to support a redesigned principal supervisor role

- Principal supervisors' span of control and network assignments
- Principal supervisor training and professional development
- Central office support for the principal supervisor role

Principal supervisors' roles and practices

- Time in schools
- Instructional leadership practices with principals
- Principal evaluation

II. METHODS

Teams of researchers at Vanderbilt, Mathematica, and the Council of the Great City Schools collaborated to design and administer the surveys to all principal supervisors in the PSI districts and the council's other member districts in spring 2018.

A. Instrument design

The team adapted the survey instrument from those used in previous years of the PSI study (Goldring et al. 2018 and 2020) and an earlier study of principal supervision by the Council of the Great City Schools (Casserly et al. 2013).[1] Researchers at Vanderbilt reviewed, piloted, and revised the original PSI surveys to ensure their face validity and clarity.

The survey asked supervisors about the following topics:

- Their professional background and demographics
- Their span of control (the number of principals they oversaw) and how these principals were assigned to them
- How they allocated their time
- Their practices and topics of discussion with principals
- Their professional development experiences
- Their perceptions of the central office
- Their perceptions of their own evaluations
- Their feedback concerning the supports supervisors need to be effective

B. Survey administration, response rate, and final sample

The study team sent the web-based surveys to all principal supervisors (staff directly overseeing one or more principals) in 63 participating Council of the Great City Schools member districts, including the 6 PSI districts. Seven other districts that were members of the council did not provide a list of their principal supervisors to the study team and were not included in the survey.[2] We administered the survey between April and September 2018.

In 4 of the original 63 districts that received surveys, no supervisors responded. We also excluded five other districts from the analysis sample. Two of these districts—District of Columbia Public Schools and Tulsa Public Schools—were engaged in separate but concurrent

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[1] The final survey for this study is available online at https://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Leading-the-Change-A-Comparison-of-the-Principal-Supervisor-Role.aspx.

[2] The Council of the Great City Schools had 70 member districts at the time of survey administration in 2018 and 76 member districts when this report was published in 2020.

principal supervision changes with support from The Wallace Foundation. The other three—Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, Denver Public Schools, and Hillsborough County Public Schools—participated in the Principal Pipeline Initiative (PPI), a separate Wallace Foundation effort that also had implications for the principal supervisor role (the other three PPI districts were not members of the Council of the Great City Schools). Excluding these districts allowed us to compare supervisors in PSI districts with supervisors in urban districts that were not participating in intensive, targeted work that included some of the PSI's approaches and components. Although the other urban districts in our sample may also have made changes to their principal supervisor role during the same period, these districts likely implemented such changes on their own, without external support.

The final sample for this analysis included 343 confirmed principal supervisors across 54 districts (a 67 percent response rate; Table II.1).[3] This included 50 supervisors in the 6 PSI districts (a 96 percent response rate) and 293 supervisors from 48 other urban districts (a 64 percent response rate). The lower response rates in the other urban districts means that the responses in those districts might not be fully representative of the views of all the principal supervisors in those districts. This could lead us to overstate or understate the differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts. However, we are unable to determine the size or direction of any possible bias.

Table II.1. Response rates and total respondents for PSI and other urban districts

District type	Number of districts	Number of respondents	Response rate (percentage)
PSI	6	50	96
Other urban	48	293	64
Total	**54**	**343**	**67**

Note: Table and analysis exclude principal supervisors in districts participating in The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline Initiative. They also exclude District of Columbia and Tulsa Public Schools, which were engaged in separate but concurrent principal supervision changes with support from The Wallace Foundation. They also exclude four respondents who we confirmed were not working in a principal supervisor role at the time of survey administration.

Principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar professional backgrounds. The average principal supervisor in the PSI districts had spent about five years in the role, compared with six years for supervisors in other urban districts. In both PSI and other urban districts, most principal supervisors worked as principals immediately before becoming supervisors. However, PSI districts were more likely than other urban districts to hire their supervisors from principal positions in the district.

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[3] Based on an initial review of the survey responses, we determined that four respondents were not principal supervisors and dropped them from the analysis sample. We have also omitted one partial response from the PSI sample.

C. Analysis

Our analyses compare the survey responses of principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts. All analyses give equal weight to each principal supervisor, rather than averaging their responses and giving equal weight to each district. We assessed the statistical significance of differences in means between PSI and other urban districts using unpaired t-tests. In general, in our discussion of the findings, we focus on differences between PSI and other urban districts that are both substantively meaningful and statistically significant at the 5 percent level. We assess whether a difference is substantively meaningful based on context from our analysis of districts' implementation of the PSI across the four years of the initiative (Goldring et al. 2018 and 2020). In discussing differences that are substantively meaningful but not statistically significant, we note the lack of statistical significance in the text.

III. STRUCTURES TO SUPPORT A REDESIGNED ROLE FOR PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS

The PSI asked districts to make several structural changes to help transform the principal supervisor role. These changes entailed reorganizing, reallocating, and refocusing essential components and functions of the central office. The districts focused on redefining the official job description, reducing the span of control for principal supervisors, implementing training and mentorship programs for sitting principal supervisors, creating apprenticeship programs for aspiring supervisors, and revising principal supervisor evaluation systems. These changes were intended to create the conditions for supervisors to spend more time in schools and give them the knowledge and skills to implement specific supervisory practices to develop and support principals.

A. Span of control and network assignments

A major component of the PSI was reducing each supervisor's span of control—the number of principals each supervisor was directly responsible for supporting. The theory behind this change was that, when principal supervisors oversee fewer principals, these supervisors can provide more individualized support to their principals, develop stronger relationships with their principals, and spend more time in schools.

In addition to reducing the span of control, PSI districts grappled with how best to group or assign principals to networks and supervisors to maximize the effectiveness of supervisors' support and principals' learning opportunities with other principals in their networks.

Span of control

Reducing principal supervisors' span of control requires substantial planning and central office reorganization. Districts must have the resources and stakeholder buy-in to hire more supervisors or to shift the responsibilities of existing central office staffers to full-time principal supervisor roles. Because of frequent pressure to allocate resources directly to schools and classrooms, it can be challenging for districts to increase the number of principal supervisors.

By the end of the PSI, principal supervisors' span of control was lower in the PSI districts than in the other urban districts (Figure III.1). Supervisors in PSI districts oversaw 13 principals on average, compared with an average of 16 principals for supervisors in other urban districts. The range of principals overseen by supervisors was also narrower in PSI districts. The span of control in PSI districts ranged from 7 to 19, compared with a range of 2 to 50 principals in other urban districts. However, spans of control in both sets of districts were considerably lower than the average span of control of 24 in urban districts in 2012 (Council of the Great City Schools 2013), suggesting a broader national trend toward these reductions.

Figure III.1. Principal supervisor span of control in PSI and other urban districts
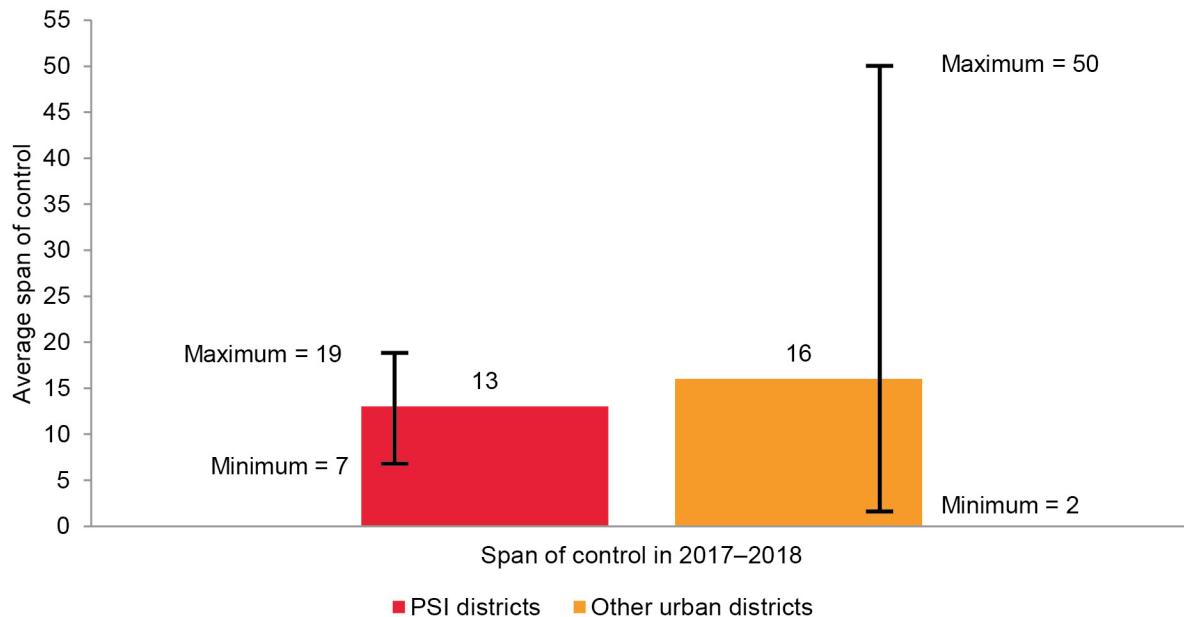
Figure reads: The average supervisor in a PSI district oversaw 13 principals.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: Survey question read, "How many principals do you currently supervise?" Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Consistent with the smaller average span of control in PSI districts, supervisors in these districts were less likely to report that they supervised too many principals.

Supervisors with higher spans of control (defined as 13 or more principals) in both PSI and other urban districts were more likely to agree that they supervised too many principals to provide enough support (Figure III.2). However, interviews with supervisors in PSI districts (Goldring et al. 2020) suggest that even a modest reduction in span of control can substantially shape principal supervisors' work and principals' experience of support. Supervisors in PSI districts who experienced smaller reductions (for example, from 19 to 13 principals) said these changes allowed them to expand their focus to work with all their principals, even those who may have needed less support.

In the PSI districts, supervisors, principals, and central office staff universally praised the reductions in span of control (Goldring et al. 2020). In interviews, central office personnel in the PSI districts said they felt that principals were better supported because they had greater access to their supervisors and more regular visits and contacts. Supervisors reported that a smaller span allowed them to understand their schools better and visit more frequently. Many principals also noted that they saw their principal supervisor more frequently or received more support after the decrease in span.

Despite the smaller average spans of control in PSI districts, however, supervisors in those districts still had commitments or faced obstacles that limited the time they could spend in schools or working directly with principals. In both PSI and other urban districts, nearly 40 percent of supervisors with lower spans of control agreed or strongly agreed that they did not have time to visit certain schools as much as they needed to (Figure III.2). The relatively high percentage of supervisors who agreed with this statement suggests that, although reducing span of control is important for clearing the way for supervisors to spend time in schools, it is not a panacea. In some PSI districts, demands and expectations for supervisors' time from other central office departments persisted. Despite their reduced caseloads, supervisors were still required to attend to these demands, such as addressing parent complaints or attending to administrative requests from the central office.

Figure III.2. Principal supervisors' perceptions of their capacity to support principals in PSI and other urban districts
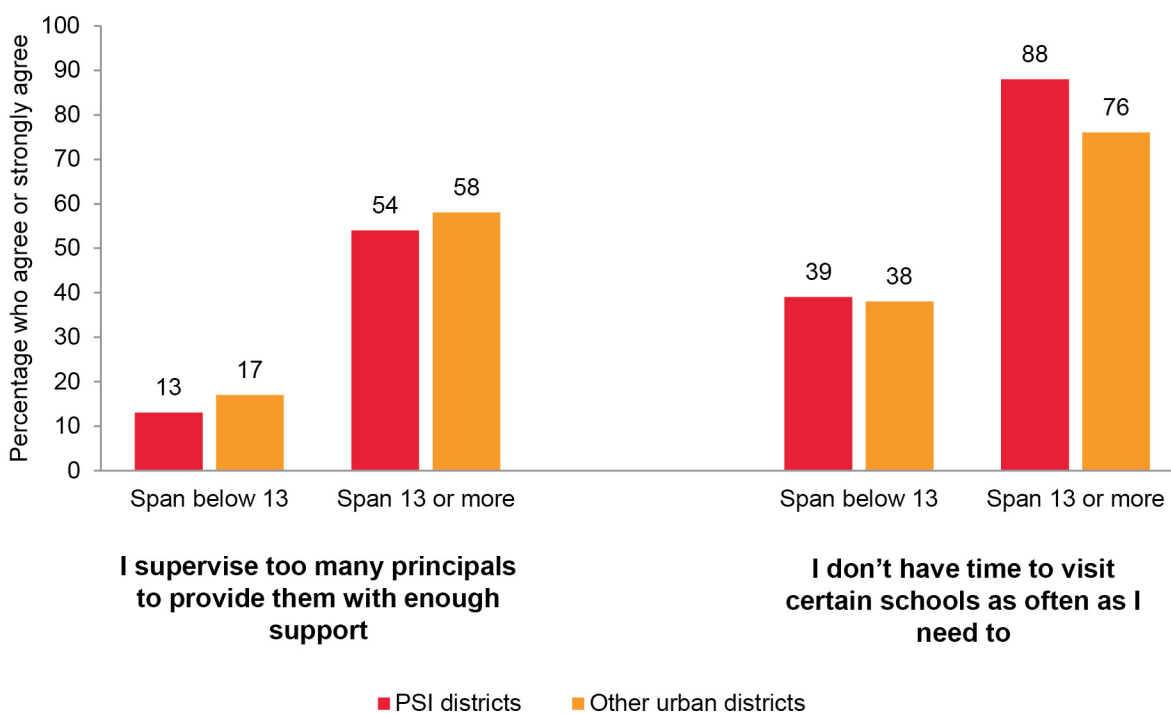
Figure reads: Thirteen percent of principal supervisors in PSI districts with a span of control of fewer than 13 principals agreed or strongly agreed that they supervise too many principals to provide them with enough support.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: Survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level for either item. Differences between lower and higher span of control groups are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for both items.

