Beyond ‘Hire and Hope’: Leading Instructional Improvement across a Rural School District

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Accessibility
Beyond ‘Hire and Hope’: Leading Instructional Improvement across a Rural School District

Doctor of Education Leadership (Ed.L.D.)
Capstone

Submitted by
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To the Harvard Graduate School of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education Leadership.

April 2022
Dedication

To the incredible women who came before me—Kim, Lynn, Berny, Bev, Alice, Cora, Nellie, Emmeline—whose drive, strength, and fortitude runs through my veins.

I am because you were.

To the incredible woman we are raising—Clara, know that our dreams, strengths, and triumphs reside in you, too.
Acknowledgements

To my parents, Lynn & Charlie—I never once doubted that I was loved. Thank you for starting me on a path that has grounded me in where I come from and given me the confidence to step into spaces we could only ever dream of. Thank you for my roots and wings.

To my committee, Dr. Monica Higgins & Dr. Jen Cheatham—thank you for seeing the extraordinary value of a rural residency and for pushing me to tell this story in a richer way. My learning and impact are deeper because of your investment in me.

To the larger EdLD community at HGSE, including faculty and funders—this program has jointly enthralled and challenged me from the beginning. Thank you for seeing the promise of the EdLD program and for advocating for each of us individually and collectively. Our school systems have brighter futures because of your leadership.

To my incomparable cohort, C10—this experience did not play out like any of us expected and, yet, here we are. I am blessed to learn, grow, serve, and lead alongside each one of you. Thank you for the ways you have poured into me and my leadership journey. We can do hard things…with joy.

To the incredible staff of Rankin Independent School District—this capstone could never truly capture the countless ways you each go above and beyond every single day. Thank you for opening up your teaching practice to me and, now, to the world. You have exemplified the brilliance and innovation that thrives in rural communities.

To Sammy & Dawn—thank you for opening your practice and leadership to me, modeling what transformative leadership looks like day in and day out. Your heart for serving kids shines through in all that you do as you lead, serve, and innovate with excellence and joy.

To Betsy & Rebecca—thank you for welcoming me into your sphere of leadership and impact. Thank you for jointly creating something no one of us could have constructed on our own. The laughter, the tears, the struggles, the prayers, the rejoicing—your influence permeates this capstone, this project, and my refined leadership. Thank you, both.

To my dearest daughter, Clara—never doubt the place you can and will create for yourself in this world. You are a leader and a learner, an empath and an advocate, a doer and a creator. You bring me more joy than I could have imagined.

To my dearest son, Bubba—you are the best of myself and your father—strong-willed, tender-hearted, brilliant, logical, passionate, and, also, distinctly you. I carry your joys in my heart. The world is laid out before you, ready for your impact and delight.

To Josh—who made all this happen. Thank you for the years of devotion, support, and encouragement. Thank you, also, for modeling transformative healing in ways we never expected nor dared to hope for. I am so incredibly proud of your journey and our story.
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Abstract

Most school districts lack a coherent, actionable strategy for improving teaching and learning across the system. Current instructional improvement strategies enacted in many districts could best be described as *hire and hope*, where districts focus on hiring great teachers and then hope those teachers will develop themselves.

During the 2021-22 school year, I developed and implemented an instructional leadership strategy in a small, rural district (Rankin Independent School District) to help all teachers improve their teaching practice. This capstone explores the unique challenges, assets, and opportunities associated with leading instructional improvement in rural districts, and how rural districts should serve as an integral component of educational innovation and learning on the national stage.

This project resulted in growth in teachers’ practice and administrators’ instructional leadership across the district; additionally, the district’s culture became more instructionally focused. These gains were driven by the change leadership strategy we implemented, district-level leadership providing authority and legitimacy to the project, an explicit programmatic focus on coaching and growth, and our use of collaborative teams and processes. Constraints that limited our progress included varying levels of project ownership, an incomplete focus on the instructional core, leadership team dynamics, and asymmetrical growth foci for teachers and administrators.

This capstone generates important learning for school districts and external organizations alike. School districts can adapt key learnings from this project by valuing instructional leadership across their district and community, while simultaneously adapting best practices to their local context. State and national organizations (including professional organizations, state education agencies, and philanthropies) can value rural spaces as centers of research and innovation through rural-centric initiatives, advocacy, networks, and funding opportunities.

This capstone presents a process for designing and implementing an instructional leadership strategy focused on teacher growth, while also centering the need for rural districts to adapt this process based on the strengths and challenges of their unique context. The promise of this capstone is that teacher growth can be cultivated at-scale across small, rural districts—and this growth can foster the success and well-being of all people in the district, students and adults alike.
Introduction

Why is teacher growth important? When asked this question during a professional learning experience, administrators and teachers in the Rankin Independent School District had a variety of initial responses: to help students learn more effectively; so we live out our mission as a place of learning; because education is constantly changing and we need to grow with it; to reach more and more students; because there is always room for improvement. When educators dug deeper into their individual why responses, a collective agreement emerged from the group: Teacher growth is important because it helps students become successful, equipped, grounded, and productive adults. (Simultaneously, teacher growth helps teachers continually become more successful, equipped, grounded, and productive adults, too.) Teacher growth, then, is not solely (or even primarily) about individual teachers—it is about fostering success and well-being for all people in an organization, students and adults alike.

Based on this discussion, we might ask the related questions: Why is teacher growth important at-scale across a district, and what is a district’s responsibility for implementing a strategy that facilitates teacher growth, rather than leaving instructional improvements to chance?

Most school districts lack a coherent, actionable strategy for improving teaching and learning across the system (Curtis & City, 2009). Strategy is often narrowly conflated with strategic planning, which, in most districts, exists “primarily as a compliance exercise more than a mechanism for real improvement and change” (Stevenson & Weiner, 2021, p.
Current instructional improvement strategies enacted in many districts could best be described as “let a thousand flowers bloom” (Curtis & City, 2009, p. 4), where cascades of teachers are left to develop (“bloom”) on their own, or “hire and hope” (Honig & Rainey, 2020, p. 38), where districts focus on hiring great teachers and then hope those teachers will develop themselves. Neither of these perspectives epitomizes the systemic approach that is required to improve experiences, outcomes, and well-being for all students in a district (Curtis & City, 2009). This capstone delves deeper into the why, how, and what of intentionally developing and implementing a systemic instructional improvement strategy (focused jointly on teacher growth and student growth) in a public school system to increase teaching and learning at-scale.

**Rural Context**

Rural schools often exist “in the shadows” of the nation’s discussion of educational improvement and reform—often missing from state and national dialogue, while also “expected to implement education in a way that was designed for urban realities” (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, p. 13). This “rural invisibility” (Tieken, 2014, p. 6) results in large school districts often being inaccurately positioned as the primary sites of educational leadership, innovation, and professional aspiration. Yet, nearly 1 in 5 students in the United States attends a rural school, and “more students in the U.S. attend rural schools than in the
nation’s 85 largest school districts combined” (Showalter et al., 2019, p. 9). With over 700,000 rural students, Texas has the largest number of rural students in America (Showalter et al., 2019) and the largest number of rural schools, where more than 54% of districts and 25% of schools in Texas serve rural communities (TEA, 2021a).

While historically overshadowed and overlooked, rural schools are a critical part of our national educational context. This capstone will explore the unique challenges, assets, and opportunities associated with leading instructional improvement in rural districts (with a specific focus on improving teachers’ practice and students’ learning), and how rural districts should serve as an integral component of educational innovation and learning on the national stage.

**Residency Site**

Rankin, Texas is a rural community in West Texas with a deep pride in its school system, the Rankin Independent School District (Rankin ISD). Located in the West Texas oilfields, the median household income in Rankin is $70,000, notably above the state and national averages; however, many household incomes in Rankin are affected by boom and bust cycles of the historically volatile oil and gas industry. As a community, Rankin exhibits a “geography-dependent sense of belonging” (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, p. 24) that is

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1 These statistics represent “a vast underestimation of the true number of students attending rural schools, a number that may be double” (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, p. 27) due to urban-centric definitions used by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) that inadvertently code many self-identifying rural communities as non-rural. For example, Presidio, Texas, a small town of 4,000 residents that is located more than 3.5 hours from the nearest commercial airport, is classified by NCES as “Town; Remote,” a non-rural designation (NCES, 2021).
characteristic of rural communities—an identity that is tied to place. Rankin, Texas is Red Devil Nation, where people throughout the community identify as “Red Devils” (the district’s mascot), internalize the athletic program’s motto (TCB: Take Care of Business, meaning “do the work needed to excel”), and exhibit a fierce loyalty to the school district and community.

Rankin Independent School District (home of the Red Devils) is a rural, PK-12 public school district that serves 300+ students across 833 square miles in two schools: Gossett Elementary School (PK-5) and Rankin Junior/Senior High School (6-12). The student body is 47% Hispanic and 49% white, while the teaching force is 15% Hispanic and 80% white. At least 40% of students are economically disadvantaged and 10% of students are emergent bilinguals. Rankin ISD is a property-wealthy, well-resourced district, with per pupil spending averaging $42,000 per student (well above the Texas state average of $14,000 per student) and a student-to-teacher ratio of less than 8:1 (TEA, 2022a; TEA, 2021b).

As a district, Rankin ISD pursues excellence in all areas: academics, athletics, and other extracurriculars. Rankin’s focus on excellence has paid off, with numerous state championships in athletic, academic, and extracurricular pursuits, as well as successful programs across the district. Under the leadership of Superintendent Sammy Wyatt, Rankin ISD has been engaged in a decade-long transformation to continually improve its

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2 For reference, over 1,200 people live within the boundaries of Rankin ISD, a geographic expanse that is roughly three times larger than all of New York City (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020).
3 High-paying oilfield jobs with minimal education requirements artificially deflate the district’s economically disadvantaged statistics. Many students in the West Texas oil fields live in households with high income earners and characteristics and challenges more reminiscent of families living in poverty (Vesely, 2021).
practices and its outcomes.

Prior to my entry into Rankin ISD, many leaders within the district had a sense of urgency around improving instruction across the district. The district was well-known as a site of excellence and innovation; district and school leaders wanted to build on this proven history of success. Specifically, Superintendent Wyatt wanted to develop an explicit instructional improvement strategy and integrate instructional foci into the district’s communication practices, professional development, and school board meetings. Other leaders were aware of specific gaps in student outcomes (e.g., underdeveloped writing skills in middle school grades, misalignment in elementary phonics development, lack of representation of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds in college programs), but there were not yet structures in place for discussing and analyzing these gaps, co-developing strategies to address them, and working collaboratively to improve outcomes.

**Problem of Practice**

Over the past decade, Rankin ISD’s strategy for instructional improvement (specifically, improving classroom teaching) has primarily focused on recruiting and hiring strong staff members, and then working hard to retain these employees through positive school culture and targeted retention strategies. The district’s enacted strategy (hire great people, work hard to retain them, and hope they engage in their own professional growth and learning—Honig & Rainey’s (2020) “hire and hope” strategy) has brought many
incredible teachers to the district but has not resulted in systematic growth in teaching and learning district-wide. In essence, Rankin ISD has lacked a coherent, actionable strategy for improving teaching and learning at-scale.

Defining and implementing an instructional leadership strategy to facilitate improvements in classroom teaching faced additional challenges in this context. Previously, the formal administrative positions in the district (elementary principalship, secondary principalship, and the superintendency) all operated as management—and not instructional leadership—positions. For example, leaders in these positions spent the vast majority of their time attending to personnel, management, operations, and student behavioral needs, with little time explicitly focused on instructional improvement. This leader-as-manager focus was not unique to Rankin and, in many ways, was tied to the wide breadth of responsibilities these positions typically shoulder in a small district. Additionally, small districts are constrained by limited human capital bandwidth, where every leader (and teacher) wears multiple hats and must divide up disproportionately more compliance work per person than in larger districts—what Starr & White (2008) describe as “role multiplicity” and “workload proliferation” in rural schools.