To further help supervisors focus on developing principals' instructional leadership skills, and to reduce administrative work, the PSI encouraged districts to reduce principal supervisors' responsibilities overseeing non-instructional personnel. During the PSI, as supervisors focused more intensely on supporting schools and principals, the percentage of supervisors supervising

non-instructional personnel declined. In both PSI and other urban districts, however, most supervisors oversaw some personnel who were not principals. An equal proportion—about half—of principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts reported that they had at least one direct report who was not a principal, such as a secretary or principal coach. Among supervisors with any direct reports, those in other urban districts had twice as many direct reports, an average of six, as supervisors in PSI districts, an average of three (Figure III.3).

Figure III.3. Average number of direct reports overseen by principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts, among supervisors who had at least one direct report
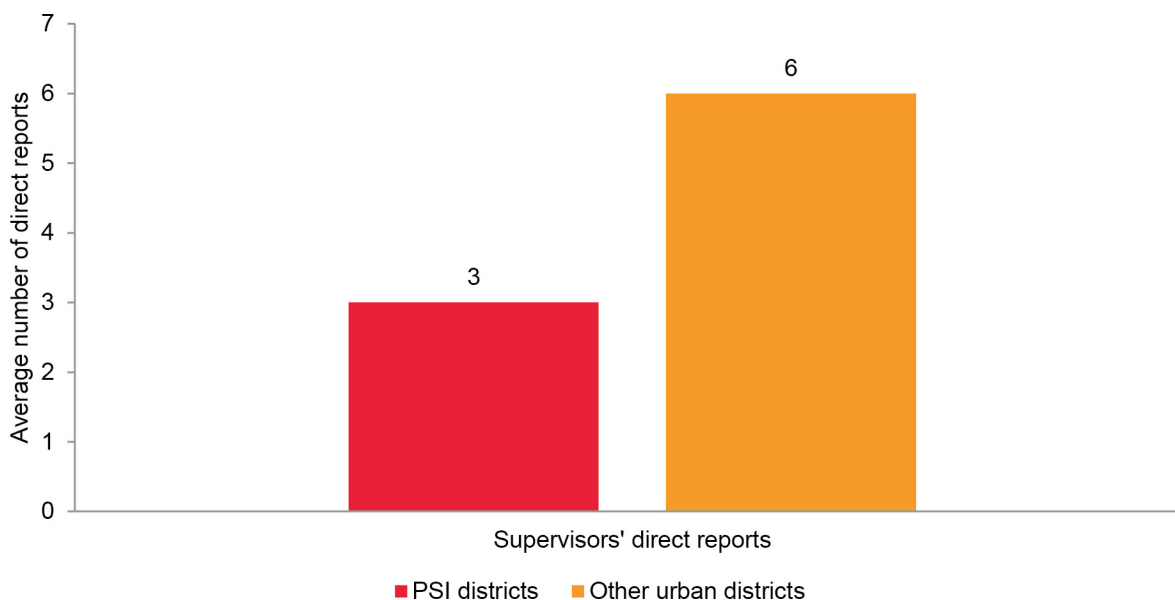
Figure reads: Supervisors who had direct reports in PSI districts oversaw an average of three direct reports.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: Survey question read, "How many personnel directly reported to you?" Only respondents who answered "Yes" to the question "Not including principals, during the 2017–2018 school year, did other school or district personnel report directly to you?" answered the question (supervisors in other urban districts, n = 139; supervisors in PSI districts, n = 24). Difference between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts is statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Many of the PSI districts implemented innovative models to support supervisors and schools. Some PSI districts replaced traditional administrative models of support with cross-functional teams, often called central office support teams (Goldring et al. 2018). In the support team model, supervisors worked with designated personnel from other central departments, such as instructional coaches (Figure III.4). Although these personnel reported to their own department heads, supervisors were able to draw on their support and sometimes deploy them to schools as they saw fit, rather than spend time supervising these staff positions administratively.

Figure III.4. District support team structure
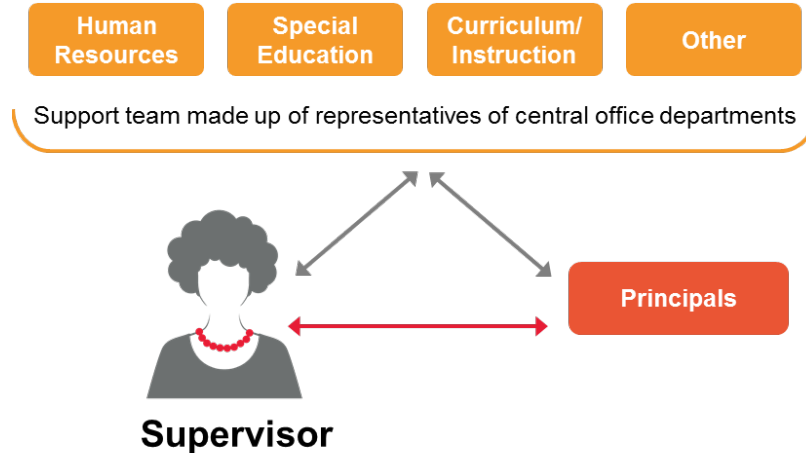
Source: PSI district interviews with central office personnel and principal supervisors, 2015 and 2016. Adapted from Goldring et al. 2018.

Approach to assigning principals to supervisors and networks

In addition to reducing the supervisors' span of control, PSI districts also redesigned how they grouped or assigned principals and supervisors to networks to maximize the effectiveness of supervisor support and principals' learning opportunities with other principals in their network. The PSI districts assigned supervisors to networks based on grade level, geographic location, feeder patterns, or school performance. Each approach presented unique benefits and trade-offs for supervisors and principals (Goldring et al. 2018). Most PSI districts relied on more than one of these criteria for grouping principals.

Approaches to assigning principals to supervisors and networks differed across the PSI and other urban districts (Figure III.5). Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely to oversee groups of principals who were organized by grade level (such as middle school principals), whereas those in other urban districts were more likely to oversee groups of principals organized by attendance feeder pattern (groups of elementary, middle, and high schools serving the same students over time).

These differences may reflect the large amount of thought that the PSI districts put into redesigning principal networks. Before the PSI, the prevailing method of supervisor assignment in most districts was by geographic area. As PSI districts grappled with increasing the instructional focus of the supervisor role, assignment based on academic features of schools—such as grade level, performance, or theme—allowed districts to match supervisors to schools based on their instructional expertise. To reduce supervisors' travel time, however, most PSI districts also attempted to take school location into account in the groupings.

Figure III.5. Criteria for principal assignment to supervisors across PSI and other urban districts
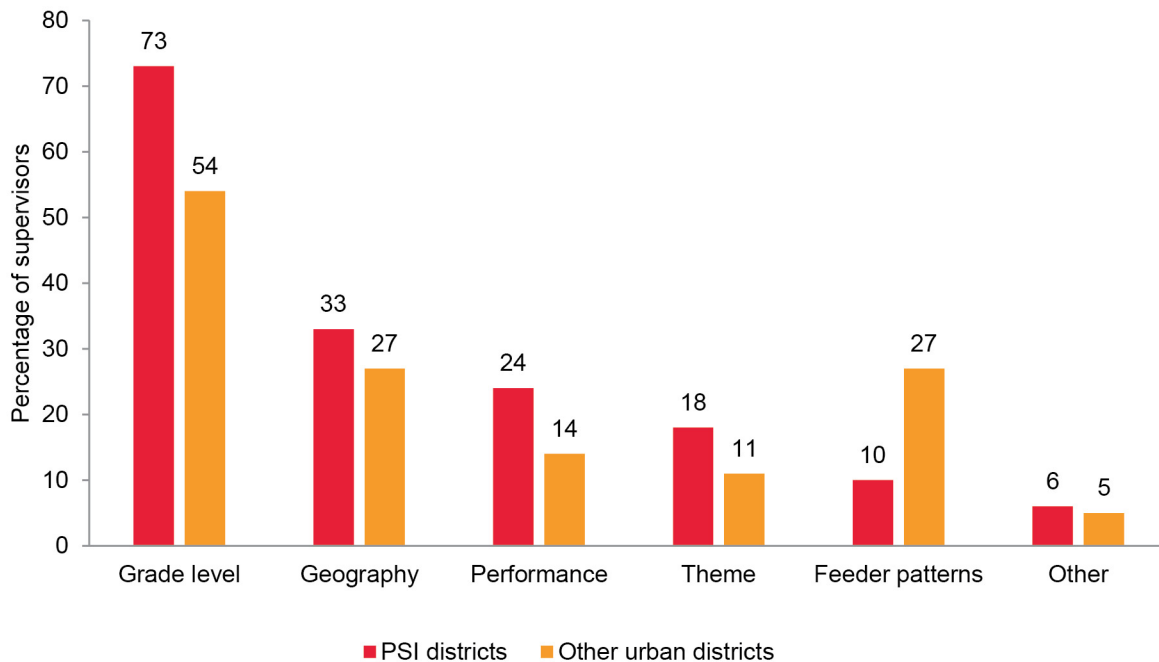
Figure reads: Seventy-three percent of supervisors in PSI districts indicated that grade level was a criterion by which their principals were assigned to them.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, $n = 50$; supervisors in other urban districts, $n = 293$).

Note: Survey question read, "This year, by what criteria are the majority of your principals assigned to you?" Respondents could choose multiple categories. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant for "Grade level" and "Feeder patterns" only.

B.   Principal supervisor training and professional development

Before the PSI, supervisors in PSI districts received minimal training on improving their capacity to support and develop principals as instructional leaders. Instead, they typically received generic professional development alongside principals and other central office staff.

In contrast, during the PSI, all six districts implemented dedicated training programs to develop supervisors' capacity to support and coach principals. Technical assistance providers played key roles in planning and facilitating the training. Supervisors especially valued job-embedded training approaches, such as one-on-one coaching and in-school peer observations with other supervisors. In the final year of the PSI, training in some districts declined in frequency and quality as these districts transitioned from more expensive external training providers to in-house trainings (Goldring et al. 2020). When not protected as a priority, these in-house trainings risked being overtaken by district administrative items and information sharing. However, some of the PSI districts committed to making dedicated, in-house principal supervisor training a priority, which ensured the continued success and growth of their principal supervisors' knowledge and expertise.

Access to role-specific training

Consistent with the PSI's emphasis on providing specific, targeted training to principal supervisors, supervisors in PSI districts were significantly more likely than those in other urban districts to report participating in professional development related to their role as a principal supervisor (Figure III.6). Eighty percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that they participated in training specific to their role in the 2017–2018 school year, compared with only 62 percent of supervisors in other urban districts.

Figure III.6. Principal supervisors' participation in role-specific training in PSI and other urban districts
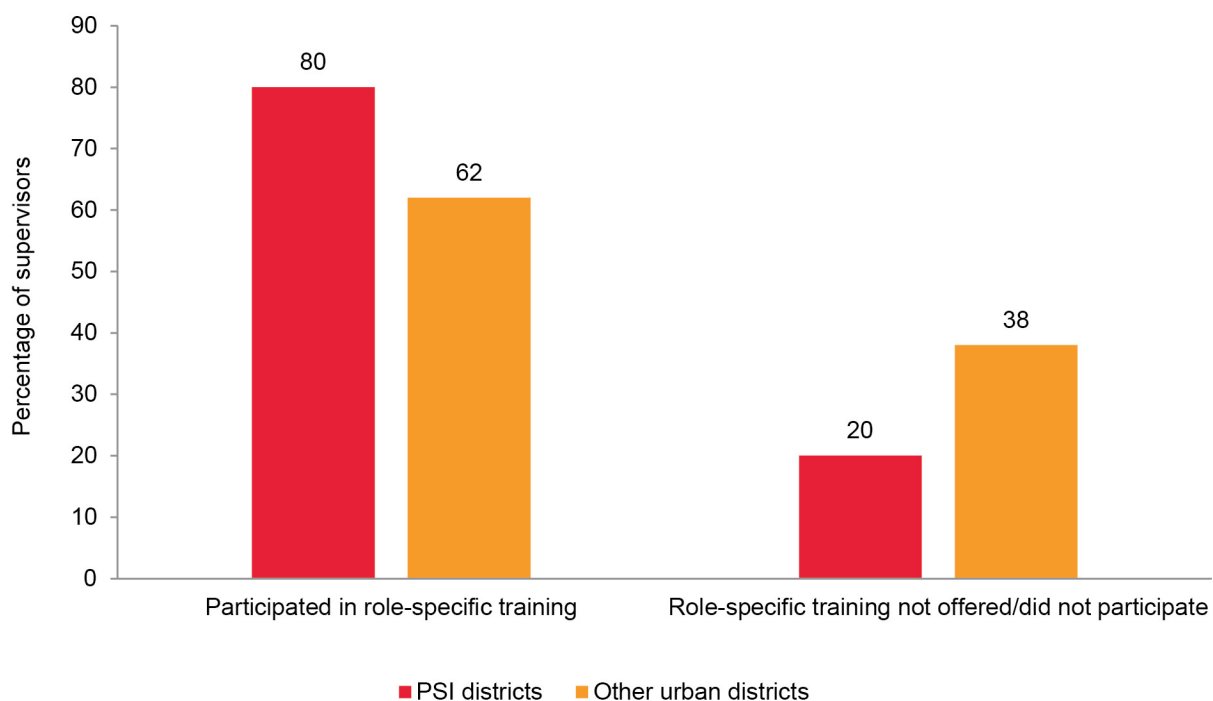
Figure reads: Eighty percent of principal supervisors in PSI districts participated in training specific to their role.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "During the 2017–2018 school year and the summer that preceded it, did you participate in district-sponsored training or professional development pertaining to your specific role as a principal supervisor?" Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Perceptions of training quality

Among supervisors who reported receiving role-specific training, those in PSI districts rated the quality of this training significantly more highly than did supervisors in other urban districts according to a scale measuring training quality (Figure III.7). The scale asked supervisors to rate their level of agreement with 20 statements pertaining to the quality of the role-specific professional development or training they received during the previous year and the summer before. For example, they were asked about their agreement with the statements that the professional development "specifically enhanced my capacity to develop principals' instructional leadership," "helped build a learning community with my fellow supervisors," and "provided

opportunities to share specific practices with other principal supervisors in my district." Overall, principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts agreed that their training was high quality. In general, however, supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to agree with the survey statements about the quality of their professional training.

Figure III.7. Principal supervisors' perceptions of the quality of their professional development and training in PSI and other urban districts

Figure reads: Supervisors in PSI districts rated their training quality an average of 3.7 on a 5-point scale.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Thinking about the district-sponsored training or professional development for principal supervisors you attended during the 2017–2018 school year and the summer before, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 'The professional development or training I attended….'" The scale was made up of 20 items; see the appendix for information on scale construction. Supervisors rated their agreement with each item on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Training emphasis

Across PSI and other urban districts, principal supervisors' training emphasized similar skills and practices. Surveys asked supervisors to indicate the level of emphasis of their professional development across a range of topics. Across both PSI and other urban districts, supervisors indicated that the skills most emphasized in their trainings were observing classrooms to identify instructional quality, improving student growth and achievement, using student performance data to improve classroom instruction, skills for effectively coaching principals, and providing actionable and specific feedback to principals (Figure III.8).

Figure III.8. Five most common areas of emphasis in principal supervisor trainings in PSI and other urban districts
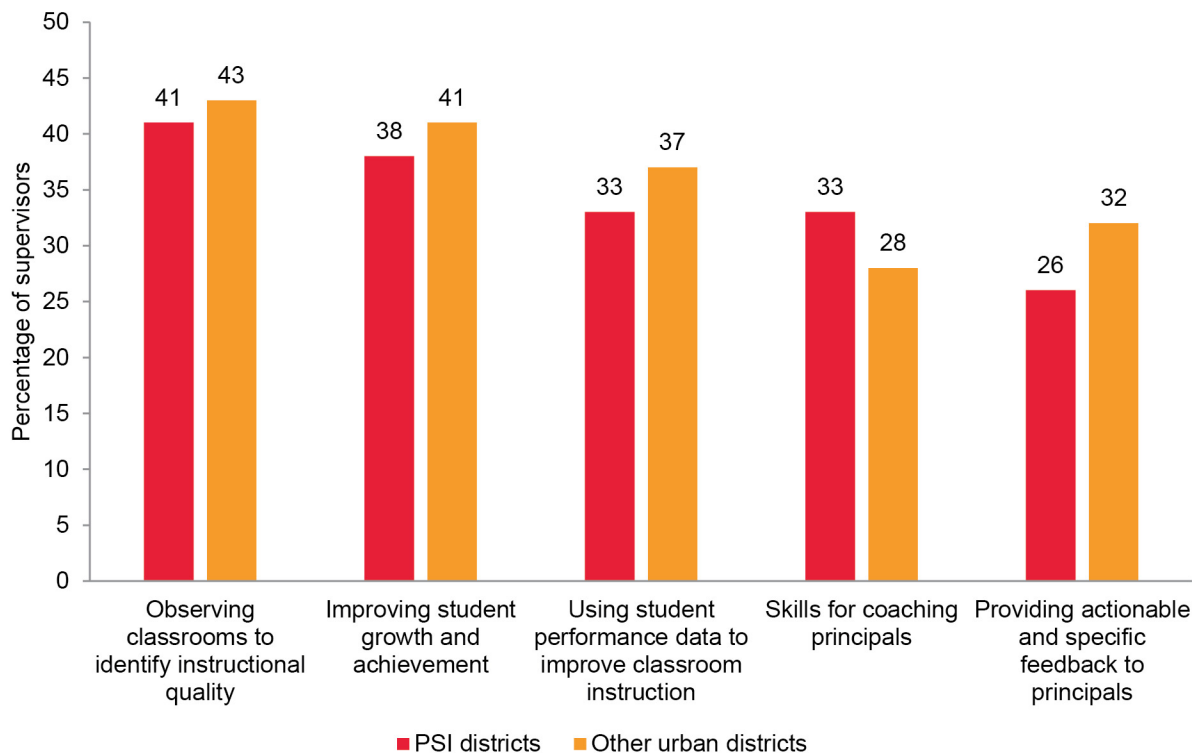
Figure reads: Forty-one percent of supervisors in PSI districts indicated that their training placed a great deal of emphasis on observing classrooms to identify instructional quality.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, $n = 50$; supervisors in other urban districts, $n = 293$).

Note: The survey question read, "Thinking about the district-sponsored training or professional development for principal supervisors you attended during the 2017–2018 school year and the summer before, how much emphasis was placed on the following areas?" The set comprised 23 items. Supervisors indicated their response as "no emphasis," "some emphasis," or "a great deal of emphasis." Figure shows the percentage of supervisors who marked "a great deal of emphasis" in each category. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Three areas—working effectively one-on-one with principals, helping principals provide actionable and specific feedback to teachers, and using resources in their work—were among the skills most emphasized in trainings in other urban districts but not in PSI districts (not shown). These differences in emphasized skills may reflect the evolution of the training that supervisors in PSI districts received during the initiative. In the earlier years of the initiative, training in the PSI districts focused on providing effective one-on-one support and specific feedback to principals. In later years (including the year of the survey), the focus of the trainings shifted toward adapting and differentiating support based on principals' needs and away from developing specific skills and practices (Goldring et al. 2020).

Despite these differences, training for supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts clearly emphasized skills for improving instruction and instructional leadership. Only 9 percent of supervisors in PSI districts and 5 percent of those in other urban districts indicated that their

training placed a great deal of emphasis on working with principals on operations, human resources, or budget management.

C. Central office support for the principal supervisor role

The PSI emphasized the importance of the central office in supporting and sustaining the new principal supervisor role. Central offices are responsible for (1) selecting and training future supervisors (including mentoring and preparing aspiring supervisors), and (2) creating staff roles and structures to support supervisors' work so those supervisors can meet the needs of the principals and their schools. In the PSI districts, the central offices that changed their structures and orientation toward supporting schools were better able to support principal supervisors (Goldring et al. 2020).

Selecting and training future principal supervisors

Administrative turnover and vacancies can present challenges to the central office's attempts to support schools. To ensure that high quality principal supervisor candidates are available for position openings, some districts operate apprenticeship programs to recruit and train promising aspiring principal supervisors. Other districts, particularly those with little principal supervisor turnover, may prefer more informal succession planning. In addition, some districts may provide formal mentoring to new principal supervisors to help them transition smoothly into their new role.

The PSI districts took varying approaches to succession planning. Three of the six PSI districts implemented supervisor apprenticeship programs. The other three districts monitored leadership in the district to identify promising future supervisor candidates (Goldring et al. 2018). The districts that chose to create apprenticeship programs varied in their approach, but common features of each program were a rigorous selection process, ongoing and job-embedded opportunities for trainees to experience the supervisor role, and coaching and feedback from mentors and experts. The districts that chose to not formally implement an apprenticeship program often relied on systems for tracking and identifying promising candidates.

Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to report that their district had an aspiring supervisor program, as well as mentorship programs for new supervisors (Figure III.9). Fifty-nine percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that their district currently had a program to identify and prepare aspiring principal supervisors, whereas only 19 percent of supervisors in other urban districts reported that their district currently had an aspiring supervisor program. In fact, 20 percent of supervisors in the PSI districts were hired into their position through their participation in an aspiring supervisor program, compared with just 5 percent of supervisors in other urban districts (not shown). PSI districts also were more likely to offer mentoring or induction programs for new supervisors. Forty-nine percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that their district had a mentoring or induction program for new supervisors, compared with 22 percent of supervisors in other urban districts.

Figure III.9. Aspiring supervisor and supervisor induction programs in PSI and other urban districts
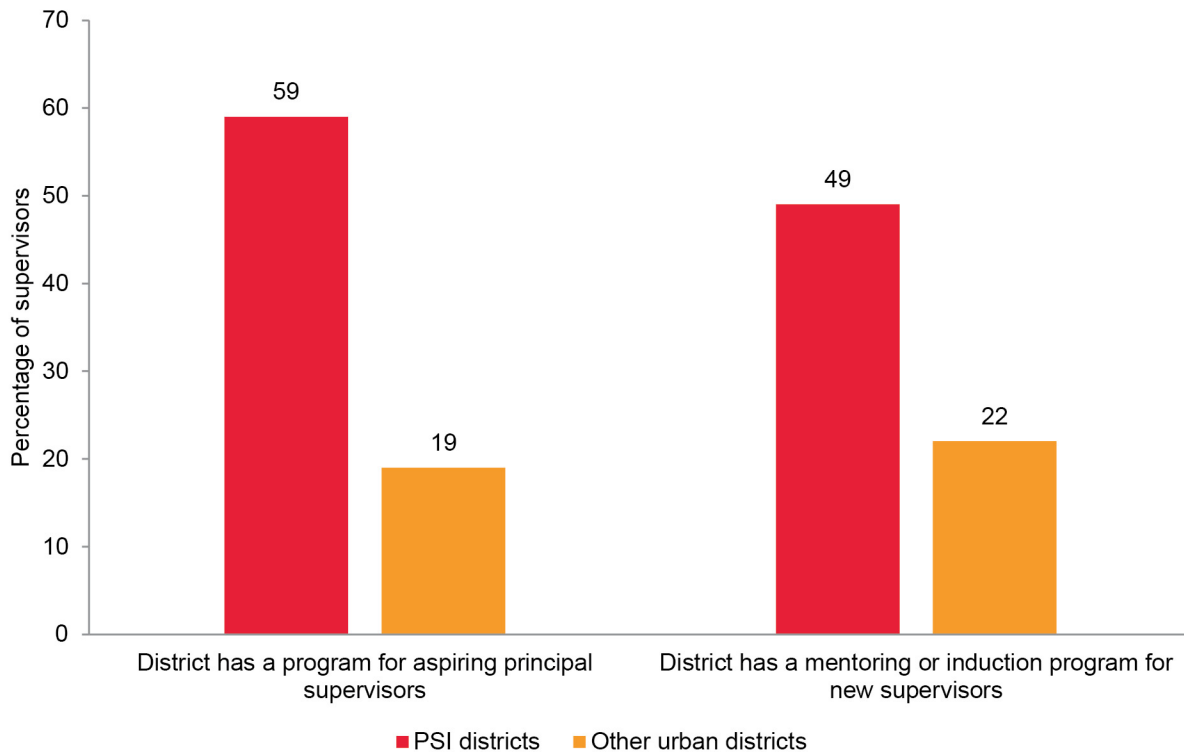
Figure reads: Fifty-nine percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that their district has a program for aspiring principal supervisors.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, $n = 50$; supervisors in other urban districts, $n = 293$).

Note: The survey questions read, "Does your district have a program in place to identify and prepare aspiring principal supervisors?" and "Does your district have a mentoring or induction program for new principal supervisors?" Supervisors indicated "yes" or "no." Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for both items.

Three of the six PSI districts drove the large differences between PSI and other urban districts in the reported availability of aspiring principal supervisor programs and induction programs. Broward, Cleveland, and Long Beach created formal aspiring supervisor programs that focused on recruiting promising principal supervisor candidates from among the ranks of top principals and cultivating their skills through internship and study (Goldring et al. 2018). These districts also created mentoring programs available for newly hired supervisors, although these programs ranged in formality. Aspiring and mentoring/induction programs for supervisors required much district investment and coordination to find resources and develop supports for supervisor candidates. Some PSI districts, including Des Moines and Minneapolis, found that aspiring supervisor programs were not well aligned with their organizational models. Instead, they relied on talent management tools (such as leader tracking systems, or data systems to track information about candidates for future leadership positions and current available positions) to help them identify promising supervisor candidates.

Principal supervisors' perceptions of central office support for principals and supervisors

Early in the initiative, leaders in the PSI districts realized that, to change the principal supervisor role, they would also need to restructure tasks and responsibilities in the central office and change its culture to better support schools (Goldring et al. 2018). The PSI districts created structures, such as central office support teams made up of personnel from other departments, that helped supervisors coordinate school support with other central office personnel. In addition, most of the PSI districts changed their central office schedules to free up supervisors' time so meetings were not held during school hours.

Principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar perceptions of the support they received from the central office. Overall, fewer than half of supervisors in PSI and other urban districts agreed that the central office understood their work, facilitated their work with principals, was organized to support principals, or scheduled meetings to maximize supervisors' time in schools (Figure III.10). In addition, only about one-third of supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts agreed that the central office was organized to support principals. Although supervisors' responses to these items indicate that there was room for improvement in the central office's support for principal supervisors, most supervisors in PSI and other urban districts agreed that improving teaching and learning in schools was a key focus of the central office's work.

Supervisors' relatively negative perceptions of the support they received from the central office in PSI districts results speak to the challenges central office leaders in PSI districts faced in changing the culture of the central office. District leaders in multiple PSI districts spoke of changing central office structures and changing central office cultures as two separate challenges. Although leaders were able to make headway in changing central office structures, such as altering meeting times to allow supervisors more time in schools and creating support teams and liaison structures to support supervisors' work, they said it was more difficult to change the central office culture to one that supported teaching and learning (Goldring et al. 2018).