However, like all rural districts, Rankin ISD was positioned with many strengths that could be leveraged to tackle this problem of practice. In Rankin, specifically, these strengths included: a superintendent who believed in instructional leadership, high-quality teaching, and continuous improvement; a robust team of administrators with a variety of strengths and a strong commitment to the district; and, a recently approved,
state-endorsed incentive pay system that brought an instructional leadership and teacher support focus to the district.

Based on this context, the driving questions for my strategic project and this capstone became:

- How does a (small, rural) district develop and implement an instructional leadership strategy to help all teachers improve their teaching practice?
- How might this process be codified so that it could scale to other (small, rural) districts?

**Review of Knowledge for Action**

To tackle these questions, I draw on research, knowledge, and expertise from a variety of interconnected disciplines. First, I highlight important findings about rural education and, specifically, about school leadership in rural communities. Then, I build on this foundation by exploring literature about instructional leadership focused on instructional improvement, followed by an analysis of how to adapt or contextualize an instructional leadership strategy to a specific locale. Next, I examine insights from change leadership, as implementing a successful instructional improvement strategy is, in and of itself, a change leadership project. Finally, I synthesize important research about requisite conditions for high-performing teams, since instructional leadership in rural school districts requires teamwork across multiple administrative roles. Collectively, this knowledge base informs a theory of action for answering the driving questions previously outlined.
Rural Education

Rural communities are often defined by what they are not—for example, by defining rural places as all places that are not urban or suburban (Marietta & Marietta, 2020). An asset-based, rural-centric definition of rurality would instead describe the common, daily lived experience of people in rural locales, including “the defining characteristics of knowing and being known by everyone in the community; living far from amenities; and having common social events and experiences” (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, p. 26). Tieken (2014) describes this “rural lifeworld” as follows:

This understanding, shared by many of the residents of rural communities, is tied to place; it provides a geography-dependent sense of belonging. Rural, in this conception, is not simply a matter of boundaries. It constitutes one’s identity; it shapes one’s perspectives and understandings; and it gives meaning to one’s daily experiences. This identity, this shared and place-dependent sense of rural belonging, gives rural its significance. (p. 5)

Figure 1 summarizes some of the characteristics, challenges, and strengths of rural communities (Marietta & Marietta, 2020).

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4 The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) classification system for defining school types based on location literally involves “urban-centric locale categories” (2006).
Figure 1

Characteristics, Challenges, and Strengths of Rural Communities in America (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, pp. 26-35)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Challenges</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Geographic distance from cities and amenities</td>
<td>• Struggling economy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Low population density</td>
<td>• Unequal funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Deep sense of place</td>
<td>• Lagging infrastructure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Strong community ties</td>
<td>• Poor health outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Strengths

• Deep sense of place
• Strong community and kinship bonds
• Strong, deep, and stable family ties and social networks
• Innate understanding and appreciation for the natural world
• Development of selflessness
• Central role schools play in communities with few other resources
• Protocol of communal independence and resilience
• Greater socioeconomic and racial integration

Rural schools often serve as the center of their communities, connecting students, educators, parents, and the larger community to a collective identity (Tieken, 2014; Marietta & Marietta, 2020). For example, during a one-week window in November 2021, Rankin ISD hosted a Thanksgiving luncheon (with over 300 family members attending), a Veterans’ Day concert (with over 400 community members attending), a playoff football game (800+ attendees), 2 basketball games, a college readiness event for high school seniors, and sent students to compete in (and parents to support) out-of-town competitions in barbeque, football, basketball, debate, and robotics. Community members set their calendars around the happenings and events of the school district.

While rural schools provide a wealth of advantages, education leaders in rural communities face unique challenges, as well, including expansive workloads, role
multiplicity, and the conflation of personal and private lives. Rural administrators experience work intensification tied to role multiplicity that results in them facing “...multiple conflicting work demands in ways that far exceed those of their non-rural peers” (Starr & White, 2008, p. 6). For example, one Rankin ISD principal serves as the school’s theater team director, cheerleading sponsor, and debate team coach, while the other principal drives a 1-hour bus route before and after school each day. In rural schools, all employees play multiple roles within the district; this role multiplicity constrains human capital bandwidth in the district. Additionally, professionals must also navigate “dual relationships” (Marietta & Marietta, 2020, p. 44) in rural communities, where there is little separation between personal and professional lives, as the people they work with and serve are also the people they live, play, volunteer, and worship with. These entanglements are heightened for school and district leaders. As Buckingham (2001) explains:

In rural areas, the principal, like the school itself, is at center stage. There is no time when the principal is not The Principal. This can be an incentive to do great work, but it also contributes to excessive hours and responsibilities, and complicates already complex relationships within one’s town, school, and family. (p. 28)

These rural-specific challenges often serve as a barrier to instructional leadership in rural school districts.

**Defining Instructional Leadership**

Instructional leadership focuses on improving teaching and learning at-scale across
a school or district. As Markholt et al. (2018) explain:

Instructional leadership is a type of leadership aimed at improving the quality of learning for each student. It begins with a compelling vision, codeveloped and shared by the entire school community, coupled with strategic action that galvanizes teachers and staff members to learn and improve their practice on behalf of student learning. (p. 9)

Fullan (2014) cautions about the danger of approaching instructional leadership with an unproductively narrow set of individualistic strategies. Rather, effective instructional leadership “involves fostering the leadership of others—teachers, high school department heads, and other staff—to support the schools’ overall approach to teaching and learning improvement” (Honig & Rainey, 2020, p. 11).

Markholt et al. (2018, p. 11) define four key dimensions of instructional leadership:

- Vision, mission, and learning-focused culture
- Allocation of resources
- Management of people and processes
- Improvement of instructional practice

Most relevant to the problem of practice discussed here are the vision, mission, and learning-focused culture and improvement of instructional practice foci.\(^5\)

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\(^5\) The two remaining dimensions of instructional leadership—Allocation of Resources, including marshaling and deploying resources, and Management of Systems and Processes, including talent management, professional growth, and structures of support—are equally important, but were not an explicit area of focus during the early stages of this project. While we incorporated elements of these dimensions within our work (such as “plan[ning] for and align[ing] resources to support the implementation of instructional initiatives” and “employ[ing] critical processes such as planning, implementing, advocating, supporting, communicating, and monitoring of all leadership responsibilities” (Markholt et al., 2018, pp. 25-26)), they were not our primary foci. Appendix A provides additional information on these dimensions of instructional leadership.
Vision, Mission, and Learning-Focused Culture

The vision, mission, and learning-focused culture dimension of instructional leadership (Figure 2) involves co-developing and utilizing a shared vision and mission and fostering a learning-focused culture that exemplifies high expectations for all students and adults (Markholt et al., 2018, p. 23).

Figure 2

Mission, Vision, and Learning-Focused Culture Dimension of Instructional Leadership

(Markholt et al., 2018, p. 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdimension</th>
<th>The Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vision and Mission</td>
<td>● Engage staff, students, and the school community in developing a vision and mission that provide a clear direction for academic success for every student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Align stakeholders’ decisions and actions to the vision and mission of the school and demonstrate a growth mindset.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning-Focused Culture</td>
<td>● Establish measurable goals aligned to the vision and mission of academic success for every student.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Engage with stakeholders to foster culturally responsive learning that ensures individual students’ learning needs are met.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Create and maintain a results-focused learning environment based on clearly established data-driven goals that underscore high expectations for every student and every adult.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For a successful instructional improvement initiative to take hold, leaders must foster high-performing cultures with high expectations (Fullan, 2014). This cannot happen through individualistic strategies; rather, “you have to use the power of the group to change the group” (Fullan, 2014, p. 29). As Fullan (2014) describes: “The primary tool for improvement in any organization is not one-to-one appraisal but rather cultures that build in learning every day and that use appraisal to supplement and strengthen the learning”
This same collaborative focus applies to teachers and leaders alike; as Fullan (2014) explains: “...the point is not to have layered individualism, but rather to influence the culture of focused collaborative work” (p. 35). Fostering a learning-focused culture is a primary—and yet often overlooked—component of instructional leadership that benefits adults and students alike.

**Improvement of Instructional Practice**

The *improvement of instructional practice* dimension of instructional leadership (Figure 3) involves cultivating a shared vision of effective instruction, observing and analyzing teaching and learning, and supporting teacher growth (Markholt et al., 2018, p. 20).

**Figure 3**

*Improvement of Instructional Practice Dimension of Instructional Leadership* (Markholt et al., 2018, p. 24)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdimension</th>
<th>The Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Shared Vision of Effective Instruction</td>
<td>● Use an instructional framework to establish a common language and shared vision of effective instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Ensure that content standards drive instruction.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation and Analysis</td>
<td>● Use an instructional framework to observe and analyze teaching practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Use instructional practice data to engage staff in the assessment and improvement of teacher and leader practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>● Use classroom observation data to determine next steps for instructional leadership practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for</td>
<td>● Support teacher growth using ongoing feedback, professional development,</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
While *improving instructional practice* is a dimension of instructional leadership, it is not the goal of instructional leadership. Why is teacher growth important, then? As William & Leahy (2015) explain: “All teachers need to improve their practice; not because they are not good enough, but because they can be better” (2015, p. 20). As the opening vignette in this capstone describes, teacher growth is not the goal in and of itself—rather, teacher growth is important because it leads to increased student achievement and well-being and because it fosters teachers’ sense of collective efficacy. Collective efficacy—“a staff’s belief in their capability to make a difference for students” (Donohoo, 2017, p. 8)—is fostered by mastery experiences, where “teams experience success (mastery) and attribute that success to causes within their control” (Donohoo, 2017, p. 8). In this way, school leaders can foster student growth by first fostering teacher growth.

Markholt et al. (2018) warn school leaders against the tendency to overly or exclusively focus on only one dimension of instructional leadership, as the four key dimensions constitute a “symbiotic relationship,” particularly between the *vision*, *mission*, *and learning-focused culture* and *improvement of instructional practice* dimensions (p. 21). As such, school leaders must dive deep into the work of instructional leadership while also working broadly across its multiple dimensions.
Contextualizing Instructional Leadership

Districts can further define what instructional leadership looks like in their context by agreeing on a collective definition or framework of high-quality teaching, then developing a vision of instructional leadership aligned to this view of teaching (Rainey & Honig, 2015). Figure 4 outlines a process for developing a district-specific theory of action for instructional leadership tied to student outcomes (UWCEL, 2014). This process involves analyzing current realities and the needed changes they expose, from the student learning level to the teacher instruction level to the administrative support level in a causal and connected manner. Leaders analyze current student learning realities (and corresponding needed changes), then determine how teachers’ instruction is yielding these results (and, again, what corresponding changes are needed), then analyze how current administrator practices are yielding these instructional and learning realities. The process culminates in leaders answering the reflective question: “What needs to change in our practice to better support teachers’ instructional practice (and, therefore, student learning)?” Through this process, school and district leaders can determine a collective theory of action for how their work will improve teaching and learning at-scale.
Having a theory of action for instructional leadership is not enough, however. School leaders also need individual skill sets to implement the district’s theory of action. District-level leadership plays a pivotal role here. Specifically, research suggests that district leaders can build learning-focused partnerships with principals to help them grow as instructional leaders—and can do this by utilizing a teaching and learning leadership approach (Honig et al., 2013). Honig & Rainey (2020) recommend using a set of teaching and learning moves when working with administrators (including principals) to develop their instructional leadership. Figure 5 highlights a subset of these moves that are of particular interest in this context—specifically, in a rural school context with high levels of administrator autonomy and beginning levels of instructional leadership and teaming.
### Figure 5

**Subset of Teaching Moves to Foster Instructional Leadership** (Honig & Rainey, 2020, p. 21)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Teacher Move</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Fostering learners’ agency | Moves that help learners operate with progressively more independence or agency in leading their own learning, for example, by assisting learners to:  
  ● assess their own proficiency with new practices;  
  ● develop and implement their own professional learning plan; and  
  ● identify and pursue learning supports on the job. |
| Joint work moves | Moves that help learners embrace new challenging work as a defined set of practices that they and their colleagues collectively value, for example, by:  
  ● using a specific shared definition of the new work as common guides for their growth; and  
  ● learning alongside learners and opening up their own practice. |
| Talk moves | Forms of talk that engage learners in making sense of what new work entails and how to engage in it, for example, by:  
  ● verbally challenging learners’ understandings of situations;  
  ● offering competing theories about underlying problems and potential solutions; and  
  ● prompting learners to question long-standing practices that have not been effective. |
| Brokering | *Bridging* moves that connect learners to new ideas, understandings, and other resources to advance their learning.  
  *Buffering* moves that protect learners from potentially unproductive external interruptions to their learning. |

Employing an instructional leadership strategy for the first time—or in a markedly new or revised fashion—constitutes a significant change initiative that affects staff and students at all levels of a school district. As such, leaders must leverage change leadership and management processes in order to actualize instructional leadership and instructional improvement at-scale.