Principal supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than supervisors in other urban districts to agree with several statements about the quality and effectiveness of the support they received from the central office (Figure III.10). For example, supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to agree that they were involved in the deployment of instructional support staff to the schools they supervised (71 versus 41 percent). A slightly larger proportion of supervisors in PSI districts agreed that central office meetings were scheduled so that they could maximize their time in schools (41 versus 35 percent) and that these meetings were useful to their practice (43 versus 34 percent), although these differences were not statistically significant.

A lower proportion of supervisors in PSI districts than in other urban districts agreed that improving teaching and learning was a key focus of the central office's work (59 versus 71 percent) and that other departments understood their work (27 versus 36 percent), although these differences were not statistically significant. The relatively low rates of agreement with these statements among supervisors in PSI districts highlight some of the challenges the PSI districts faced in changing central office culture to align with the revised principal supervisor role. As the PSI districts shifted the principal supervisor role away from managerial tasks, some supervisors

noted that other departments in the central office remained mired in regulation and compliance. Through their unique training, interactions with other supervisors in the PSI, and their focus on their new role, supervisors in PSI districts had specific ideas of how the central office could support their work and be more responsive to their principals. These supervisors occasionally expressed frustration that their new role was not well understood by other central office departments and that these departments were slow in learning to support them in their work of helping principals improve teaching and learning. Supervisors in other urban districts might not have felt this disconnect, because they might not have had to navigate such significant changes to their role or been part of deliberations about central office redesign to support their roles.

Improving central office culture was slow but possible. Supervisors' perceptions of the central office in PSI district over the course of the initiative indicated incremental but positive and statistically significant changes (Goldring et al. 2020).

Figure III.10. Principal supervisors' perceptions of the central office in PSI and other urban districts
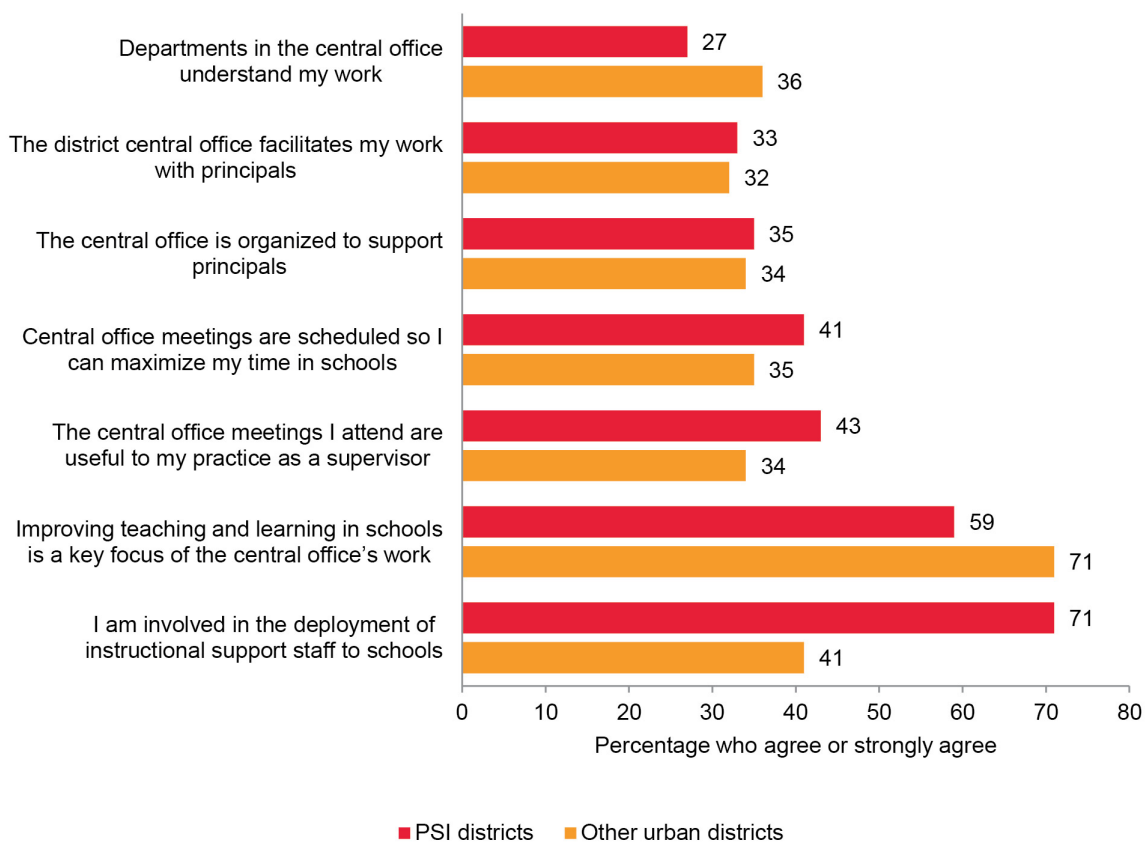
Figure reads: Twenty-seven percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed or strongly agreed that departments in the central office understand their work.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, $n = 50$; supervisors in other urban districts, $n = 293$).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences with this district's central office in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Difference between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts is statistically significant at the 5 percent level for the item "I am involved in the deployment of instructional support staff to the schools I supervise."

In both PSI and other urban districts, large proportions of supervisors agreed with several statements regarding barriers from the central office that they encountered with their work with principals (Figure III.11). For example, most supervisors agreed that principals lost time focusing on teaching and learning because of requests from the central office. These findings again underscore the difficulties of reorienting the central office system to support principals and schools, even as the PSI districts were able to successfully redefine the role of principal supervisors themselves.

However, a smaller proportion of supervisors in PSI districts reported that their principals sought help from them because they did not know who to contact in the central office (49 versus 61 percent of supervisors in other urban districts) or that instructional staff were deployed to the central office without their knowledge (43 versus 57 percent of supervisors in other urban districts), although these differences were not statistically significant. Our interviews with principal supervisors in PSI districts suggest that they have become more aware of, and involved in, central office processes for school support, likely due to the introduction of innovative collaborative structures such as central office support teams and department liaison systems.

Figure III.11. Principal supervisors' perceptions of barriers from central office in PSI and other urban districts
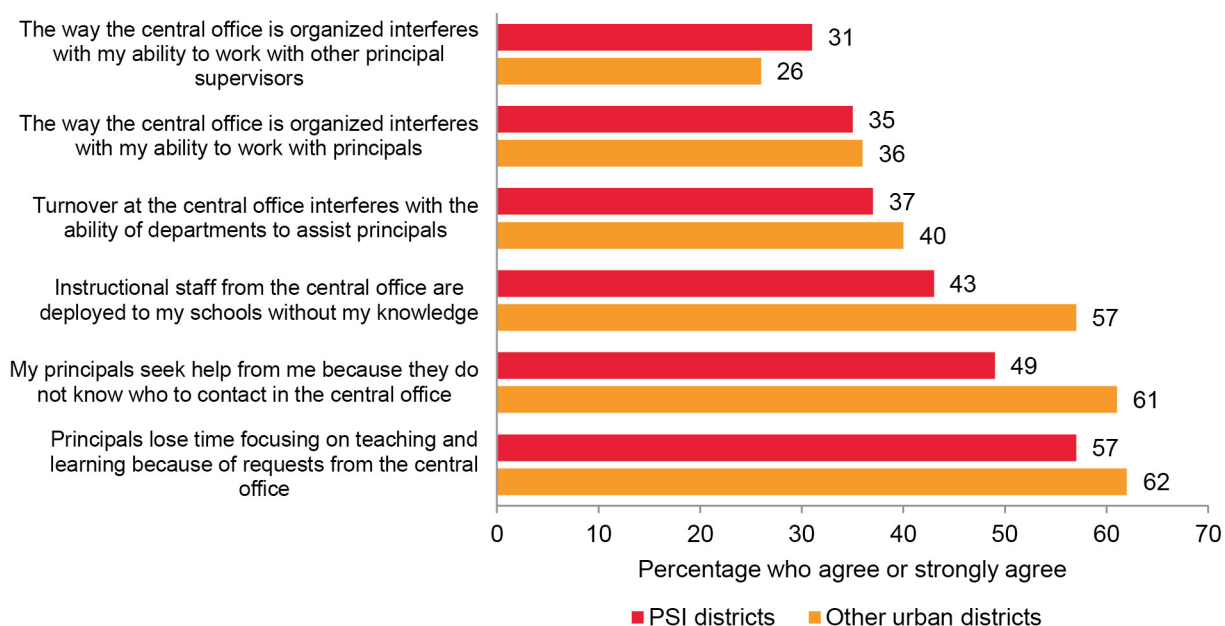
Figure reads: Thirty-one percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed or strongly agreed that the way the central office is organized interferes with their ability to work with other principal supervisors.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences with this district's central office in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Evaluation of principal supervisors

Supervisors themselves may receive evaluations and feedback on their performance from their superiors in the central office. However, few districts have implemented evaluations that are specific to principal supervisors. As the supervisor role continues to evolve away from administration and compliance, general evaluations may no longer provide supervisors with the specific, targeted feedback they require to improve their performance.

None of the PSI districts had formal supervisor-specific evaluation systems at the beginning of the PSI. When districts evaluated supervisors at all, they used a generic central office rubric that was ill-equipped to capture supervisors' effectiveness in the changing role. Recognizing the importance of providing principal supervisors with ongoing feedback, four PSI districts invested in formalizing evaluation systems or tools that assessed supervisors according to the expectations for their revised role. For example, Cleveland moved away from a generic central office evaluation rubric to a detailed assessment that included monthly meetings with the department chief, coaching observations, and structured write-ups about each supervisors' performance, as well as improvement plans for supervisors who needed them. The other two PSI districts provided informal coaching and feedback to principal supervisors in regular meetings with their supervisor at the central office. Several PSI district leaders said they would continue to develop and refine their principal supervisor evaluation systems after the PSI ended.

Overall, supervisors in PSI districts expressed more positive views of their supervisor evaluation systems than did supervisors in other urban districts (Figure III.12). Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to agree that their district's principal supervisor evaluation system was aligned with their work (55 versus 39 percent) and provided actionable feedback (65 versus 41 percent). They also were more likely to report that their district's principal supervisor evaluation system incorporated principal feedback (57 versus 21 percent). However, in both PSI and other urban districts, about a quarter of supervisors (29 and 23 percent) agreed that the principal supervisor evaluation system in their district was very general.

Figure III.12. Principal supervisors' perceptions of the quality of their district's principal supervisor evaluation system in PSI and other urban districts

Figure reads: Fifty-five percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The principal supervisor evaluation system in this district aligns with my role and the work I do."

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the principal supervisor evaluation system in this district?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "The principal supervisor evaluation system in this district aligns with my role and the work I do," "I receive actionable and useful feedback from my supervisors' evaluations of my performance," and "Principals provide formal input into my evaluation."

Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to report that their principal supervisor evaluation system held them accountable for various outcomes (Figure III.13). For example, 65 percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that their evaluation system held them accountable for improving student achievement, compared with 51 percent of those in other urban districts. However, none of these differences was statistically significant.

Figure III.13. Principal supervisors' perceptions that their district's evaluation system held them accountable in PSI and other urban districts