### Leading Change

Research on organizational change suggests that leaders of any organization (in or
beyond education) can successfully lead change initiatives by following an eight-stage process (Kotter, 2012). Kotter’s (2012) *leading change* framework (Figure 6) helps leaders shift from a management focus (keeping a complicated system running smoothly) to a leadership focus (adapting an organization based on changing circumstances). Change is something we must *lead*, not just *manage*. As Kotter (2012) explains, “...successful transformation is 70 to 90 percent change leadership and only 10 to 30 percent management” (p. 28).

**Figure 6**

*Process for Leading Change Initiatives (Kotter, 2012, p. 23)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Establishing a sense of urgency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Establishing a sense of urgency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Examining the market and competitive realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<td>Creating the guiding coalition</td>
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<td>Putting together a group with enough power to lead the change</td>
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<td>Getting the group to work together like a team</td>
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<td>Creating a vision to help direct the change effort</td>
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<td>Developing strategies for achieving that vision</td>
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<td>Communicating the change vision</td>
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<td>Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies</td>
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<td>Having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected of employees</td>
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<th>Empowering broad-based action</th>
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<td>Getting rid of obstacles</td>
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<td>Changing systems or structures that undermine the change vision</td>
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<td>Encouraging risk-taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions</td>
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<td>Generating short-term wins</td>
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<td>Planning for visible improvement in performance, or “wins”</td>
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<td>Creating those wins</td>
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<td>Visibly recognizing and rewarding people who made the wins possible</td>
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<td>Consolidating gains and producing more change</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision</td>
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Hiring, promoting, and developing people who can implement the change vision
Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents

8 Anchoring new approaches in the culture
- Creating better performance through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management
- Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success
- Developing means to ensure leadership development and succession

The first four stages of this process collectively focus on overcoming the current status quo, so that team members can then focus on introducing and adopting new practices in stages five through seven (Kotter, 2012). Collectively, this process supports leaders in moving beyond change management (planning and budgeting, organizing and staffing, controlling and problem solving) into change leadership (establishing direction, aligning people, motivating and inspiring) in order to produce long-term, sustainable change (Kotter, 2012).

Teaming Conditions

A critical aspect of Kotter’s (2012) leading change framework involves morphing the guiding coalition from a collection of people into a productive and collaborative team. This teaming focus is particularly important in rural school districts, where work intensification tied to role multiplicity leaves individual administrators with less time for instructional leadership. As such, instructional leadership initiatives in rural schools require teaming in order to collectively generate sufficient bandwidth across multiple administrative roles.

Hackman & Wageman (2012) describe six conditions of team effectiveness, including three essential conditions (right people, real team, compelling purpose) that act
as fundamental building blocks for effective teams and three enabling conditions (sound structure, team coaching, supportive context) that accelerate a team’s development to next-level collaboration. Figure 7 outlines these conditions.

**Figure 7**

*Six Conditions of Team Effectiveness* (Hackman & Wageman, 2012)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Condition</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The 3 Essentials</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Right people</td>
<td>Members have the knowledge, skills, and perspectives needed to accomplish the team’s purpose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real team</td>
<td>Clear boundaries that delineate who is and is not on the team; interdependent group working towards a shared purpose; stability of membership to provide time and opportunity to work well together</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compelling purpose</td>
<td>A purpose that is challenging, clear, and consequential in order to energize, orient, and engage team members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The 3 Enablers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sound structure</td>
<td>Team task is meaningful and substantive; core norms specify valued and unacceptable behaviors; tackling tasks together that should be done together; team size is small but significant (6-8 people)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team coaching</td>
<td>Competent coaching to minimize team dysfunctions and maximize team synergies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supportive context</td>
<td>A reward system that recognizes excellent team performance; all available data and information; larger context that promotes great teamwork</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of particular interest in this context are the conditions focused on right people, compelling purpose, sound structure, and supportive context. All six conditions are designable elements of teams, meaning that team leaders can deliberately create, foster, and improve these conditions in order to improve the team’s effectiveness.

Higgins et al. (2012) extend these conditions of team effectiveness to the context of *implementation teams*, defined as “team[s] charged with designing and leading the
implementation of an organization-wide change strategy” (p. 366). Implementation teams are fundamentally different from decision-making or diagnostic teams, since they “both develop and implement a strategic vision” (Higgins et al., 2012, p. 366). Curtis & City (2009) further support the necessarily collaborative nature of strategic implementation: “Strategy will never be implemented nor vision realized without collaboration and teamwork. Strategy doesn’t just happen. People working in teams make it happen” (p. 38). To this end, educational research “has begun to understand the exercise of instructional leadership as a collective endeavor, distributed among multiple people by design or default” (Portin & Knapp, 2014, p. 27). Portin & Knapp (2014) position effective instructional leadership as a necessarily teaming practice, whereby “…[l]eaders [lead] a learning improvement agenda [means] working with—and through—a group of individuals, all of whom [bring] different ideas, experiences, and expertise together in the service of instructional improvement work” (p. 38). Teaming, strategy, and change leadership intersect when instructional leadership teams act as implementation teams that design and lead an instruction-focused, organization-wide change strategy.

**Theory of Action**

If I...lead Rankin ISD to define its vision of effective instruction and instructional leadership; design and implement organizational structures (specific to our rural context) to build the capacity of principals and administrators to improve instructional practice based on the district’s vision; and, implement teaming conditions to increase collaboration, coaching,
and accountability across the district’s instructional leadership team,

then...principals and administrators will serve an increased role as instructional leaders in their schools; school and district leaders will enact a system of continuous improvement in the district that helps all teachers improve their teaching practice and fosters a learning-focused culture; and, school and district leaders will collaborate effectively towards improved student outcomes.

Description, Evidence, and Analysis of the Strategic Project

Description and Goals of Strategic Project

When I joined Rankin ISD as Assistant Superintendent in July 2021, the district was looking to enact instructional leadership practices to support all educators in improving their teaching practices. One potential mechanism for this work in Rankin was a recent, state-approved Teacher Incentive Allotment system that allows teachers to earn designations and significant salary bonuses from the state based on exceptional teaching and demonstrated student growth.

Using Rankin ISD’s emerging Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) system, my strategic project centered around helping district and school leaders articulate and implement an instructional leadership strategy for improving teaching and learning at-scale across the district. This strategy-in-action included incorporating instructional leadership skills and

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6 The Assistant Superintendent role was a new, temporary role added to the district for the purpose of this 10-month residency. An Assistant Superintendent role is rare in a district the size of Rankin ISD; typically, in districts this size, the leadership structure includes a superintendent, business manager, and administrative assistant at the central office level, with individual principals at the one or two campuses in the district.
expectations within all administrative roles (including the principalships) and building
effective teaming structures across the administrative team. Within this project, the
superintendent and I also set out to clearly identify the role of a small district’s central office
(namely, the superintendent and assistant superintendent) in advancing instructional
leadership across the district.

Overall, the superintendent’s goals for this strategic project were to:

- Enact a system of continuous improvement in the district that helps all teachers
  improve their teaching practice
- Equip and empower principals and other administrators to serve as instructional
  leaders in their schools
- Implement teaming structures that result in administrators across the district
  collaborating effectively towards improved student outcomes

Design & Implementation Strategy

Teacher Incentive Allotment

The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) is a state initiative created by the Texas
Legislature in 2019 to “provide a realistic pathway for top teachers to earn six-figure
salaries and to help attract and retain highly effective teachers at traditionally hard-to-staff
schools” (TEA, 2021c). Texas school districts can opt in to a two-year process to establish
a local designation system that is approved by the Texas Education Agency (TEA). When I
entered Rankin ISD in July 2021, the district was moving into their second year of this
application process, a data collection year in which teacher performance data and student growth data must be collected and submitted to the state for all teachers who teach in TIA-eligible teaching assignments. If this collective data set meets TEA approval in Fall 2022, Rankin ISD will have a state-approved, local system to designate effective teachers.

Through said local TIA system, teachers can earn one of three possible designations: Recognized, Exemplary, or Master. These designations would be added to teachers’ state teaching certification and travel with teachers to any other district in Texas. Once designated, teachers receive a significant annual salary bonus for five years funded directly by earmarked state funds. Figure 8 outlines the three designation levels, the percentile of teachers the designation was designed for, the range of possible allotment funding per teacher at each designation level, and the allotment funding for designated teachers at Rankin ISD. For example, the Master designation is designed for the top 5% of teachers in Texas. Teachers earning the Master designation would generate an annual allotment of anywhere from $12,000 to $32,000 per year for five years; in Rankin ISD, said teachers would receive $21,621 per year. This annual bonus is paid for by TIA-specific state funds, rather than local district funds.

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7 The Texas Education Agency (TEA) determines the specific allotment funding amounts per designated teacher for every school campus in the state based on a formula that prioritizes rural locations and the socioeconomic need of the campus (TEA, 2022b).

8 The teacher salary schedule at Rankin ISD ranges from $38,010 for a first-year teacher to $62,790 for a teacher with 35 years of experience (Rankin ISD, 2022). As such, TIA designations could result in anywhere from a 9.4% to a 56.9% annual salary increase depending on the teacher’s designation level and current step on the district’s salary schedule.
By legislative mandate, a district’s TIA designation system “must include both a teacher observation and a student performance component” (TEA, 2022c). Rankin ISD’s TIA system equally weights these two criteria in determining TIA designations: 50% of a teacher’s TIA score is based on teacher observations using the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) rubric (a state-developed and -approved instructional rubric in Texas); and 50% of a teacher’s TIA score is based on student growth scores for their class of students using nationally normed NWEA MAP Growth assessments for most grade levels and subjects. Student growth metrics are based on beginning-of-year (August/September 2021) to end-of-year (April/May 2022) assessments.

Rankin ISD’s TIA System includes the following grade levels and subjects: PK-8th

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9 NWEA MAP Growth assessments were used for almost every grade level and subject. Locally developed pre- and post-tests were used for the few grade levels and subjects (such as 4th grade music) that did not have MAP Growth assessments.
grade reading; PK-9th grade mathematics; 9th-11th grade English language arts; 4th-9th grade science; and three elective subjects areas (4th grade music, high school forensic science, and high school United States history). Based on these subject areas and grade levels, 29 of Rankin ISD’s 38 teachers (76%) taught in a TIA-eligible teaching assignment during the 2021-22 school year (Figure 9). TEA requires all teachers in TIA-eligible teaching assignments to participate in the data collection process (e.g., teacher observation and student growth assessments) during the data collection year (2021-22). In Rankin, 3 of our 29 TIA-eligible teachers were not interested in seeking a TIA designation but were required by this TEA mandate to participate in the program; Rankin ISD leaders designed an accommodated process for these teachers to limit their participation in the program while still meeting state requirements. The overwhelming majority of TIA-eligible teachers (26 of 29; 90%) were actively seeking designation at the beginning of the school year.