Percentage who agree or strongly agree

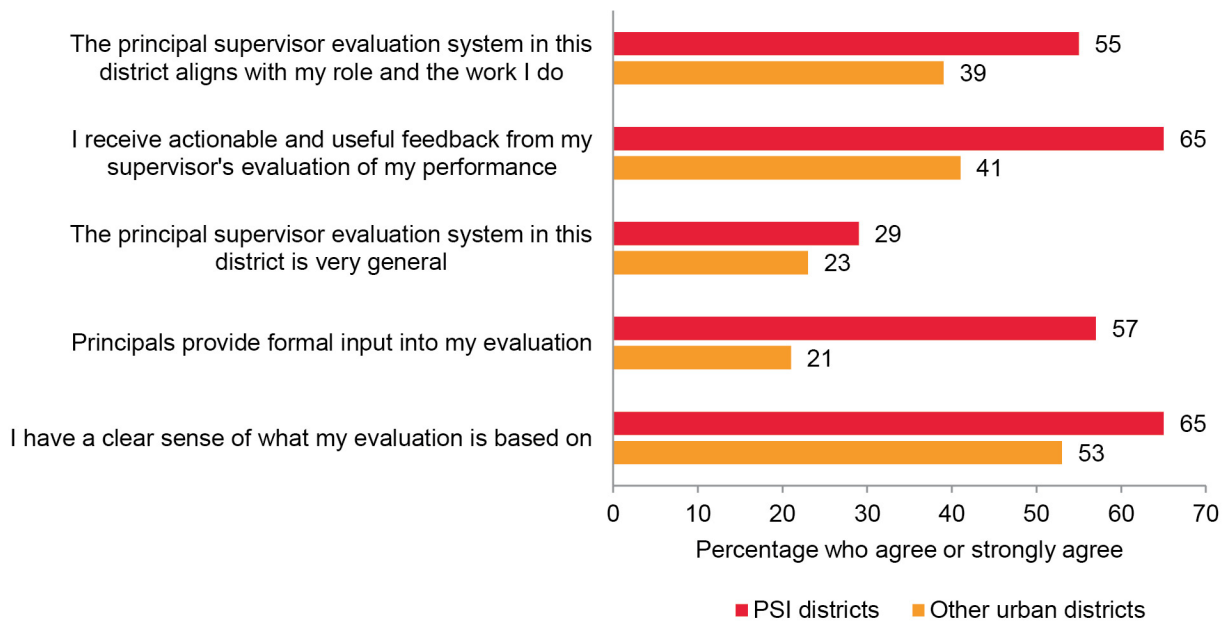■ PSI districts   ■ Other urban districts
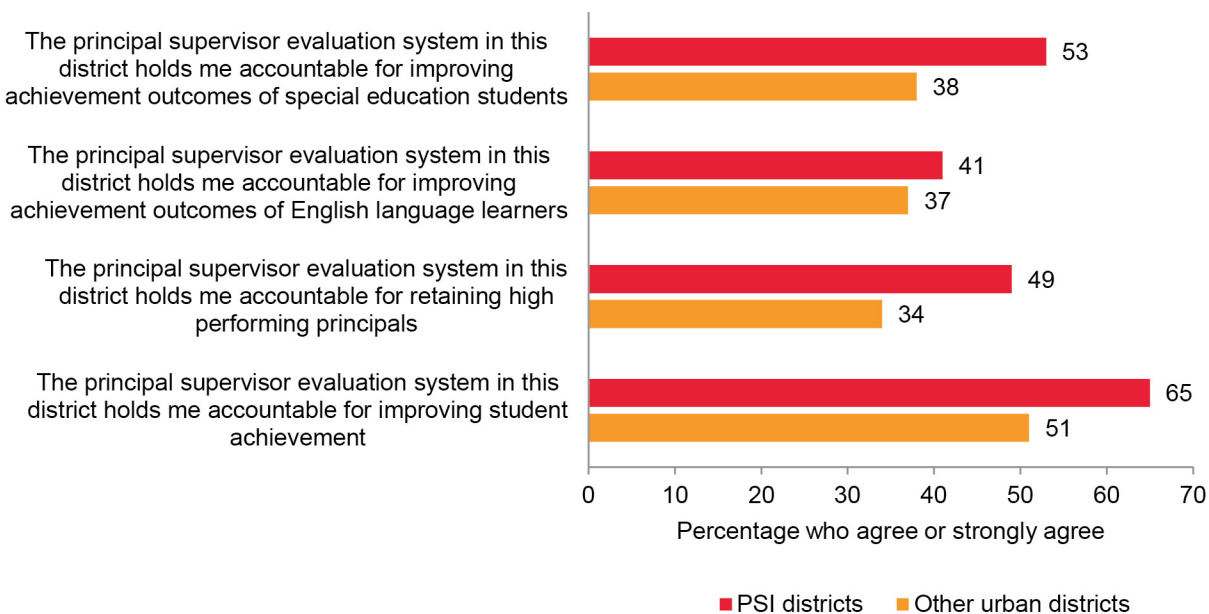
Figure reads: Fifty-three percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "The principal supervisor evaluation system in this district holds me accountable for improving achievement outcomes of special education students."

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the principal supervisor evaluation system in this district?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

D.   Summary

Early in the PSI, districts made wide-ranging structural changes to foster the redesign of the supervisor role, and they continued to refine these structures throughout the initiative. By the end of the PSI, when supervisors completed the survey, clear differences were apparent between PSI and other urban districts. Principal supervisors in PSI districts had lower average spans of control, fewer direct reports but greater agency in deploying central office staff, more and better role-specific training, and access to the role through apprenticeship and mentorship programs.

Because these changes are resource- and time-intensive, they require planning and coordination among multiple district stakeholders that would be unlikely to occur without a strong vision for the new supervisor role. Even with the clear vision of the PSI, district leaders sometimes met with resistance as they made these changes, especially when the new principal supervisor role was not yet well understood across the central office. Many PSI district leaders reported that changing systems and mindsets in the central office was one of the most challenging aspects of the initiative. These challenges were reflected in principal supervisors' perceptions of the support they received from the central office even at the end of the initiative.

IV. PRINCIPAL SUPERVISORS' ROLES AND PRACTICES

Changing the principal supervisor role to better support principals requires altering the day-to-day practices of principal supervisors. Before the PSI, districts gave supervisors broad discretion in their work with principals, outside of formal evaluation and compliance responsibilities. Supervisors in PSI districts described their role before the initiative as reactive, requiring them to respond to every need that principals voiced. In contrast, the PSI focused the principal supervisor role on providing direct supports to principals and developing and coaching them. PSI districts also strived to align principal supervisors' evaluations with their work with principals.

A. Principal supervisors' time use

Because principal supervisors typically have many roles, they must spend their time on a variety of activities. These include principal coaching and evaluation, district administration, and leading principal professional learning communities. In a previous report by the Council of the Great City Schools, 80 percent of principal supervisors noted that they were responsible for addressing district administrative issues and 62 percent noted that they were responsible for addressing district compliance issues in 2012 (Casserly et al. 2013).

The PSI attempted to further focus each principal supervisor's time on direct interactions with principals and their leadership teams. The PSI districts used several strategies to free up supervisors' time to spend in schools with principals. For example, some districts scheduled central office meetings after school hours so that they would not conflict with supervisors' school visits, mandated a minimum number of visits supervisors should make to each principal, and reassigned managerial and non-instructional responsibilities from supervisors to other central office staff. Several districts also developed systems to help supervisors differentiate their time based on principals' needs, especially in the later years of the initiative (Goldring et al. 2020).

Despite the lower span of control in PSI districts, supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts had similar patterns of time use and focused much of their efforts on instructional leadership work with principals. This pattern is consistent with the national standards for principal supervisors (Council of Chief State School Officers 2015).

Overall time use

Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts spent their time in a similar manner (Figure IV.1). In both sets of districts, supervisors spent about half their time visiting schools and about 15 percent of their time in network and group meetings with principals, with a total of about 65 percent of their time working and interacting with principals. Differences between time allocation in PSI and other urban districts were generally small.
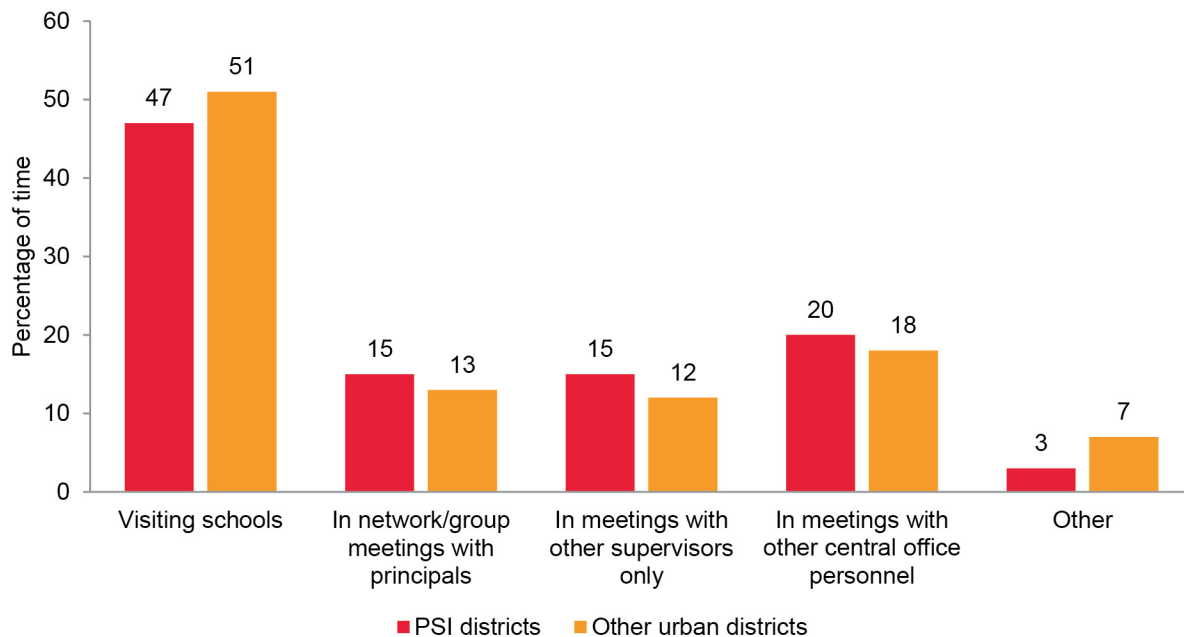
Figure IV.1. Principal supervisors' time use in PSI and other urban districts

Figure reads: Principal supervisors in PSI districts spent 47 percent of their time visiting schools.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Over the past three months, what percentage of time did you spend on each of the following activities in a typical week, excluding travel time?" Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "In meetings with other PS only" and "Other." Totals across PSI and other urban districts may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

Number of visits to schools

Although supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts spent about half of their time, on average, visiting schools, some schools received more frequent visits than others. For example, in the first three years of the PSI, some principals reported receiving no visits from their supervisor during a three-month period, whereas others reported receiving as many as 20 visits (Goldring et al. 2018). In later years, these patterns persisted and could be linked to supervisors' span of control: principals whose supervisors had spans of control of 11 principals or fewer received an average of about five visits per semester, but principals whose supervisors oversaw 15 principals or more received only about three visits in the same time period (Goldring et al. 2020). This suggests that span of control influenced how often supervisors in PSI districts were able to visit their schools.

To further understand how frequently supervisors visited their schools, the survey asked them to report how many times they visited their least- and most-visited schools in a three-month period. Compared with supervisors in other urban districts, supervisors in PSI districts reported making slightly more visits to their least- and most-visited schools (Figure IV.2), although these differences were not statistically significant. On average, supervisors in PSI districts made about one more visit to their least-visited schools and about three more visits to their most-visited schools in a three-month span, compared with those in other urban districts (not statistically significant). These results are consistent with the research finding that supervisors with lower

spans of control make more visits to each principal, especially those that need the most support (Goldring et al. 2018 and 2020). Many PSI districts used "tiering," a process in which supervisors categorized schools into three tiers of support based on needs and then made more visits to the schools that needed support the most, while still maintaining a minimum number of visits to other schools.

Figure IV.2. Number of principal supervisors' visits to least- and most-visited schools in PSI and other urban districts over past three months
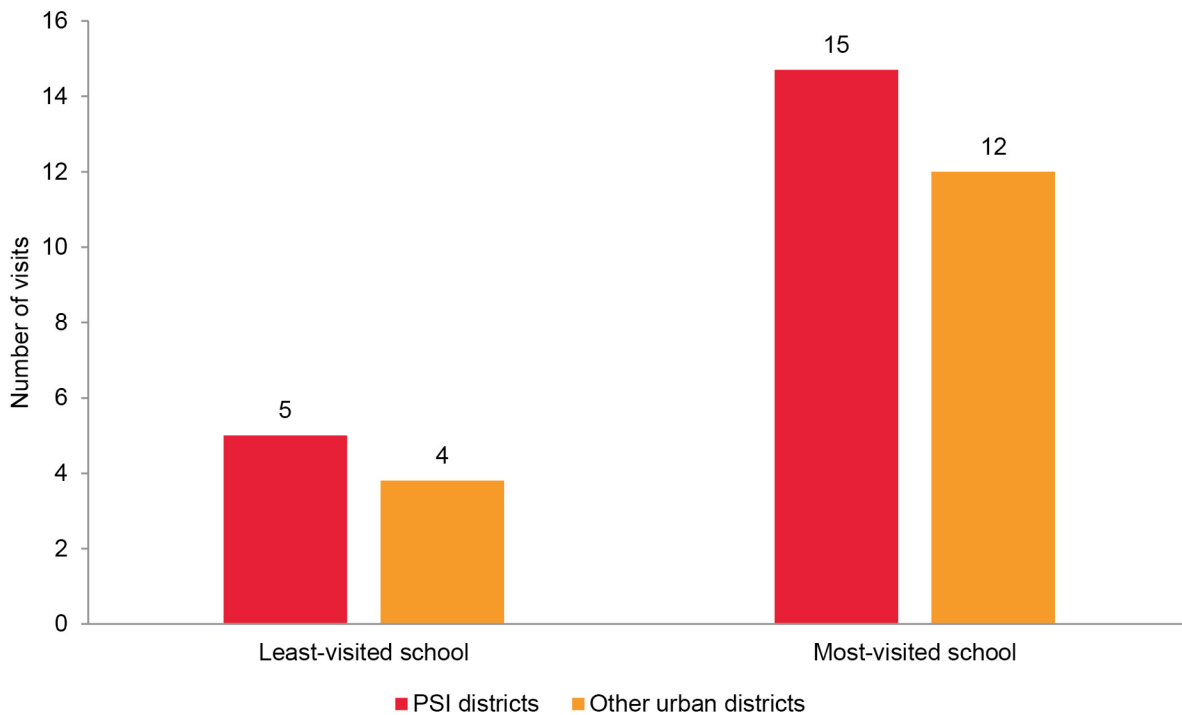
Figure reads: Supervisors in PSI districts reported making an average of five visits to their least-visited school in the past three months.
Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).
Note: Survey question read, "Please think about the school you visited LEAST (MOST) frequently over the past three months among the schools that you supervise. How many times did you visit this school?" Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Instructional leadership focus with principals

In a typical week, principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts spent about half their time with principals focusing on instructional leadership and the other half focusing on other topics (Figure IV.3). Differences in the time spent on each focus area between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts were small and not statistically significant.