Figure 9

TIA Eligibility & Participation in the Rankin ISD TIA System during the 2021-22 School Year
Creating the Guiding Coalition

Early in the project, we set out to establish roles for driving and supporting the TIA process. We determined a group of 3 administrators who would lead the project (myself and the two administrators who had led the TIA development and application process in the district—the Curriculum Director and the Early College High School Director), called the TIA Leads. We knew we could not implement the program single-handedly, nor should we—we knew successful instructional leadership initiatives involve campus principals in substantive roles.

We then recruited a team of 8 campus and district administrators to serve as TIA Evaluators (later changed to TIA Coaches to align with our focus on coaching, not evaluation). This team included all campus administrators, as well as two central office administrators—specifically, both campus principals, the assistant principal, three partial administrators 10 (the Response-to-Intervention Coordinator, Curriculum Director, and Early College High School Director, who were each half-time teachers, as well), the superintendent, and myself. 11 One principal expressed concern about serving as a coach due to his full schedule and the existence of other roles in the district that were explicitly focused on instruction. Our belief that instructional leadership needed to fall within principals’ responsibilities led us to develop strategies to include this principal as a coach.

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10 I am intentionally referring to these part-time administrators as “partial administrators” to reflect the dynamics they experience in the district. Specifically, these administrators are viewed as “pseudo-” or “kind of” administrators and not as “true” or “full” administrators in the district.
11 This team changed slightly over time, with the Assistant Principal no longer serving as a TIA Coach (because she was participating in the program as a TIA-eligible teacher) and with the addition of a new partial administrator role to the district. These changes occurred early in the project (October 2021).
(e.g., lessening the number of teachers this principal coached).\textsuperscript{12}

As a team, we decided that coaches would work in pairs to evaluate and coach teachers in the TIA system. TIA Coaches were strategically paired so that each pair included a TIA Lead. Coaching pairs were also determined by considering each coach’s teaching expertise and teacher evaluation calibration scores.

Upon establishing roles within the guiding coalition, we also developed collaborative structures to help the group work together as a team. Organized collaboration across the administrative team was a relatively new construct; previously, administrators collaborated in more ad hoc ways, with a focus on “staying in your lane” and “not stepping on toes” rather than teaming (L. Butler,\textsuperscript{13} personal communication, August 5, 2021).

We established recurring meetings for various stakeholders as outlined in Figure 10.

**Figure 10**

*Recurring Meetings Established to Support Rankin ISD’s TIA System*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholders</th>
<th>Meeting Frequency</th>
<th>Meeting Length</th>
<th>Meeting Foci</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>TIA Leads</td>
<td>Twice a week</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Week-to-week strategy and implementation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIA Coaches</td>
<td>Twice a month (Fall) Once a month (Spring)</td>
<td>40 minutes</td>
<td>Developing coaching capacity Practicing instructional leadership collaboratively Level-setting around program expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIA Teachers (seeking designation)</td>
<td>Three times a semester (Fall) Once a semester (Spring)</td>
<td>1 hour</td>
<td>Fostering teacher growth over time Fostering collaboration among staff Communicating TIA system vision &amp; details</td>
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\textsuperscript{12} When forming guiding coalitions for change leadership work, Kotter (2012) encourages leaders to attend to positional power and its representation on the guiding coalition by considering: “Are enough key players on board, especially the main line managers, so that those left out cannot easily block progress?” (p. 59)

\textsuperscript{13} Pseudonyms are used for all personal communications to preserve individuals’ anonymity.
Each TIA coaches’ meeting was designed to leverage teaching and learning moves (Honig & Rainey, 2020), such as fostering learners’ agency, joint work moves, talk moves, and brokering, to further develop each administrator’s instructional leadership skills. For example, joint work moves—“Moves that help learners embrace new challenging work as a defined set of practices that they and their colleagues collectively value” (Honig & Rainey, 2020, p. 21)—were used when introducing, exploring, and practicing protocols for leading coaching launch sessions and formal observation pre-conferences.

Each TIA teacher meeting was designed to model high-quality instructional practices aligned to our vision of high-quality teaching as outlined in the Texas Teacher Evaluation and Support System (T-TESS) rubric. For example, the TIA Leads designed activities that: used effective routines, transitions, and procedures; provided opportunities for teachers to take initiative of their own learning; and provided opportunities for all teachers to communicate effectively with each other and the facilitators.

*Developing a Vision & Strategy*

Before the school year began, the TIA Leads (myself included) developed a vision for the Rankin ISD TIA System. While the state’s vision for TIA systems was to reward high-performing teachers, we knew this scope was too limited for a small school district in a rural community. We did not want our system to merely evaluate teachers and then reward only some teachers, as we were concerned about how these financial designations would be accepted, questioned, or challenged in a tight-knit community where educators
and administrators had intertwined personal and professional relationships. Additionally, we did not want the TIA system to be focused on external motivators (e.g., financial rewards and designations); rather, we wanted the system to be a vehicle for fostering a culture of intrinsic motivation (e.g., self-efficacy, desire to grow) and collective efficacy. As such, we incorporated a deliberate growth focus in our TIA system vision: *The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) at Rankin ISD rewards excellent teaching and helps all teachers grow to their next level of teaching excellence.* This growth focus is relatively unique to Rankin ISD; role-alike colleagues in other Texas school districts described how their districts’ TIA systems utilize a purely evaluative stance (B. Scarborough, personal communication, July 7, 2021; A. West, personal communication, October 21, 2021).

The TIA Leads developed a strategic calendar with different foci over the course of the school year (see Figure 11).

**Figure 11**

*Rankin ISD’s TIA System Proposed Timeline (August 2021)*
This timeline incorporated: student testing windows (pre-, mid-year, and post-testing opportunities), teacher professional development about the testing platform (NWEA MAP) strategically scheduled before and after relevant testing windows, walkthrough and observation windows, and supporting meetings spaced throughout the year.

The TIA Leads were jointly led by an overarching strategy and a willingness to improve and iterate the process and system as we went. For example, early in the year, we focused on launching the program successfully and establishing structures for communication and collaboration. Later in the semester, we pivoted towards developing systems for strong beginning-of-year testing, then systems for launching coaching and teacher observation. Figure 12 illustrates this just-in-time strategy through the meeting objectives for the teacher meetings held in the first semester of the 2021-22 school year.

**Figure 12**

**Learning Objectives for TIA Teacher Meetings Held in Fall 2021**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Objectives</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| August 4, 2021 | Describe the vision of the Rankin ISD TIA process.  
Describe beginning-of-year aspects of the Rankin ISD TIA process.  |
| Sept. 1, 2021 | Describe the main components of the Rankin ISD TIA process.  
Review required test security and accommodation protocols.  
Prepare for your first meeting with your TIA coaches by reflecting on your strengths and professional goals.  
Collaborate with colleagues about your professional practice.  
Breathe easier about the TIA process.  |
| Sept. 20, 2021 | Co-create your coaching experience by describing what you want and need from your TIA coaches.  
Describe what teaching practice looks like at each performance level of the T-TESS rubric.  
Prepare for your first meeting with your TIA coaches.  
Collaborate with colleagues about your professional practice. |
The Strategic Project in Practice

Communicating the Change Vision

We routinely communicated the change vision for the TIA system in all teacher meetings, coaches’ meetings, and coaching sessions. Additionally, we used the vision to make course-correction decisions. For example, after completing a set of walkthroughs focused on the Instruction domain of our instructional rubric, we realized that our proposed model of averaging teachers’ walkthrough and formal observation scores would inadvertently penalize growth over time, by averaging higher scores earned later in the year with lower scores from earlier in the year. Based on our vision for the system to help all teachers grow to their next level of teaching excellence, we adjusted our method for determining teachers’ observation scores, then communicated this change (and its underlying why tied to our vision) to stakeholders.

We implemented numerous intentional communication strategies for fostering collaboration and buy-in with TIA coaches. For example, the superintendent’s active participation in the coaching process, all TIA coaches’ meetings, and all TIA teacher meetings conveyed to TIA coaches (and teachers) the importance of this initiative to the superintendent and the district. Additionally, by having a TIA Lead in each TIA Coaching
Pair, we were able to quickly communicate emerging changes, updates, etc. to all TIA coaches through one-on-one interactions with the TIA Lead on their team. This setup also allowed the TIA Leads to learn in real-time across all TIA Coaching pairs, by receiving continuous input, suggestions, and feedback on successes and challenges.

We also implemented a robust set of intentional communication strategies to foster the vision of the program with teachers. The superintendent and I dropped into almost every classroom in the district on the first day of school to welcome students back to school and to “break the ice” about having administrators in teachers’ classrooms. During the first 3 weeks of school, every teacher in the district had at least one TIA Coach drop in to their classroom to enjoy the learning environment; each teacher then received a follow-up email with specific, positive feedback about what the coach enjoyed about the class. We also regularly communicated with teachers in the TIA system through listserv emails and newsletters that conveyed important updates (see Appendix B).

We also designed and implemented numerous structures to assist teachers and coaches in launching effective coaching relationships, which was a new practice in the district. For example, TIA coaches dropped in to chat informally with their teachers during their teachers’ conference periods to build relationships and develop trust. Additionally, we designed a protocol for TIA coaches to use in their first triad (one teacher, two coaches) meeting with their teachers (see Appendix C). This protocol included questions such as *What do you want and need from your TIA coaches?* and was designed so that teachers could co-create their ideal coaching experience.
Empowering Broad-Based Action

Throughout the year, we proactively adapted systems and structures that might have otherwise undermined the change vision we were working towards. For example, as previously discussed, a small subset of teachers (3 out of 29 teachers) were uninterested in seeking a TIA designation nor participating in the Rankin TIA system. However, launching a TIA system writ large across the district required their participation for the system to be approved by the state. We identified those teachers who were not seeking designation early (and updated this list as teachers’ interest changed) and adapted the system for them. These teachers, for example, did not have to attend the TIA teacher meetings and instead received a one-on-one truncated debrief of elements of the meeting relevant to their situation. By adapting the system to better meet these teachers’ needs, we minimized the impact of their negative perceptions of the program on other teachers who were seeking growth in their practice and a potential designation through the TIA system.

We also mitigated potential pushback to would-be controversial changes by proactively previewing these changes with people who might disagree with the decision. We engaged in one-on-one conversations in these instances to share the proposed thinking, get feedback, invite and answer questions, and address concerns individually, rather than in a later, whole-group session. We used this strategy with coaches and teachers alike. These conversations helped prevent obstacles in advance, which paved the way for broad-based action and consensus in subsequent meetings.
Throughout the process, we also empowered broad-based action by encouraging risk-taking and innovative ideas and actions. We created processes for teachers to set individual goals for TIA designation (see Appendix C); detailed feedback from classroom walkthroughs helped teachers develop sub-goals for instructional improvement to help them reach their overall designation goal. For example, when debriefing a classroom walkthrough, a teacher and their coaches brainstormed ideas for adapting current instructional materials to make group work more collaborative, a next step area of growth for this teacher based on the walkthrough observations and the T-TESS rubric. We also deliberately fostered teacher collaboration in our coaches’ meetings, coaching sessions, and teacher meetings to help educators in the district overcome the culture of isolation that previously existed. For example, in a September 2021 TIA Teacher Meeting, teachers worked in groups to: collectively brainstorm what they wanted and needed from their TIA coaches, apply a modeled process to deconstruct a dimension of the T-TESS rubric, brainstorm examples of what instructional descriptors from the T-TESS rubric might look like in their classrooms, and review and discuss relevant parts of a TIA coaching launch protocol. Additionally, we carefully planned every TIA meeting so that over 50% of the time would be spent engaged in collaborative learning and meeting facilitation would model instructional strategies valued in the T-TESS rubric (the district’s shared vision of effective instruction). (See Appendix D for the detailed agenda of a TIA Teacher Meeting.)
Generating Short-Term Wins

We strategically designed opportunities for generating and celebrating short-term wins throughout the TIA process. For example, by providing only positive feedback during classroom drop-ins during the first few weeks of school, we helped teachers see the strengths they brought to the classroom, while simultaneously dismantling some of the anxiety associated with having administrators in classrooms.