Figure IV.3. Focus of principal supervisors' work with principals in PSI and other urban districts

Percentage of time worked on topic with principals

■ Instructional leadership   ■ Operations   ■ Parent/community   ■ Human resources   ■ Other
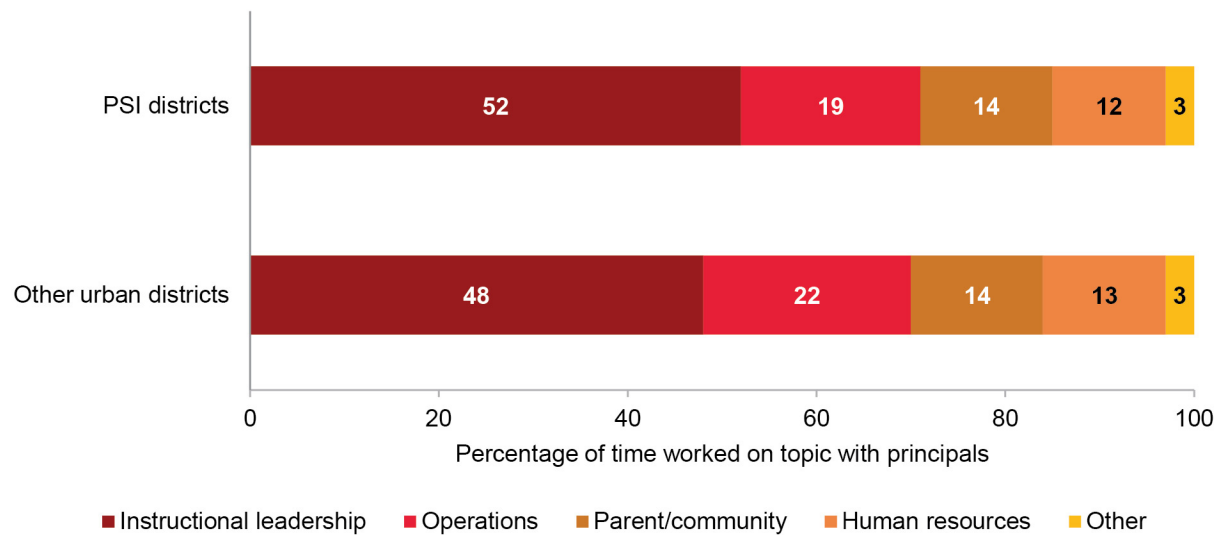
Figure reads: Principal supervisors in PSI districts spent 52 percent of their time with principals focusing on instructional leadership.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Over the past three months, what percentage of time did you spend working with principals on each of the following in a typical week, excluding travel time?" Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

B. Principal supervisors' practices to support principals

The structures PSI districts implemented to support principal supervisors were intended to foster supervisors' ability to develop, engage in, and sustain the day-to-day practices necessary to improve principals' leadership. Principal supervisors use a variety of practices with their principals. Before the PSI, the PSI districts mostly left the work of principal supervision to the discretion of each supervisor (except for compliance responsibilities). During the PSI, these districts worked to introduce and strengthen supervisors' practices to develop and support principals' instructional leadership and promote consistency in these practices. These practices included classroom walkthroughs, feedback, coaching, facilitating principal learning communities, and principal evaluation.

Supervisors' practices to support principals in their visits to schools were similar across PSI and other urban districts (Figure IV.4). Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts were minimal for other practices such as modeling effective teaching practices, preparing a specific agenda in advance, and communicating the goals of their work with principals. Only one practice, modeling effective feedback and coaching with principals, was significantly different between PSI and other urban districts (59 versus 76 percent).

Figure IV.4. Principal supervisors' practices with principals during school visits in PSI and other urban districts
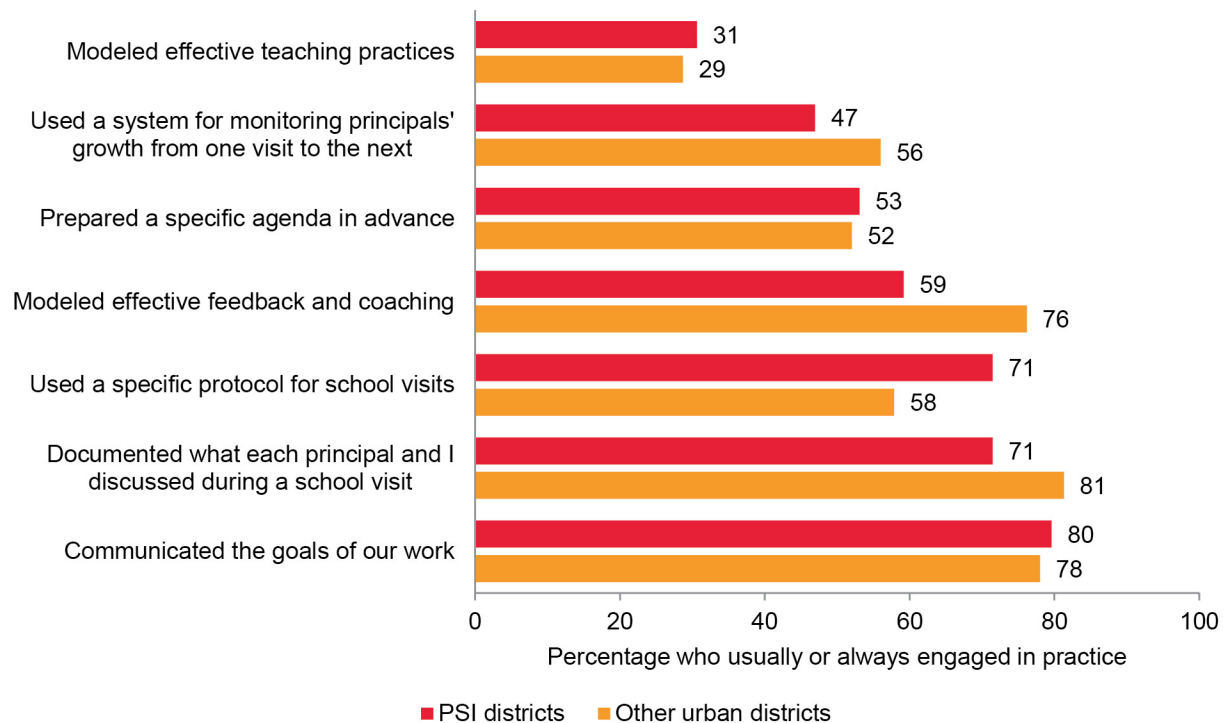
Figure reads: Thirty-one percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that they usually or always modeled effective teaching practices when visiting with principals at school.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Over the past three months, when you visited a principal at his/her school, how often did you do each of the following?" Supervisors rated their frequency of practices on a 5-point frequency scale. Difference between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts is statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "Modeled effective feedback and coaching."

Supervisors in PSI and other urban districts also engaged in similar practices with principals outside of school visits (Figure IV.5). Supervisors in PSI districts were significantly less likely than those in other urban districts to report that they usually or always provided principals with actionable feedback (76 versus 94 percent).

Figure IV.5. Principal supervisors' instructional leadership practices with principals (not specific to school visits) in PSI and other urban districts

Percentage who usually or always engaged in practice

■ PSI districts   ■ Other urban districts
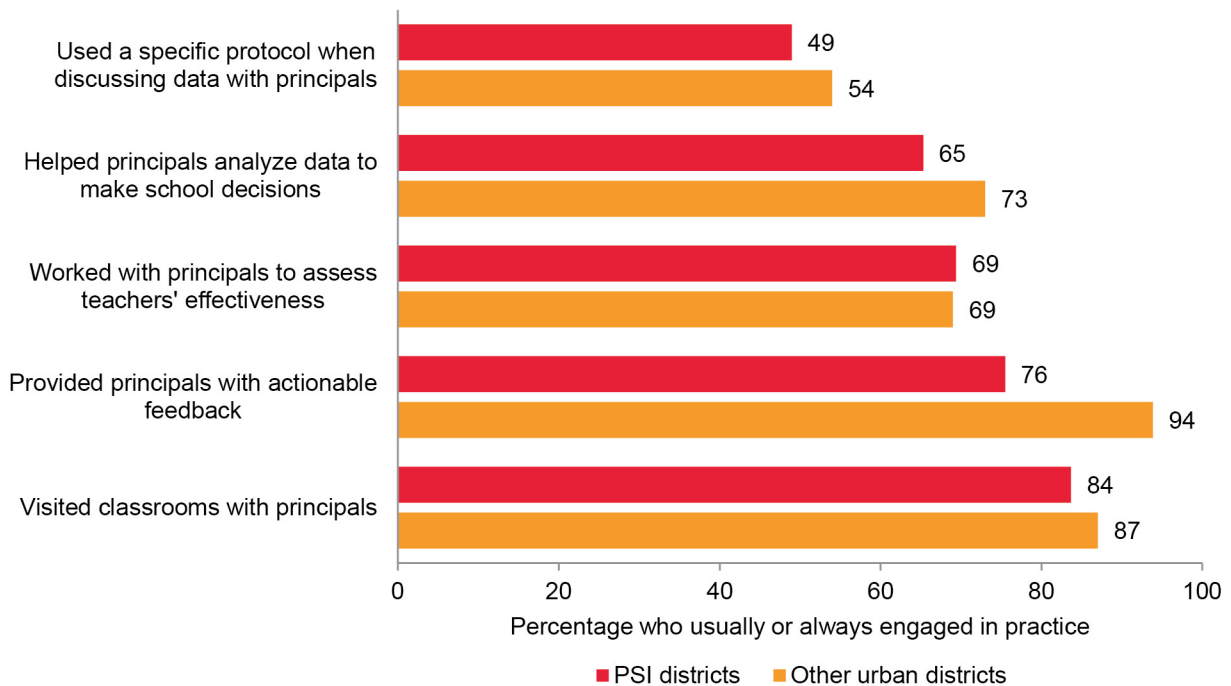
Figure reads: Forty-nine percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that they usually or always used a specific protocol when discussing data with principals.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Thinking about all the time you spent working with principals over the past three months, how often would you say each of the following were true?" Supervisors rated their frequency of practices on a 5-point frequency scale. Difference between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts is statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "Provided principals with actionable feedback."

In contrast, supervisors in PSI districts worked less often with principals on hiring and operations than supervisors in other urban districts (Figure IV.6). Twenty-two percent of supervisors in other urban districts reported that they usually or always supported principals with hiring teachers or other school staff, compared with 10 percent of those in PSI districts. Nearly half (45 percent) of supervisors in other urban districts also indicated that they usually or always helped principals with facilities or other operational issues, whereas only 20 percent of supervisors in PSI districts indicated this. Supervisors in PSI districts continued to support principals, especially new ones, with annual budgeting (Goldring et al. 2020).

Figure IV.6. Principal supervisors' work with principals on hiring and operational issues in PSI and other urban districts
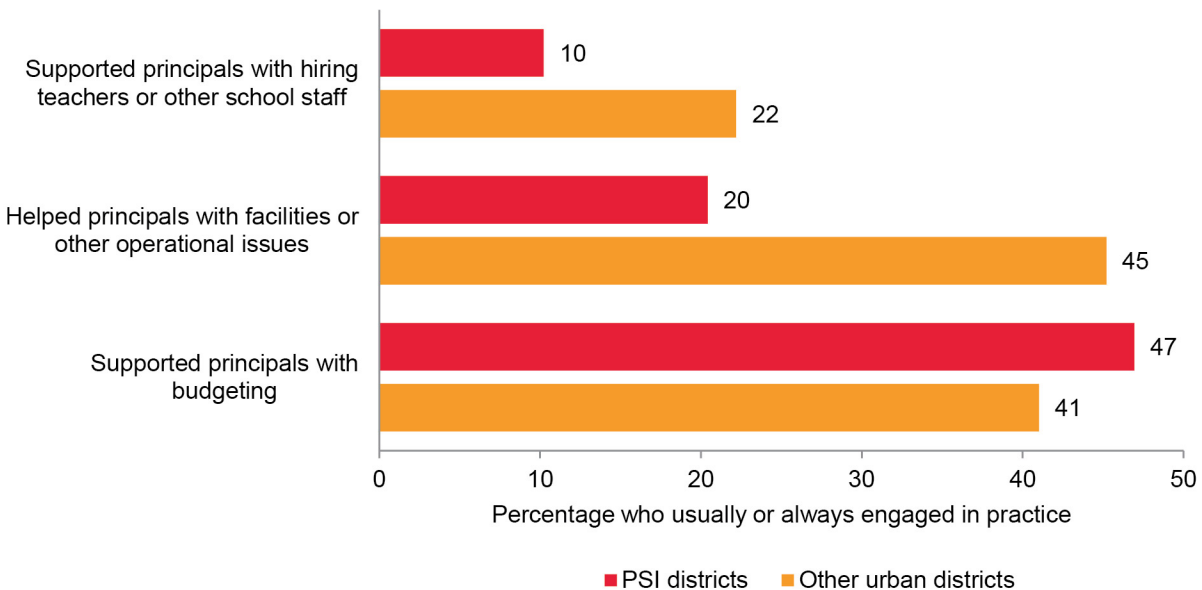

Figure reads: Ten percent of supervisors in PSI districts reported that they usually or always supported principals with hiring teachers or other school staff.

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Thinking about all the time you spent working with principals over the past three months, how often would you say each of the following was true?" Supervisors rated their frequency of practices on a 5-point frequency scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "I supported principals with hiring teachers or other school staff" and "I helped principals with facilities or other operational issues."

Given the intensive training and support in instructional leadership practices that supervisors in PSI districts received as a part of the initiative, the lack of consistent differences between PSI and other urban principal supervisors in their use of practices related to instructional leadership may seem counterintuitive. There are a few possible explanations for these results.

First, there has been a nationwide emphasis (beyond the PSI districts) on refocusing principal supervision. For example, a recent report from the Council of the Great City Schools showed that, between 2012 and 2018, principal supervisors' average span of control in their member districts had decreased from 24 to 16 (Cochran et al. 2020). Other urban districts may have given their supervisors guidance for working with principals that was comparable to that given in the PSI districts. The Council of the Great City Schools reported that, in 2018, many more supervisors were engaging in instructional leadership practices with principals (such as visiting classrooms and discussing feedback from classroom walkthroughs) than in 2012. Furthermore, the nationwide diffusion of new standards and expectations for principal supervisor work, such as those presented in the 2015 Model Principal Supervisor Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers 2015), likely influenced other urban districts to make changes to the principal supervisor role.