We planned for and produced additional short-term wins through design decisions, structures, and protocols. For example, we decided to have our first scored walkthroughs focus on the learning environment domain of our instructional rubric (routines and procedures, student behavior, classroom culture) since we knew our teachers had strengths in these areas district-wide. During all walkthroughs, coaches focused on providing high-leverage, bite-sized, actionable feedback to teachers that would immediately improve students’ and teachers’ experiences, rather than whole-scale classroom redesign recommendations. For example, during a walkthrough post-conference, a teacher and their TIA coaches brainstormed easy-to-implement ways to streamline routines for grouping students (e.g., displaying a pre-created list of student partners) and beginning-of-class work (e.g., displaying a timer, circulating throughout the classroom). Another teacher and coaching trio brainstormed ways to provoke and guide discussions with students, including the use of short turn-and-talk opportunities. These practical suggestions allowed teachers to immediately implement feedback into their practice—and see results quickly. We also set up coaches to experience early wins with
teachers by prioritizing early discussions focused on positive feedback and by providing protocols to help coaching sessions run effectively.

Another important aspect of our implementation strategy was to recognize and reward early wins privately and publicly. We did this in teacher meetings by designing opportunities for teachers to collaboratively share their teaching strengths and, later, the ways they had grown their practice as a result of the TIA system. Coaches also reinforced and celebrated teachers’ growth in practice in individual coaching sessions with teachers. We celebrated early wins in TIA coaches’ meetings, too, by having coaches share highlights from their beginning-of-year classroom drop-ins, specific examples of how teachers had grown their practice over the semester, best practices that worked well in their own coaching practice, and appreciations that highlighted the strengths of their coaching partner.

**Revisiting Theory of Action**

Figure 13 summarizes my theory of action and specific examples of these actions within the strategic project.
### Figure 13

**Theory of Action with Specific Examples**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I...</th>
<th>...design and implement organizational structures (specific to our rural context) to build the capacity of principals and administrators to improve instructional practice based on the district’s vision...</th>
<th>...implement teaming conditions to increase collaboration, coaching, and accountability across the district’s instructional leadership team...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ...lead Rankin ISD to define its vision of effective instruction and instructional leadership... | **Examples:**
  - lead process to determine instructional framework for Rankin ISD
  - lead process to define vision of instructional leadership (for principals and administrators) aligned to instructional framework | **Examples:**
  - provide principal coaching
  - launch and lead regular principal meetings
  - focus coaching and meetings on supporting the growth of administrators as instructional leaders
  - use teaching and learning moves with principals and administrators |
| **Examples:** | **Examples:**
  - launch and lead regular instructional leadership team meetings
  - foster principal and administrator participation and collaboration in instructional leadership team meetings
  - design meetings with a focus on collaborative tasks that require teamwork |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Then...</th>
<th>...school and district leaders will collaborate effectively towards improved student outcomes.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| ...principals and administrators will serve an increased role as instructional leaders in their schools... | **Examples of school and district leader actions:**
  - Define and calendar personal core leadership tasks with clear priorities for instruction
  - Systemically use normed tools and processes with instructional leadership teams to analyze calibrated teacher observation data
  - Provide timely, clear, and actionable feedback and coaching to all teachers on their team
  - Regularly use teaching and learning moves (joint work, modeling, tool use, bridging, and buffering) when working with teachers to help teachers improve their teaching practice
  - Use written protocols and processes to regularly lead and manage leadership teams
  - Regularly seek coaching and feedback from supervisors and peers |
| **Examples:** | **Examples:**
  - school and district leaders will enact a system of continuous improvement in the district that helps all teachers improve their teaching practice and fosters a learning-focused culture... |

### Evidence to Date

**Outputs**

Figure 14 summarizes the progress made on various outputs of my theory of action.
Accomplished outputs (✓) were previously described in the *Description and Goals of Strategic Project* section.

**Figure 14**

**Progress Made on Theory of Action Outputs**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>If I...</th>
<th>Outputs:</th>
<th>Outputs:</th>
<th>Outputs:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>...lead Rankin ISD to define its vision of effective instruction and instructional leadership...</td>
<td>✓ lead process to determine instructional framework for Rankin ISD</td>
<td>✓ provide principal coaching</td>
<td>✓ launch and lead regular instructional leadership team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>➖ lead process to define vision of instructional leadership (for principals and administrators) aligned to instructional framework</td>
<td>X launch and lead regular principal meetings</td>
<td>✓ foster principal and administrator participation and collaboration in instructional leadership team meetings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ focus coaching and meetings on supporting the growth of administrators as instructional leaders</td>
<td>✓ design meetings with a focus on collaborative tasks that require teamwork</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓ use teaching and learning moves with principals and administrators</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Note.** ✓: accomplished; ➖: upcoming; ⍻: mixed results; X: did not accomplish.

In April 2022, I will lead our instructional leadership team in a process to define our vision of instructional leadership based on our collective learning from the past 9 months.

Two outputs that had mixed results (⍻) were using teaching and learning moves with principals and administrators and fostering principal and administrator participation and collaboration in instructional leadership team meetings. For numerous reasons (e.g., schedule conflicts, staffing coverage), principals were our most likely instructional team members to miss our monthly meetings; these collaborative experiences could not be
replicated in a meeting recap in the same way they were experienced by the team.

Additionally, while I carefully designed the TIA coaches’ meetings to leverage teaching and learning moves (Honig & Rainey, 2020), when working with principals one-on-one I too often engaged in counterproductive, would-be “buffering” activities (e.g., “moves that protect learners from potentially unproductive external interruptions to their learning” (Honig & Rainey, 2020, p. 21)) to the detriment of growing principals’ instructional leadership skills. This involved me taking work off principals’ plates that was the work of instructional leadership development (e.g., drafting feedback for teacher growth, leading coaching sessions with teachers) rather than work that would have been an “unproductive external interruption” to this learning.

While I succeeded in scheduling and launching weekly principal meetings, I did not lead these meetings nor otherwise integrate principal coaching into the scope of my work. These meetings were scheduled weekly, but occurred roughly once every 3 weeks; the content of these meetings focused on operational concerns, information dissemination, and input gathering.

**Outcomes: Instructional Leadership**

Administrators (TIA Coaches) self-reported improvement in their instructional leadership as a result of the TIA system (Figures 15 and 16).
Figure 15

Administrators’ Perceptions about Growth in Their Instructional Leadership

100% of TIA coaches believe the TIA system has improved their instructional leadership (e.g., coaching teachers, improving instruction).

Note. Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 6.

Figure 16

Administrators’ Qualitative Perceptions about Growth in Their Instructional Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to: Rankin ISD’s TIA system has helped me improve my instructional coaching practice.</th>
<th>Response to: Why or why not? (Tell us more about your response above.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>I think the team approach helped me learn different ways to look at teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>It has led me to look up research-based practices that help teachers in the areas of need. Those ideas are shared with teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>The system in place is doing an excellent job of implementing the TTESS rubric. The system drives a focus on the rubric!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>Examining the rubric in detail and observing teachers has helped me to improve my practice.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>I am way more familiar with the TTESS rubric now and have developed better working relationships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>I have studied the rubric and understand better how to apply it to classroom instruction.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 6.
Administrators adopted many leadership practices that I modeled for the team, including calendaring personal core leadership tasks using our district’s digital calendar system. These practices were more frequently adopted and implemented by partial administrators than by principals and the superintendent. During instructional leadership team meetings, all administrators used protocols and processes to collaboratively analyze calibrated teacher observation data; outside of instructional team meetings, TIA Leads primarily engaged in collaborative data analysis. These ongoing calibration activities—combined with consistent and transparent communication with teachers—resulted in all TIA-eligible teachers agreeing or strongly agreeing that TIA coaches’ T-TESS scoring was calibrated across teams (Figure 17).

**Figure 17**

*Teachers’ Perceptions about TIA Coach Calibration*

100% of teachers believe Rankin ISD’s TIA coaches are calibrated on T-TESS scoring across the coaching teams.

![Teacher Perception Graph](image)

*Note.* Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 25.

Teachers and administrators agreed that administrators provided timely, clear, and actionable feedback and coaching (Figures 18 and 19).
Figure 18

Teachers’ Perceptions about Coaching Feedback

Teachers believe feedback and coaching from their TIA coaches has been timely, clear, and actionable.

Note. Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 25.

Figure 19

Administrators’ Perceptions about Coaching Feedback

Administrators believe their feedback and coaching for their teachers has been timely, clear, and actionable.

Note. Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 6.

It remains to be seen how (if at all) administrators adopted teaching and learning moves (Honig & Rainey, 2020) into their own coaching with teachers. While administrators used common protocols for specific coaches-teacher meetings (e.g., TIA coaching launch, post-conferences, pre-conference), much of the work of coaching happened between and
beyond these meetings in less structured ways.

Two outcomes that did not materialize were using written protocols and processes to regularly lead and manage leadership teams and regularly seeking coaching and feedback from supervisors and peers. When administrators planned and led other meetings, they reverted to structures that focused on information transmission rather than collaborative learning and work. Additionally, no coaching or feedback structures emerged (explicitly or organically) for administrators.

**Outcomes: Teacher Growth**

As a result of the TIA system, an overwhelming number of teachers improved their teaching practice according to self-reported perceptions (Figure 20) and increases in calibrated T-TESS observation scores (Figure 21).

**Figure 20**

*Teachers’ Perceptions about Their Instructional Growth*

96% of teachers believe the TIA system has improved their teaching.

*Note.* Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 25.
Teachers’ Instructional Growth from Walkthroughs to Formal Observations

On average, teachers seeking designation improved their teaching as measured by T-TESS scores, while T-TESS scores for teachers not seeking designation remained relatively unchanged. T-TESS is measured on a 5-point scale. Preliminary data (n = 27).

Note. Growth as measured by calibrated T-TESS scores; n = 27.

While most teachers experienced individual growth in their T-TESS scores from their walkthroughs to their formal observations, this growth was most pronounced for teachers who were seeking designation (Figures 21 and 22). Teachers seeking designation started out with higher T-TESS scores and experienced more growth in their scores (Figure 22).
Figure 22

Teachers’ Instructional Growth Disaggregated by Designation-Seeking Status

Most teachers improved their teaching as measured by T-TESS scores from walkthroughs to formal observations. Teachers seeking designation saw the largest gains.

T-TESS is measured on a 5-point scale. Preliminary data (n = 27).

Note. Growth as measured by calibrated T-TESS scores; n = 27.

Figure 23 highlights some teachers’ qualitative descriptions of how the TIA system did (or did not) help them improve their teaching practice.

Figure 23

Teachers’ Qualitative Perceptions about Their Instructional Growth

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Response to: Rankin ISD’s TIA system has helped me improve my teaching practice.</th>
<th>Response to: Why or why not? (Tell us more about your response above.)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>They have helped guide me to strengthen areas I need.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>My coaches have been so supportive and have really helped me grow as a teacher and get me out of my comfort zone to do things I have never tried before but have been very successful implementing!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>The feedback and recommendations are very helpful in how I should address issues in the classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>I have had some things brought to my attention and have been given the opportunity to get suggestions on how to improve in those areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>I would like to have had more information about how to improve certain areas…exactly what does it take to see a proficient or accomplished in my classroom.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>It has opened my eyes to different ways of teaching that I haven’t explored before.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree</td>
<td>This system has helped me pinpoint areas of improvement and challenge myself to become a better educator.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strongly agree *</td>
<td>Held me accountable.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>I’ve appreciated the feedback from observers this year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>I think it has helped me analyze each domain and really focus in and dig into how I can grow.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>It’s made me focus on a few areas I needed to improve.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree</td>
<td>I look at each lesson deeper now.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Agree *</td>
<td>I may not be seeking a designation, but meeting with [my coaches] has helped me improve lessons in my classes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disagree *</td>
<td>I go to professional development during the summer to become a better teacher.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Survey conducted in January 2022; n = 25. *Responses from teachers not seeking designation.

**Outcomes: Student Growth**

Student growth was determined using beginning-of-year (Sept. 2021) and middle-of-year (Jan. 2022) testing with predetermined, student-specific, individual growth goals. Testing platforms included NWEA MAP (reading, math, science) and locally developed pre- and post-tests (forensic science, music, PreK math and reading, United States history). Across all students and all test administrations, 52.4% of students met their individual growth goals. Student growth averages (the percentage of students in a teacher’s class(es) who met their growth goal) ranged from 0% to 100% with class sizes of
\[ n = 1 \text{ to } n = 27 \text{ (Figure 24).} \]

**Figure 24**

*Student Growth Averages for All TIA-Eligible Teachers*

Student growth averages for *individual teachers* ranged from 0\% to 100\%.

![Student growth averages](image)

*Note. \( n = 45 \).*\(^{14}\)

To receive final approval, Rankin ISD’s TIA System will be analyzed by the Texas Education Agency (TEA) for correlation between teachers’ teaching scores (e.g., T-TESS scores) and students’ growth scores (e.g., NWEA MAP Growth). We conducted a similar, preliminary analysis based on our mid-year data (Figure 25), which depicts a moderate, positive correlation between our teachers’ teaching scores and their students’ growth scores (\( r = 0.5857 \)). This suggests that our teachers with higher teaching scores (as measured by the T-TESS rubric) are associated, on average, with higher student growth scores.\(^{15}\)

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\(^{14}\) While only 29 teachers were TIA eligible, some teachers were TIA eligible in multiple subjects (e.g., Kindergarten reading and math) or in multiple grade levels (e.g., 4th and 5th grade math). Each instance of teacher data (subject and grade level) is included in this data.

\(^{15}\) This correlation analysis will be part of the final approval process for Rankin ISD’s TIA system. It is included here to illustrate the overall trends between teaching and learning within Rankin’s TIA system.
Correlation Between Student Growth Scores and Teachers’ Teaching

Classroom teaching (as measured by T-TESS scores) and student growth data showed a moderate, positive correlation. Correlation coefficient, $r = 0.5857$.

Note. Student growth measured as percent of students meeting their growth goals; teachers’ teaching measured using T-TESS score; $n = 45$; mid-year data.

Analysis: The Why

Improving Student Outcomes

Having 52% of our students district-wide meet their mid-year growth goals was a strong start; at the classroom level, many teachers saw 70% or more of their students meet their mid-year growth goals, with some teachers’ collective classroom growth scoring in the 99th percentile nationally. However, our leadership team would like our district-wide growth percentage to be at least 75%. The dissonance between our ideal and
realized results led us to wonder: Why did we not see more student growth across the district? Answering this question requires that we first acknowledge that we do not have a local baseline with which to compare these growth metrics. With this being the first time we have used MAP assessments in our district, we do not know what our student growth percentages would have been in previous years before the implementation of the TIA system. Regardless, we still wanted student growth outcomes to be higher (district-wide) than they were—why weren’t they? Classroom and coaching levers both likely affected these results.

At the classroom level, without external comparisons (especially during the school year) teachers may have had an inflated sense of their students’ growth. While most students in the district demonstrated some growth on each of their TIA assessments (e.g., NWEA MAP Growth), our data showed that half of our students were not growing as much as other students across the country. This inflated perception of effectiveness may have resulted in some teachers implementing lower expectations or decreased pacing as compared to what our students are capable of—and what other students experience across the nation.

A number of coaching and system factors also played into these results. For example, our instructional rubric (the T-TESS rubric) was explicitly focused on student and teacher actions, but did not address the third critical component of the instructional core (City et al., 2014), content. As such, our measure of classroom teaching (T-TESS scores)

16 While Domain 1 of the T-TESS rubric focuses on planning and includes numerous descriptors about standards alignment, analysis of student data, and instructional activities, this Domain is not included in the TIA process recommended by TEA and, therefore, was not included in Rankin ISD’s TIA system. The Rankin
was unintentionally narrow. As City et al. (2014) explain, “it is the relationship between the teacher, the student, and the content—not the qualities of any one of them by themselves—that determines the nature of instructional practice” (p. 23). Further, City et al. (2014) center the instructional task within the instructional core, where the instructional task is “the actual work that students are asked to do in the process of instruction” (p. 23). Notably, our system did not have a specific focus on either content nor instructional tasks. As such, teachers might have been leveraging effective pedagogical practices and students might have been engaged in their learning, but this learning might not have been focused on grade-level standards with appropriate rigor, depth, and/or student actions. This misalignment would not have resulted in low teaching scores in our system, but might have manifested in mismatched low student growth scores for some teachers. Additionally, many of our TIA coaches did not have previous experience with instructional coaching. As such, many coaches were new to the work of helping teachers shift instructional practices, with gaps in their own instructional leadership skills.

An additional system-level concern involved discrepancies between teachers who were seeking designation and those who were not. Many of our teachers who demonstrated the lowest student growth were not seeking designation and were not interested in (or actively engaged in) shifting or improving their teaching practice. This resistance ran counter to the learning-focused culture we were working to cultivate and, often, resulted in less growth for students in these classrooms.

_TIA system only scores (and, therefore, prioritizes) teachers’ performance in Domain 2: Instruction and Domain 3: Classroom Environment. These domains include no explicit references to content and/or standards alignment._
Our mid-year student growth results were not yet where we want them to be. However, this student growth data represents an important component of a new system of accountability and support in our district. This system explicitly communicates a first-ever, collective expectation of teaching that grows student learning district-wide.17

Helping All Teachers Improve Their Teaching Practice

This project’s success in helping all teachers improve their teaching practice was facilitated by: the strategic change leadership strategy we implemented, district-level leadership providing authority and legitimacy to the project, and our explicit programmatic focus on coaching and growth.

Part of this initiative’s success is based on the strategic, research-based change leadership process I implemented based on Kotter’s (2012) leading change framework. The highest-leverage components of this model in our project included creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, empowering broad-based action (including minimizing or removing obstacles), and generating short-term wins. What made

17 There are interesting parallels between this project and recent research findings that robust teacher evaluation system reforms have resulted in no overall improvements on student assessment scores (Bleiberg et al., 2021). Additionally, even after these reforms, very few teachers receive low or “unsatisfactory” ratings on their annual evaluations, even while teachers and principals privately rate higher levels of unsatisfactory teaching performance in their schools (Kraft & Gilmour, 2017). There are important implications to keep in mind here: if teacher evaluations do not accurately and meaningfully differentiate between teachers at the ineffective end of the spectrum, do they do so at the distinguished end of the spectrum in order to earn TIA designations? How might we (at Rankin ISD) continue to maintain a focus on feedback and coaching, rather than evaluation, in order to improve teaching and learning? What do our small percentage of low teacher evaluation ratings mean in our system, especially when paired with higher proportions of classes exhibiting low classroom growth percentiles? These are important questions for Rankin ISD leaders to grapple with.
this strategy effective was my overarching focus on leadership over management\(^\text{18}\) (Kotter, 2012, p. 29) as outlined in Figure 26 below. “Change management” is often a misnomer, as management practices alone rarely result in sustainable change (Kotter, 2012).

**Figure 26**

*Characteristics of Change Management Versus Change Leadership* (Kotter, 2012, p. 29)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Change Management</th>
<th>Change Leadership</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Planning and budgeting</td>
<td>● Establishing direction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Organizing and staffing</td>
<td>● Aligning people</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Controlling and problem solving</td>
<td>● Motivating and inspiring</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Specifically, when working with the various teams involved in this project (TIA Leads, TIA Leadership / Coaches, and TIA-eligible teachers), I continued to center the leadership practices of establishing direction, aligning people, and motivating and inspiring. This leadership focus—integrated with the specific change leadership strategy we leveraged—resulted in widespread gains in teachers’ practice due to the TIA system.

Additionally, and in no small measure, this change initiative was successful because of the district-level authority and legitimacy that was provided to this project. Specifically, my role—Assistant Superintendent, a new district-level role that was specifically focused on curricular and instructional *improvement*—brought (as one partial administrator described) a newfound district-level focus on curriculum and instruction that was not experienced before. To be clear, many leaders (particularly among the partial administrator ranks) had well-developed strengths in curriculum and instruction before my arrival;

---

\(^{18}\) Throughout this project, I employed many aspects of both change leadership and change management, but with higher priority and focus on leadership actions.
however, my district-level role brought an elevated *valuation* of instruction across the district. Teachers and leaders *felt* a new, explicit focus on instruction. As a district, we were talking about instruction in ways we never had before—in leadership meetings, in coaching sessions with teachers, between teachers in hallway conversations, in school board meetings, and on our public social media channels. Another partial administrator described the importance of my formal role (and corresponding authority) this way: “We never could have done TIA this way without you. We had the skills, but we did not have the authority to make things happen before your role” (E. Clark, personal communication, Feb. 10, 2022).

Part of this previous constraint was a result of role definition in the system; before I joined the district, instructional-facing leaders (partial administrators) reported only to individual principals and often did not have authority to lead district-wide initiatives. However, as Battilana & Casciaro (2021) explain, “…authority does not always equal power…How much power comes from authority varies considerably” (p. 67). Battilana & Casciaro (2021) define power as “*the ability to influence another’s behavior*, be it through persuasion or coercion” (p. x) and contend that power instead rests in “the resources the organization in question values, and the people who control them,” including a leader’s network of relationships (p. 68). To this end, my ability to move this project forward likely rested in a mix of positional authority (through the creation of the Assistant Superintendent role), the organization’s larger context that valued positional authority and “chain of command,” and my network of relationships with influential employees who held formal and informal power in the
In addition to the formal authority vested in my role and the influence I cultivated in the district, our superintendent provided additional authority and legitimacy to the initiative by: continually and consistently communicating his support of the initiative; actively participating in almost all TIA meetings and professional development sessions; and participating as a TIA Coach in the system. This district-level valuing of curriculum and instruction permeated many aspects of the district in a new way. Portin & Knapp (2014) explain how a “...team’s existence and potential success as a collective instructional leader depend[s] on them being legitimized, occupying an understood and accepted position in the building, and undertaking a kind of work that all saw as important to the school’s success” (p. 37). The superintendent’s support and actions facilitated these requisite conditions.

Another important driver of the success of our program was our programmatic focus on growth and coaching, rather than evaluation. This focus, which permeated all parts of our program’s meetings, communication, and professional development, resulted in an emerging culture shift within the district. Specifically, this program helped overcome a previous culture that prioritized teacher comfort; through this program, we saw more teachers focused on growth and high expectations—akin to what Fullan (2014) describes as the “high-performance expectations and cultures” required for a developmental approach to making teachers more effective (p. 31). Edmondson (2012) describes this

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19 Many of these pre-existing relationships were developed during my tenure as a successful teacher in the district 10 years prior and my 8 years serving teachers in Rankin ISD through my subsequent role as an educational consultant with one of Texas’ regional education service centers. I also focused on building new relationships upon my re-entry into the district in July 2021.
mindset and accompanying practices as *organizing to learn*, “a leadership mindset that cultivates an environment conducive to learning” (p. 26). Individual actions that support collective learning within an *organizing to learn* approach include: “asking questions, sharing information, seeking help, experimenting with unproven actions, talking about mistakes, and seeking feedback” (p. 27). In many ways, our TIA system normalized and elevated these behaviors, which created opportunities for collective learning. Additionally, this culture shift also helped teachers open their classroom doors (and practice) to fellow teachers for ideas and collaboration. This shift from individualistic strategies to collaboration aligns with Fullan’s (2014) change premise of “using the power of the group to change the group” (p. 29).