Second, supervisors in PSI districts may have underestimated their engagement with instructional leadership practices, given the extensive training they received on these practices. Research has documented the widespread phenomenon that people often overestimate their performance in areas in which they have not received training or do not have a nuanced understanding of a practice, whereas people who have received instruction and training in an area tend to underestimate their performance (Kruger and Dunning 1999). Many of the practices supervisors reported on revolve around complex concepts such as modeling teacher feedback conversations, coaching principals, monitoring their growth and change, and providing them with actionable feedback. Supervisors in PSI districts received extensive training in these areas and often worked in teams to implement structures and protocols designed to guide these practices and observed each other in job-embedded sessions in schools (Goldring et al. 2018). For example, supervisors in Des Moines Public Schools spent the first two years of the initiative in intensive trainings in which they studied the district's teacher evaluation standards in detail and worked together to form a consistent understanding of how to support principals in observing, rating, and giving feedback to teachers. In Long Beach, supervisors participated in special training lab days on which they observed and critiqued each other engaging in instructional leadership coaching with principals. Cleveland and Minneapolis hired coaches to work directly with supervisors to help them reflect and address problems of practice. As a result of unique and dedicated training, supervisors in PSI districts may have deepened their knowledge of how instructional leadership is defined and may have consequently formed higher expectations and a more specific understanding of what these practices entail. In contrast, supervisors who were not specifically trained in these areas may have inaccurately believed they were engaging in these high-leverage practices frequently and may have misunderstood what these practices entail.

C. Principal evaluation

Nearly all principal supervisors in the PSI districts evaluated principals. Prior surveys in the PSI districts showed that 100 percent of supervisors in PSI districts evaluated principals by the third year of the initiative (Goldring et al. 2018). Because intensive principal coaching and feedback were hallmarks of the new principal supervisor role, some districts that implemented the PSI invested in developing and refining their principal evaluation systems to align with principal supervisors' changing role, focusing on providing more useful feedback to principals (Goldring et al. 2018). The goal was to use principal evaluation systems to align supervisors' work with ongoing formative feedback for principals.

A larger proportion of supervisors in PSI districts than in other urban districts agreed that the principal evaluation system was aligned with the work supervisors and principals did together (76 versus 63 percent; Figure IV.7), although this difference was not statistically significant. Furthermore, a larger proportion of supervisors in PSI districts than in other urban districts reported that the principal evaluation system provided actionable feedback for principals (67 versus 57 percent), although this difference was also not statistically significant.

Figure IV.7. Principal supervisors' views of the alignment of their districts' principal evaluation systems with their work in PSI and other urban districts

Figure reads: Seventy-six percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed with the statement "The principal evaluation system in this district aligns with the ongoing work I do with my principals."

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, n = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, n = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the principal evaluation system in this district?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are not statistically significant at the 5 percent level.

Compared with supervisors in PSI districts, those in other urban districts were more likely to agree with negative statements about their principal evaluation system (Figure IV.8). Forty percent of supervisors in other urban districts agreed that it was unclear how principal evaluation data were used in the district, compared with only 18 percent in PSI districts. Similarly, 38 percent of supervisors in other urban districts agreed that the principal evaluation system was too cumbersome, compared with only 27 percent in PSI districts, but this difference was not statistically significant.

Figure IV.8. Principal supervisors' ratings of their district's principal evaluation system in PSI and other urban districts

Figure reads: Eighteen percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed with the statement "It is unclear how principal evaluation data are used in this district."

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the principal evaluation system in this district?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Difference between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts is statistically significant at the 5 percent level for "It is unclear how principal evaluation data are used in this district."

Improving principal evaluation was not an explicit focus of the PSI, but districts used their evaluation systems to help principal supervisors use benchmarks and data to be more effective coaches and evaluators. During these trainings, supervisors became more familiar with identifying principal effectiveness and using district evaluation rubrics to rate and provide actionable feedback to principals. Supervisors developed expert knowledge in the competencies principals needed to lead schools effectively and adapted their own work accordingly. They attended sessions to learn how to calibrate their ratings and justify evidence in those ratings. Some districts, such as Des Moines, also worked to improve their principal evaluation systems themselves to ensure that they aligned with district expectations for principals' instructional leadership, as well as the coaching and reflection work that principals were expected to do with their supervisors.

Finally, perhaps as a result of the emphasis on evaluation as an integral part of the supervisor role, there was a strong link between principal evaluation and accountability in PSI districts. Supervisors in PSI districts were significantly more likely than those in other urban districts to report that their principal evaluation systems held principals accountable for several outcomes (Figure IV.9). For example, 67 percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed or strongly agreed that their principal evaluation system held principals accountable for improving achievement outcomes of students with special needs, whereas only 29 percent of supervisors in other urban districts agreed with this item.

Figure IV.9. Principal supervisors' perceptions of the district's principal evaluation system for principal accountability in PSI and other urban districts

Percentage who agree or strongly agree
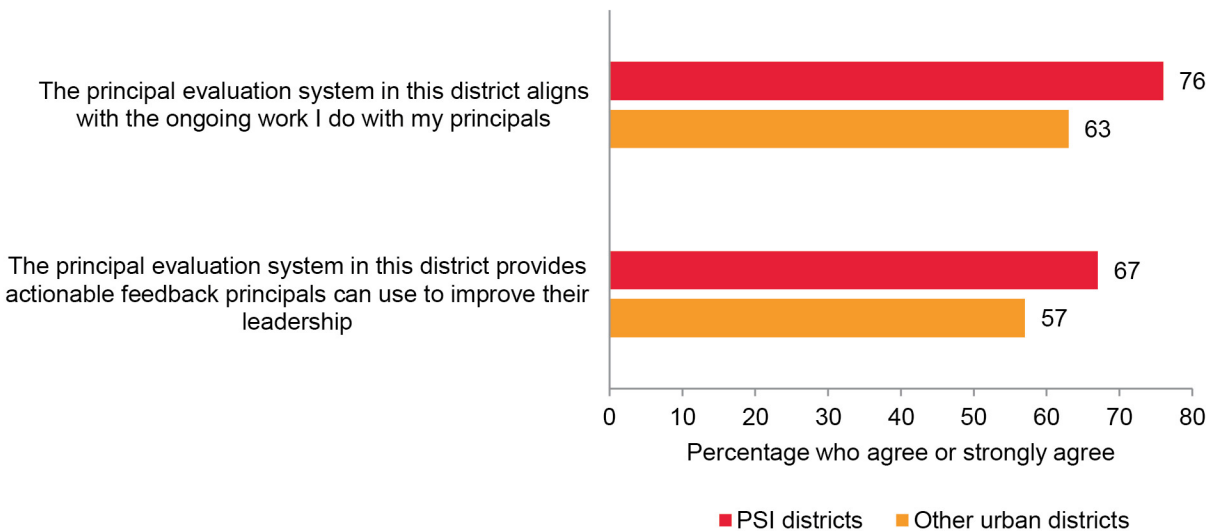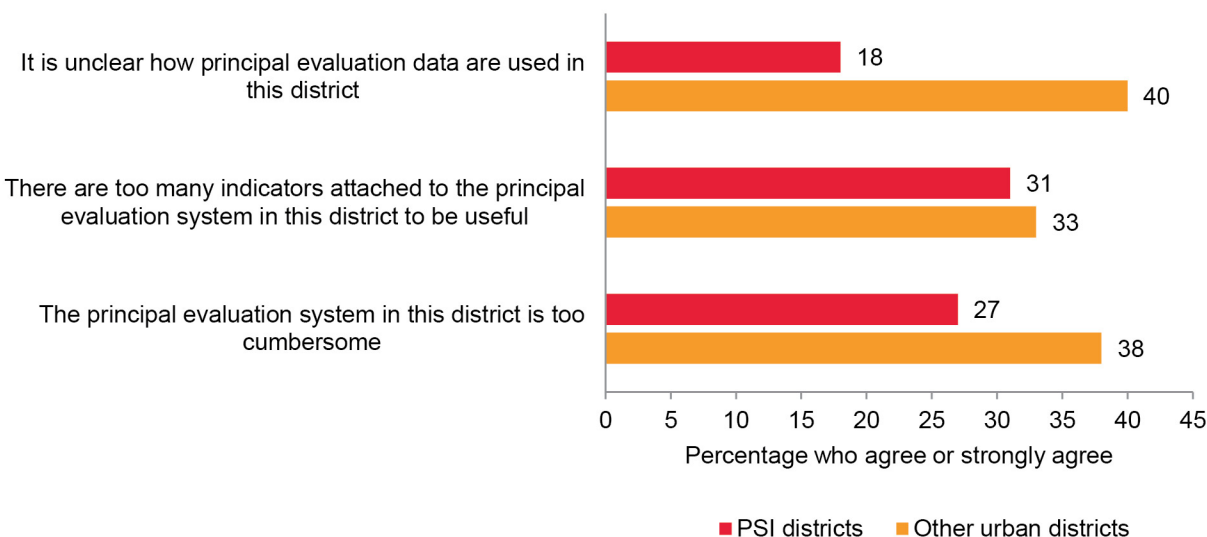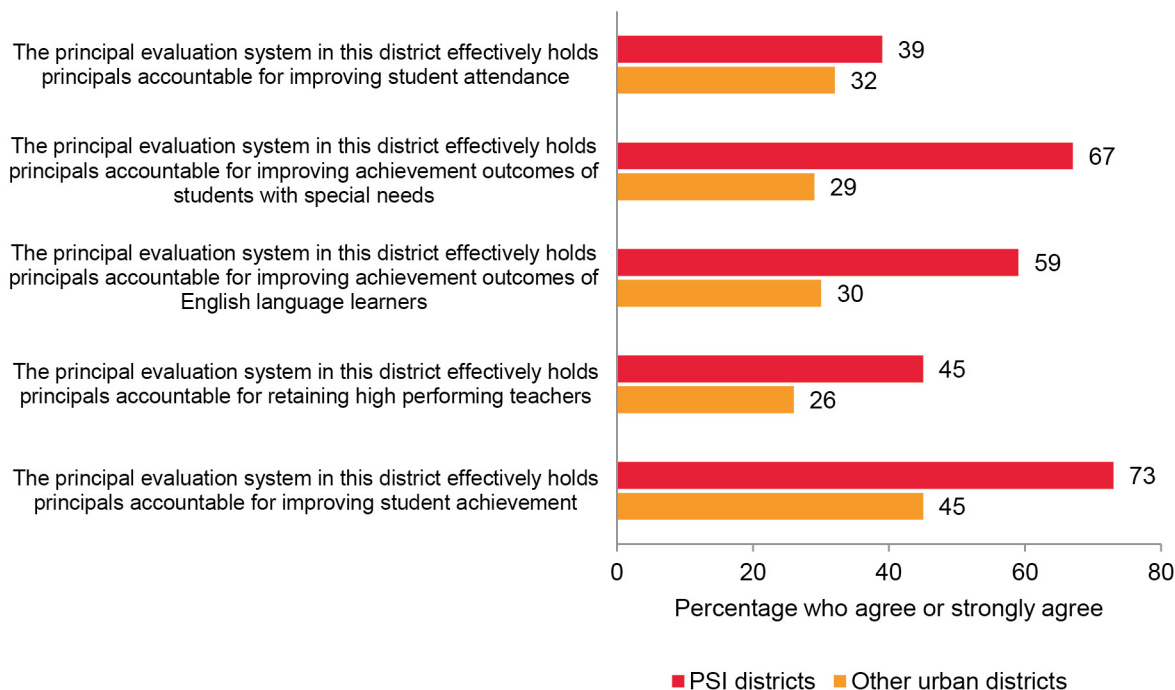
■ PSI districts ■ Other urban districts

Figure reads: Thirty-nine percent of supervisors in PSI districts agreed with the statement, "The principal supervisor evaluation system in this district effectively holds principals accountable for improving student attendance."

Source: Wallace Foundation National Survey of Principal Supervisors, 2018 (supervisors in PSI districts, *n* = 50; supervisors in other urban districts, *n* = 293).

Note: The survey question read, "Based on your experiences in the current 2017–2018 school year, how strongly do you agree or disagree with the following statements about the principal evaluation system in this district?" Supervisors rated their agreement on a 5-point Likert-type scale. Differences between supervisors in PSI and other urban districts are statistically significant at the 5 percent level for all items except "…improving student attendance."

In the PSI districts, there was little evidence of conflict between supervisors' dual roles as coach and evaluator. Principals and supervisors noted that increased ongoing support allowed supervisors to gain the trust, knowledge, and understanding of principals and their school context needed to evaluate principals accurately and fairly.

D. Summary

Principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts spent their days in a similar manner. They spent a similar amount of time in schools, focused on similar topics, and engaged in high quality practices at about the same rates. The only major differences between supervisors' practices in PSI and other urban districts were in principal evaluation. Perhaps because of the increased training and alignment of their role with principal evaluation, principal supervisors in PSI districts were more likely to agree that the work they engaged in with principals was more aligned with their district's principal evaluation system.

The similarities in supervisors' practices between PSI and other urban districts may reflect several trends and have several explanations. There is growing consensus in the field beyond the districts in the PSI about the role of principal supervisors, due in part to increasing professionalization of the role and the availability of guiding documentation, such as national standards. Principal supervisors in PSI districts also may have underrated their use of certain leadership practices as they gained deeper understanding of what these practices entailed through their PSI training.

What do supervisors need to be successful?

We asked principal supervisors: *As a leader of principals, what additional support do you need that would improve principal effectiveness and student achievement?*

Principal supervisors expressed a need for support in many areas. Supervisors in PSI districts made requests like those of supervisors in other urban districts, but often their requests were to continue receiving supports that were already provided.