Not all teachers, however, believed that coaching (and/or the larger TIA system) did—or even *could*—help them improve their teaching. One teacher who was not seeking designation shared that they believed professional development they selected and attended helped them grow, but that coaching and the TIA system could not. Other teachers—even those who agreed that the TIA system had, in fact, improved their teaching—still chose to participate in the program at the minimal level, without seeking a designation or any coaching to further improve their teaching. This left district and school leaders with an important question to consider and reconcile: *What will we do about teachers who do not want to grow as part of the TIA system?*20 This question, while not yet

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20 The number of teachers *not* seeking a designation increased from 3 of 29 (10%) at the beginning of the school year to 6 of 29 (21%) by March 2022. Teachers’ reasons for no longer seeking a designation varied and included transitioning out of the district or profession, out-of-school challenges, and lower than expected mid-year teacher and student growth data. While there was overlap between teachers *who do not want to grow in the TIA system* and teachers *not seeking designation*, these two groups were not necessarily
addressed, will be an important discussion and decision point when we determine our vision for continuing instructional leadership later this spring.

*Increasing Instructional Leadership*

Our increases in instructional leadership as a result of this project were driven by the collaborative teams and processes we implemented; however, these increases were also constrained by our (perhaps necessarily) late delineation of an instructional leadership strategy.

All administrators described shifts in their instructional leadership (specifically around coaching teachers and providing feedback to teachers) as a result of their involvement in the TIA system. One of the main drivers of these increases was the deliberate way we designed our TIA leadership structure (Figure 27). Specifically, by having three TIA Leads that met twice a week and having these same three Leads distributed across the five coaching pairs, we ensured tight cohesion of messaging, vision, and implementation across all the TIA coaches. Additionally, these intentional pairings also ensured that each coaching pair had a team member with robust strengths in instructional leadership (specifically, our TIA Leads) and helped feed collective learning from all TIA coaches’ experiences back up to the TIA Leads’ team. Through these structures, our underlying organizing to learn mindset, and teaming among the TIA Leads, the TIA Leads operationalized execution-as-learning (“getting the work done while simultaneously working congruent. An important next step here will be to differentiate between teachers who do not want to grow through this system and those who struggle year after year to improve their practice.
on how to do it better” (Edmondson, 2012, p. 30)) in our overarching leadership of this project.21

**Figure 27**

*TIA Leadership Structure at Rankin ISD*

Additionally, by leveraging joint work moves (Honig & Rainey, 2020) throughout our TIA leadership team meetings, we supported administrators growth in instructional leadership by codifying practices for our collective implementation. For example, providing protocols to use in coaching launch sessions, walkthrough post-conferences, and formal observation pre-conferences (see Appendix C), resulted in a usable, vision-aligned process that set TIA Coaches up for success in their coaching sessions. These protocols served as scaffolds for leaders with less instructional leadership experience, helping them engage in new-to-them instructional leadership practices in a supported fashion.

While we designed and iterated our TIA system strategy throughout the program, we did not explicitly define our larger instructional leadership strategy early in the process.

21 While teaming was prevalent and practiced among the TIA Leads, it was less well-developed across the larger team of TIA coaches.
In some ways, the TIA system itself served as a surrogate strategy; however, the TIA system was also experienced as a standalone project or initiative. This framing later constrained the scope of impact of this work. We considered developing a district-wide instructional leadership theory of action early in the project in a process similar to that recommended by UWCEL (2014) (as previously outlined in Figure 4). However, individually and collectively, we did not yet have common knowledge about what was happening in classrooms across our district. We could not, in all honesty, answer the questions: “What’s going on with our students’ learning?”, “How is teachers’ instruction affecting student learning?”, and “What are teachers doing (or not doing) in their instruction that’s helping or hindering students’ performance?” (UWCEL, 2014, p. 4). While individual leaders had anecdotal impressions for some students’ learning and some teachers’ instruction, we did not have calibrated understandings based on a common instructional model. To this end, we needed to immerse ourselves in the practice of instructional leadership (including observing classroom instruction, matching instructional practices to a research-informed instructional rubric, analyzing student learning and student data, etc.) before we could develop our local theory of action or vision of instructional leadership. This aligns with Fullan’s (2011) “practice drives theory” belief—specifically, that effective leaders go from practice to research, rather than blindly applying theory to practice. This practice of “deliberative doing” reflects how “the most effective leaders use practice as their fertile learning ground” (Fullan, 2011, p. xii).

While we perhaps necessarily waited to define our instructional leadership vision
and theory of action for the district, this delayed approach had significant costs. For example, a number of questions loomed over this project, including:

- Is TIA our “instructional leadership strategy?” What is our vision of instructional leadership? Is it broader than TIA?
- Does instructional leadership exist district-wide…or just as this “side project?” Who owns this side project? Whose work is this to do?

While all administrators actively participated in the TIA system as TIA coaches, this participation at times felt perfunctory or obligatory (like this was a project certain leaders were compelled to do), rather than central to the core work of a school and district. Partial administrators often demonstrated more ownership of teacher growth and the TIA system, as evidenced by their higher rates of attending TIA Leadership meetings and coaching teachers beyond the required TIA meetings and coaching sessions. These varied levels of ownership were likely rooted in the previous (and, as will be discussed in the next section, sustaining) conceptions of principals and the superintendent as managers and partial administrators as teaching-centric, instructional support roles. Additionally, the TIA system was often presented and discussed as an initiative, rather than a vehicle to implement a specific strategy. As Curtis & City (2009) explain:

Talking about and building understanding of the strategy must begin during its earliest development and continue throughout its lifetime. It must happen at every level of the organization, focusing on three things: what, why, and how. By building an understanding of what the strategy is, why it was chosen, and how it will be
implemented, everyone in the system knows what they are supposed to do, the rationale behind doing those things, and how the work should play out. (p. 139)

Not clearly and consistently communicating the strategy driving this initiative likely resulted in decreased ownership and enactment of the strategy throughout the system (Curtis & City, 2009). As such, while all administrators improved their instructional leadership practice, instructional leadership skills, actions, and ownership remain unevenly distributed and implemented across the TIA coaches, acting as the district’s unofficial (and perhaps unnamed) instructional leadership team.

*Enacting a System of Continuous Improvement with a Learning-Focused Culture*

While we made significant progress on enacting a system of continuous improvement with a learning-focused culture in our work with *teachers*, there was a lack of *symmetry* (Mehta & Fine, 2019) between this growth-focus for teachers and the lack thereof for coaches. Mehta & Fine (2019) describe *symmetry* as alignment that “links the experiences of teachers to those of their students” (p. 81). Applied to our TIA system, symmetry would involve alignment that links the experiences of our *coaches* to the experiences of the *teachers we coach*. For example, if our TIA system truly rewards excellent teaching and helps all teachers grow to their next level of teaching excellence (our espoused and, in many ways, enacted vision of the program), then a *symmetrical* system would also reward excellent *coaching* and help all *coaches* grow to their next level of *coaching* excellence. This explicit, strategic growth focus for coaches was missing from
our system; in this section, I explore why.

Within our TIA system, we enacted a clear and consistent focus on teacher growth based on an explicit conception of high-quality teaching (as outlined in the T-TESS rubric). However, we did not implement a similar growth-focus for the formal leaders in this system, specifically the TIA coaches. We did not employ a clear, collective definition of what high-quality instructional leadership looked like at beginner, emerging, and proficient levels, even though there is a state-provided, research-informed rubric (the Texas Principal Evaluation and Support System, T-PESS) that we could have used for these purposes. Additionally, we did not incorporate expectations of coaching (or being coached), providing (or giving) feedback, and growth in leadership practices into our model or our ongoing work. Without these explicit foci, no TIA coach explicitly or consistently sought coaching or feedback throughout this process.\textsuperscript{22}

A primary barrier to scaling this growth-focus symmetry into the instructional leadership team was the previous (and ongoing) leadership team dynamics. The leadership dynamics in the district have an explicit focus on hierarchy, following the chain of command, and “not stepping on toes” (meaning, doing your assigned leadership work without encroaching on what was defined as “someone else’s” leadership work). Superintendent-principal relations were more collegial than collaborative. The superintendent sought to honor the principals’ leadership and autonomy by “avoiding

\textsuperscript{22} This lack of collective growth focus for TIA coaches may be related to the unofficial and unnamed status of our instructional leadership team. Had we identified ourselves as a collective instructional leadership team jointly responsible for instructional leadership across the district (rather than a group of TIA coaches implementing a program in the district), we might have experienced the need to learn and grow as a team, as well.
micromanaging the principals;” the superintendent sought to navigate a fine line that empowered principals to advance the superintendent’s vision for the district without dictating specific strategies for how to actualize this vision. Principals and the superintendent often worked together (and quite successfully) on highly public, controversial, and/or policy-informed issues; however, instructional leadership and personal leadership development (e.g., collective professional learning, mentoring, coaching) were not core components of these relationships. The TIA system’s focus on instructional leadership and cross-district teaming challenged these dynamics.

Partial administrators in the district experienced additional culture dynamics. Traditionally, districts of Rankin’s size have a leadership structure that includes a superintendent, two principals (one for each campus), and (sometimes) an assistant principal at the secondary level. Over the past 5 years, Rankin ISD has innovatively added additional part-time leadership responsibilities (with corresponding stipends) to the district; these roles have been used to attract and retain high-quality teacher leaders who serve dual roles—as part-time teacher and part-time administrator. These partial administrator roles (e.g., Early College High School Director, Curriculum Director, Response-to-Intervention Coordinator, Grants Coordinator) often do not exist in other similarly-sized districts, but are part of Rankin ISD’s innovative human capital efforts to recruit and retain extraordinary staff members. While these roles provided increased leadership opportunities and simultaneously extended the administrative bandwidth across the district, they also pushed against the “traditional” understanding of what administrative
teams look like—and how they work—in a small, rural district. This resulted in a sort of role ambiguity whereby partial administrators weren’t seen as fully teachers nor fully administrators. The impacts of this role ambiguity were experienced through authority, delegation practices, pay structures, and positioning with the School Board. Collectively, this resulted in unintended leadership team dynamics whereby the management-focused principalships and superintendency were seen as “real administrator” positions, while the instruction-focused, partial administrative roles were “pseudo-administrator” positions. Partial administrators described examples of their curtailed authority within their leadership responsibilities, including being unable to convene people (e.g., schedule and plan meetings) and experiencing power bottlenecks when seeking to design district-wide initiatives that fell within their assigned scope of work. Partial administrators described how their lack of positional authority often kept them from leading impactful change; meanwhile, people with positional authority had delegated the work of instructional improvement to these other roles. In meaningful ways, the TIA system interrupted these dynamics, driving collaboration between all administrative roles through our collective leadership structures (e.g., TIA leadership team, TIA Leads, paired coaching), while also elevating the perception and authority of partial administrators as district-level leaders. However, challenges remain in terms of clearly defining leadership roles and teaming expectations as Rankin creates a new model of what rural school leadership teams can look like.

As Rankin innovates this new model of collaborative leadership, discrepancies emerge between the espoused vision of administrative teaming and the constraints of the
current system. Partial administrators disproportionately undertake curriculum and instruction work across the district due, in part, to how these roles were created and defined. The work delegated to partial administrators is *important* work, but not all systems in the district are yet aligned with how much the district *values* this work. For example, the management-focused principalships are compensated at higher levels than the partial administrators,\(^{23}\) principals also receive significant annual bonuses from the Board that are unavailable to partial administrators. These hierarchical compensation schemes disproportionately reward principal positions for instructional outcomes that are often delegated outside their purview.\(^{24}\) In this way, Rankin’s innovative work in both teacher reward programs and expanded leadership opportunities has created new (and unintended) compensation inequities which the district is seeking to rectify.

The leadership team dynamics also reflect entrenched gender norms that permeate the education sector, despite the explicitly egalitarian views and actions of the superintendent and other district leaders. As Arriaga et al. (2020) explain, “The public education system was not built on equality and is grounded in negative stereotypes that men take charge and women take care” (p. 11). These dynamics are inadvertently reflected in the gender composition of the “formal,” management-centric administrator

\(^{23}\) An interesting dynamic here: many of the partial administrators are TIA-ineligible because they do not teach students for at least 50% of their day. Teachers who earn the highest designation (Master) will earn salaries that are comparable to beginning principal salaries. However, partial administrators earn less than principals by design; these partial administrators will make less money than the teachers they design and implement the TIA system for.