- *Time*. Supervisors' number one request was for more time to coach principals and conduct principal professional learning meetings.

> **[I need] quality time spent with principals and more time for principals to have collegial discussions regarding instructional leadership and operations without interfering with their daily running of a school.**
>
> *Other urban principal supervisor*

- *Assistance*. Supervisors *expressed* a desire for better access to instructional and support staff whom they could deploy to schools to provide extra support to principals and to help them gather feedback about principal and teacher performance.

> **It would be helpful to have a curriculum and instruction expert on my team (not a member of the curriculum and instruction department that I do not supervise and that is not accountable to my network's goals, but an instructional expert who actually serves the schools in my network).**
>
> *PSI principal supervisor*

- *Alignment*. Supervisors stressed the importance of coherent goals, organization, norms, culture, and procedures across central office departments and between the central office and schools. Among other reasons, supervisors believed that central office alignment would allow them to more easily communicate with departments to obtain resources and support for principals.

> **There needs to be a common language and theme within the district. Oftentimes departments are doing the same thing, but not talking with one another.**
>
> *Other urban principal supervisor*

> **We need a consistent vision and expectation for all departments to align and maintain focus on support of schools.**
>
> *PSI principal supervisor*

- *Collaboration.* Many supervisors asked for opportunities to work with other principal supervisors in their district or to connect with supervisors in other districts.

> ❝ **I would love to have a virtual place to collaborate, share ideas, and communicate with other principal supervisors outside of my district.**
>
> *Other urban principal supervisor*

V. CONCLUSIONS

Principal supervisors can play an important role in developing and supporting principals. National conferences, new principal supervisions standards, and other local efforts have promoted changes to the role to better support principals. At the same time, the supervisor role varies from district to district. Some principal supervisors may be the only such personnel in their district, with few resources available to support their development. Others might work in districts with clear definitions of the principal supervisor role and well-developed, role-specific trainings.

The PSI prompted six districts to make specific structural changes to support revising and reframing the principal supervisor role. These included reducing supervisors' span of control, providing role-specific training, and reorganizing the central office to better support principal supervisors' work with schools. A comparison of key aspects of principal supervision across PSI and other urban districts can provide greater context for the changes that the PSI districts made during the initiative, highlighting the areas where PSI districts' work aligned with broader national trends and the areas where it surpassed these trends. It can also provide a roadmap for other districts seeking to strengthen the principal supervisor role to better support principals as instructional leaders, by highlighting aspects of principal supervision that districts and states may find easier to change and aspects that may require more deliberate action and focus.

A. Structures to support the revised principal supervisor role

❶ Principal supervisors in PSI districts had lower spans of control than those in other urban districts. Reducing principal supervisors' span of control was a key goal of the PSI, intended to enable supervisors to spend more time working with each of their principals. By the end of the initiative in the 2017–2018 school year, supervisors in PSI districts oversaw an average of 13 principals, compared with an average of 16 for principal supervisors in other urban districts. However, spans of control in both sets of districts were considerably lower than the average span of control of 24 in urban districts in 2012 (Council of the Great City Schools 2013), suggesting that both PSI and other urban districts made structural changes to better support the principal supervisor role.

❷ Principal supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to oversee groups of principals organized by grade level. PSI districts put considerable thought into how best to assign principals to supervisors, and there were some differences in assignment approaches across PSI and other urban districts. Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely to oversee groups of principals organized by academic characteristics, such as school grade level, performance, or theme. Grouping principals this way can enable supervisors to narrow their focus to a set of content standards, curricula, and assessment data that is more homogeneous with their principal groups. In comparison, other urban principals were more likely to indicate that their principal groups were assigned according to feeder patterns, which required supervisors to work with principals across the K–12 spectrum. Such broad work could inhibit supervisors' ability to develop specific expertise but might be necessary in districts with fewer principal supervisors.

❸ Principal supervisors in PSI districts reported more role-specific training than did those in other urban districts and rated their training more highly. PSI districts focused on providing training and professional development that was specific and unique to the principal supervisor role, particularly in the first years of the initiative (Goldring et al. 2018 and 2020). Supervisors in PSI districts clearly valued the training they received because it helped them hone their skills and, at the same time, build a sense of professional identity by working with fellow supervisors and coaches (Goldring et al. 2018). This type of role-specific training was more prevalent in PSI than in other urban districts. Furthermore, although their trainings emphasized some similar skills, supervisors in PSI districts rated the quality of their training more highly than did those in other urban districts.

❹ PSI districts were more likely than other urban districts to offer programs for new and aspiring supervisors. The PSI emphasized the importance of the central office in supporting and sustaining the new principal supervisor role. Central offices are responsible for cultivating and hiring principal supervisor candidates, supporting the development of current principal supervisors, and creating roles and structures to support supervisors' work so they can meet the needs of principals and their schools. To ensure the sustainability and robustness of the new principal supervisor role, PSI districts worked to create plans and programs to fill principal supervisor vacancies with the best-prepared candidates and to deliver high quality training and mentorship to aspiring and new supervisors. Supervisors in PSI districts were more likely than those in other urban districts to report that (1) their district had a program to train aspiring supervisors, (2) their district had a mentoring and induction program for new supervisors, and (3) they themselves had entered their position through participation in a program for aspiring principal supervisors.

❺ Principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar perceptions of central office support and structures. Early in the initiative, PSI districts realized that they needed to modify their central office structures and cultures to support and align with new principal supervisor roles. Overall, fewer than half of supervisors in PSI and other urban districts agreed that the central office understood their work, facilitated their work with principals, was organized to support principals, or scheduled meetings to maximize supervisors' time in schools. Supervisors in PSI districts, however, were more likely to agree that they were involved in the deployment of instructional support staff to their schools. This gave supervisors the opportunity to allocate support to principals based on their specific needs.

❻ Principal supervisors in PSI districts had more favorable views of their own evaluation systems than did those in other urban districts. PSI districts also invested in the evaluation and feedback supervisors received from their central office leaders. In many cases, these changes involved revising not only the expectations for principal supervisors' performance, but also the roles of those who would be responsible for overseeing principal supervisors. Supervisors in PSI districts rated the quality of their own evaluations higher than did those in other urban districts on many dimensions, including the usefulness of feedback.

B. The role and practices of principal supervisors

❶ Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts spent much of their time visiting schools focusing on instructional leadership. In 2015, the Council of Chief State School Officers released the first principal supervisor standards, which emphasized the importance of supervisors spending more time directly supporting principals (Council of Chief State School Officers 2015). These standards and other nationwide initiatives could have led to changing expectations for the role across urban districts that were similar to those in the PSI districts. Many PSI districts specified the amount of time supervisors should spend in schools each week or set a minimum number of visits supervisors should make to each school, and some implemented a differentiated support process called "tiering." On average, supervisors in both sets of districts reported spending approximately half of their time on the job visiting schools and working with principals on instructional leadership. However, principal supervisors in PSI districts made slightly more frequent visits to both their most- and least-visited schools than did supervisors in other urban districts, although these differences were not statistically significant. This may have been a result of their smaller spans of control.

❷ Principal supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts used similar instructional leadership practices with principals, but supervisors in PSI districts were less likely to work on operational issues with principals. PSI districts revised their expectations for the principal supervisor role, including redrafting the job description and clarifying how supervisors should work with principals on coaching and feedback, data analysis, and classroom walkthroughs. PSI districts worked to ensure consistency of supervisor practices with principals. Supervisors in both PSI and other urban districts implemented similar instructional leadership practices with principals, but supervisors in PSI districts focused less than did those in other urban districts on budgeting and hiring. The PSI's extensive training on instructional leadership and effective coaching may have led supervisors in the PSI districts to judge these practices according to higher standards, given their new understanding of what these practices entail.

❸ Principal supervisors in PSI districts had more positive views of their districts' principal evaluation systems than those in other urban districts. PSI districts also focused on aligning their principal evaluation systems with principal supervisors' work with principals. Supervisors in PSI districts expressed slightly more positive perceptions of their districts' principal evaluation systems and were more likely to report that the systems held principals accountable for a variety of outcomes.

C. Summary

The PSI asked districts to make dramatic changes to the principal supervisor role, transforming a position that traditionally focused on managerial tasks to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to be effective instructional leaders. At the same time, districts across the United States also were rethinking principal supervision, prompted by national conferences, new principal supervision standards, and other local efforts. However, the more intensive approach that the PSI districts followed led to some changes above and beyond those in other districts.

The biggest differences between PSI and other urban districts, as reported by supervisors were in the structures to support the principal supervisor role. Compared with other urban districts, the PSI districts had lower spans of control, were more likely to provide unique and dedicated training for supervisors, and were more likely to offer programs for aspiring supervisors. In contrast, principal supervisors in PSI and other urban districts had similar perceptions of the support they received from the central office. Supervisors' practices with their principals also were similar across PSI and other urban districts—supervisors reported spending more than half their time on instructional leadership and visiting schools. However, principal supervisors in PSI districts had more positive views of their districts' principal evaluation systems than supervisors in other urban districts.

Our finding of similar supervisor practices across PSI and other urban districts is consistent with two other recent studies, one focused on PSI districts and one on a broader set of urban districts, that examine how principal supervisors' work with principals has evolved. The first study, Goldring et al. (2020), found that supervisors' work with principals in PSI districts changed over the course of the PSI. Principals reported increased frequency of supervisor practices such as coaching, feedback, and data use. Principals' perceptions of their supervisor's effectiveness improved over the course of the initiative as well. Principals recounted how, over the course of the initiative, their relationships with their supervisors had improved and deepened because supervisors better understood their contexts and specific needs. The second study, Cochran et al. (2020), examined trends in principal supervision in a broader set of urban districts. It suggests that principal supervisors in urban districts have changed their practices to focus more on instructional leadership in recent years. Together these findings suggest that it is possible for districts to change the principal supervisor role to better support principals.

Our findings are also consistent with prior research on districts as agents of organizational change, which distinguishes between bureaucratic changes and changes in professionalism (Hightower 2002; Johnson and Chrispeels 2010; O'Day 2002). These studies argue that top-down changes in bureaucratic structures, policies, resource allocation, and role definitions do not by themselves bring about professional changes, but rather create critical enabling conditions for these changes. For example, Johnson and Chrispeels (2010) concluded that strong district supports in structures, policies, and resources were important precursors to instructional improvement, but only when they supported pathways and conditions that promoted shared values, beliefs, and unity of mission between individuals in schools and the central office. In a study of how district conditions supported principal supervisors' work with principals, Honig and Rainey (2019) found that certain internal district conditions, such as having a knowledgeable central office mentor, were beneficial in helping principal supervisors deepen their practices. They also noted that individual principal supervisors with stronger prior knowledge, who took it upon themselves to drive their own learning and protect their time, tended to make more growth in their practices—even compared with other supervisors in their district. These findings speak to the importance of district structural conditions, but also to the centrality of deep cultural shifts focusing on professional practice as keys to principal supervisor success.

Other districts seeking to revise the principal supervisor role to better support principals can build on some of the work that we observed in the PSI districts. In particular, districts can help supervisors acquire a deep understanding of instructional leadership and learn how to develop it in principals. This requires developing a deep understanding of both high quality instruction and

instructional leadership practices. Without a clear understanding of high quality instruction, it is difficult for districts to determine and promote principal supervisor practices needed to support high quality instruction. To address this, some PSI districts worked with principal supervisors to develop and apply a common understanding of high quality instruction (for example, what they wanted students to learn and how they wanted teachers to teach). Some PSI districts also worked with principal supervisors to clearly specify expectations for instructional leadership. For example, they identified instructional leadership practices that principals should use in their schools (such as data-based decision making, observing instruction, and providing feedback to teachers). The need to develop a common understanding of high quality instruction and instructional leadership practices before principals and supervisors could dive deeply into instructional leadership development was an important finding from the study of the PSI.

Deep changes to the principal supervisor role require clearly articulated expectations for the focus of the supervisor role, including strong expectations for consistency of practices; alignment with central office culture and capacity; and continued opportunities for principal supervisors to learn and refine practices. District leaders, practitioners, and researchers should continue to actively identify how and under what circumstances districts can promote these conditions to strengthen principal supervisors' knowledge and practices.

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APPENDIX A: SCALE DEVELOPMENT

Table A.1. Training quality scale

Items
Specifically enhanced my capacity to develop principals' instructional leadership
Helped build a learning community with my fellow supervisors
Provided opportunities to share specific practices with other principal supervisors in my district
Was geared toward implementing district initiatives and programs
Helped me understand district procedures
Provided opportunities for me to receive feedback on my practice
Addressed real challenges I face in my role
Gave me opportunities to plan my work
Was based on problems of practice I face in my role
Provided opportunities for self-assessment of my skills
Was engaging
Provided me with actionable tools/resources I can use as a principal supervisor
Facilitated my overall leadership
Provided me tools to set goals for my own development
Was interactive
Taught me new knowledge and/or skills
Was part of a sustained, systematic program for my development
Stimulated my interest
Allowed me to model practices I learned
Helped me align my work with that of the other principal supervisors in the district

Scale overall reliability (Cronbach's alpha) = 0.96

Note: The items are from the following survey question "Thinking about the district-sponsored training or professional development for principal supervisors you attended during the 2017–2018 school year and the summer before, to what extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements? 'The professional development or training I attended…'" (1 = Strongly disagree; 2 = Disagree; 3 = Neither agree nor disagree; 4 = Agree; 5 = Strongly agree). We created mean scale scores for training quality by averaging the 20 items at the supervisor level. We compared these mean scale scores with factor scores and found them to be virtually identical. We measured reliability using Cronbach's alpha, a commonly accepted statistic for determining scale reliability. Coefficients above 0.90 are considered to have excellent internal consistency (DeVellis 2012).

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