\(^{24}\) There are interesting parallels (and contrasts) to the TIA system here: These bonuses were designed to *incentivize* instructional leadership within the principalships. However, they do not (currently) account for the collective interplay of instructional leadership across the administrative team, nor align compensation with those most involved in instructional leadership.
positions (superintendent, principals; all males) and the “supporting” partial administrators (instructional support positions; all females) in Rankin ISD. Part of this composition likely lies in the role definition: the partial administrator roles were defined to be part-teacher and part-instructionally-focused-leader positions; this aligns with sector-wide research that documents the trend that women education leaders “tend to rise through instructional roles” (Chiefs for Change, 2019, p. 8). Research also demonstrates how educational systems often provide “...few opportunities for female leaders to move through a system designed for women to teach and men to lead” (Arriaga et al., 2020, p. 21). While this mirrors the current leadership dynamics in Rankin ISD—where female leadership positions focus more on teaching (and/or supporting teaching), while male leadership positions are viewed as the “true” leadership positions in the district with fewer explicit expectations for teaching or instructional leadership—the superintendent’s explicit focus on empowering all leaders is interrupting these dynamics. For example, the superintendent actively fosters informal “coaching trees” for women leaders, where he “develop[s] future leaders who share a long-term vision for excellence and equity and grow[s] the pool of qualified internal candidates for future openings,” while also supporting women leaders’ development through mentoring, network connections, and stretch role assignments (Chiefs for Change, 2019, p. 10). In these ways, Rankin ISD is reimagining leadership teams and working to shift its leadership team dynamics.

The persistence of leadership culture dynamics throughout this project is partly

25 Notably, and importantly, the gender composition of the administrative positions in Rankin ISD has not always been so marked. In the last two decades, women have held leadership positions as both superintendent and elementary principal in Rankin ISD.
explained by these analyses of role definition, authority, and gender norms and partly explained by the sustaining impetus of the larger context this leadership team existed in. One of Hackman & Wageman’s (2012) six conditions for team effectiveness is a supportive context that includes a reward system that recognizes excellent team performance and a larger context that promotes great teamwork. As previously discussed, these conditions represent growth edges in the district. Rewards systems primarily recognized leaders at the top (and were not tied to team performance), and the larger context remained focused on siloed, delegated, and piecemeal leadership (rather than collaboration); however, there is much internal momentum around shifting these current dynamics and the TIA system has, in many ways, initiated these shifts.

Future conflict regarding pay structures and reward systems is on the horizon for the district. A number of teachers are on-track to earn the Master designation from the TIA system; this will result in an additional $22,000/year (or more) salary stipend from the state of Texas, which will put these teachers’ salaries in comparable range to current principal salaries (and above the salaries of the district’s partial administrators). This may cause tension with the district’s current culture that focuses on pooling power and financial compensation at the top of the organization. The district will have to thoughtfully navigate this emerging conflict over the coming year.

What could have been done differently to accelerate the shifts to the leadership culture dynamics? Research suggests three additional approaches we could have used: coaching, a leading change strategy, and an alternative vision. First, Hackman & Wageman
(2012) recommend team coaching (specifically, coaching to minimize team dysfunctions and maximize team synergies) as a key enabler of team effectiveness. In our context, team coaching might have helped us collectively name and address the team dysfunctions that existed so that we could more proactively maximize and leverage our team synergies.

Second, Kotter’s (2012) leading change framework was found to be particularly effective in shifting teachers’ practice, individually and collectively. A similar process (including establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, and generating short-term wins) could have been designed and deployed to deliberately shift the leadership team culture. Third, an alternative vision of power distribution and collaboration might have helped shift the conception of what effective leadership could look like in the district. As Battilana & Casciaro (2021) explain: “...to challenge established power hierarchies, would-be disrupters need an alternative view of how power should be distributed, not just trenchant criticism of the existing power structure” (p. 109). Finding a similarly-sized (or slightly larger-sized) district with multiple leadership roles working collaboratively to improve student performance might help the Rankin ISD leadership team envision a different potential reality for our leadership culture.

**Implications for Self**

As a result of leading this successful change project, I learned about my strengths in developing and implementing a change strategy. I also learned about how my core value
of empowerment often conflicts with my tendency to seek control, and about the power of prioritizing visibility and face-to-face communication.

Develop & Implement a Successful Change Strategy

My leadership and growth throughout this project further developed my strengths in designing and implementing a successful change strategy. While there are many next steps for change within this project, we accomplished significant change improvements on multiple fronts within a short period of time. For example, we demonstrated improvements in teachers’ instructional practice, leaders’ instructional leadership, and our community’s collective valuing of high-quality instruction.

Overall, I learned that I have strengths in strategic, change leadership that I will take with me to future roles. These strengths and lessons learned include:

- Developing and implementing a change process that includes a guiding coalition, a compelling vision, distributed leadership structures, short-term wins to foster long-term change, and established protocols to support success
- Leading a process to develop a compelling vision, then consistently communicating and centering this vision in order to drive and iterate the process; developing a vision that will draw others into the change work; using this vision to make potentially controversial decisions throughout the process
- Generating short-term wins by designing for early success; highlighting and/or playing to strengths in the system early in the process so everyone experiences
success; using protocols, one-on-one support, and scaffolds to help leaders and teachers experience early success in the change project

- Preempting potential controversies and/or obstacles by identifying these concerns in advance, then engaging stakeholders face-to-face to understand their concerns and insights; designing systems and processes with both the “ideal user” and the resistant user in mind in order to minimize potential conflict

I also learned the importance (and potential success) of implementing a change leadership plan on multiple fronts. For example, to center high-quality instruction in our district, I developed and led a change strategy that included: working with teachers, working with leaders, supporting staff members individually and collectively, communicating with the Board, and communicating with the larger community. These multiple fronts of engagement created a more expansive initiative that permeated the district in a way that would not have happened if our instruction-focus was only applied to our work with teachers. Additionally, I learned the cost of not attending to symmetry across these parallel tracks; for example, while we engaged leaders in the work of improving instruction, we did not explicitly or structurally engage leaders in the work of improving their leadership practices. This created an asymmetry in our model, where we expected teachers to continually grow their practice, but were not explicitly expecting this of their leaders. In the future, I need to deliberately plan parallel tracks that are symmetrical, scaling a similar vision across multiple layers of the district (e.g., students, teachers, leaders).
Lastly, and importantly, I learned that I can successfully lead an effective, strategic change initiative while also building strong relationships across multiple layers of the organization. Change and strong relationships are not mutually exclusive. Rather, by building strong relationships with all stakeholders—by valuing them as people, honoring their strengths, attending to their insights and concerns—collectively we can lead more change than I ever could alone. Change can improve the culture of an organization and individuals’ sense of belonging in it, if it is led in a way that honors the humanity of all involved. I leave this leadership experience as a more strategic, intentional leader who can develop and implement a strategy on multiple fronts, while also designing experiences that center the humanity and collective belonging of all stakeholders.

**Empower, Trust, and Support Co-Workers**

Throughout this leadership project, I learned that I can empower others to their next level of excellence if I trust them to do the work and constrain my tendency to take back control of work that others could do. I dislike asking others to do work that I could do or that might be seen as mundane; however, as a system-level leader, I have to allow others to do a lot of work that I could do so that I can instead focus on the work that only I can do in my role. Additionally, I like to control the quality of work produced by doing it myself. These are (often counterproductive) tendencies I have honed over time; I now realize the negative effects of these behaviors: signaling distrust, causing disempowerment, and constraining the collective impact.
In this project, I continued my journey of overcoming these tendencies by explicitly trusting others to do high-quality work, delegating more work to others, asking for help with more projects, and offering support to co-workers (instead of taking work over “for” them). Other times, I recognized myself falling back into counterproductive habits—specifically, doing more for co-workers who I believed did not yet have a particular skill set, rather than doing with them or otherwise helping them grow their leadership skills in these areas. I realize that these actions are antithetical to my core values of empowerment and community. I have improved my ability to see these dynamics emerging in-the-moment and have developed new skills to bring my actions more in line with my core values.

**Prioritize Visibility & Face-to-Face Communication**

Another significant learning for me is the importance of prioritizing visibility and face-to-face communication with stakeholders. I was able to circumvent many would-be obstacles, challenges, and misunderstandings by engaging with people face-to-face rather than corresponding strictly by email or another more distant medium. This style of engagement might be easier to implement in a small, rural district, where quick access to one another is an inherent strength of the context.26 When potentially controversial moments emerged, I would make time to go visit with a teacher, leader, or other staff member face-to-face during a convenient time for them in a place that was comfortable for

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26 For example, I can get from my office to any classroom or office in the district in less than 5 minutes.
them (e.g., their classroom or office) so that we could discuss the topic in-person together. While it would have been easier and faster to respond to these concerns by email, it was more humanizing and productive to prioritize engaging face-to-face to hear people’s concerns, questions, and insights. This response was also more aligned with my values of centering others’ humanity and building strong relationships. As a system-level leader, it can be difficult to prioritize these face-to-face encounters, but they are so critical—for engaging important insights, fostering buy-in from all team members, and actualizing our values of community and care.

Implications for Site

Consolidate Gains & Anchor Changes in the Culture

Two critical elements of Kotter’s (2012) leading change process are the last two steps in the 8-part model: consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture. Resistance to change initiatives is always waiting to reassert itself (Kotter, 2012). As such, it is important that leaders consolidate gains and integrate them into the organization’s culture—This is how we do things here.—in order to sustain and build on the positive growth achieved so far. Figure 28 outlines guidance from Kotter (2012) for actualizing these steps of the process; insights most applicable for Rankin ISD are highlighted.
Figure 28

Final Two Stages of Process for Leading Change Initiatives (Kotter, 2012, p. 23)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>7 Consolidating gains and producing more change</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Hiring, promoting, and developing people who can implement the change vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>8 Anchoring new approaches in the culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>● Creating better performance through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● Developing means to ensure leadership development and succession</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. Highlights added.

The district can “[use] increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision” (Kotter, 2012, p. 23) by posing and addressing questions that the TIA system has exposed, including: What will we do about individual teachers who do not want to grow as part of the TIA system?, What will we do about low teacher performance and/or student performance?, and How do the TIA rewards systems (e.g., significant salary bonuses for teachers) intersect with our currently held reward and power systems?

Additionally, the district can integrate the best practices developed in the TIA system into the district’s culture by “articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success” (Kotter, 2012, p. 23). The district can codify a set of specific best practices for change leadership based on this project, then apply them to other future leadership and change initiatives.

The following sections identify further ways the district can consolidate gains and anchor them in the culture of the district. An important caveat to these recommendations:
it would benefit the district to launch high-priority recommendations in Spring 2022 before the rebranding of the Assistant Superintendent position in July 2022. This would allow for a smoother transition and scaling of practices that leverages the district-level authority and bandwidth the Assistant Superintendent role currently provides, while collectively defining the scope of the Chief Academic Officer replacement role.

**Continue a District-Level Focus on Instruction**

To sustain the district’s newfound focus on instruction and instructional improvement, the district must develop a specific plan for district-level authorization and valuing of this work. This will be particularly important in light of the upcoming transition of the temporary Assistant Superintendent role to a permanent Chief Academic Officer position, as there may be confusion about the intersection of various administrative roles and great impetus to return to previous leadership team dynamics and structures where instruction was not a central tenet of the district’s leadership. An important lesson learned from this project is the need for a district-level role that has the authority, convening power, and bandwidth to spearhead instructional improvement across the district; a similar role must continue for the work to be sustained. The Chief Academic Officer position could be thus designed—specifically, it will be important that this role reports directly to the Superintendent and that this position works closely with the Superintendent. This collaboration will provide this role with the district-level authority and convening power.

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27 The Assistant Superintendent position will transition into a Chief Academic Officer role in July 2022, a newly-created, permanent, district-level administrative position.
needed to successfully lead this work. Alternatively, here are some ideas for continuing to advance instructional improvement through the TIA system if the Chief Academic Officer role is ultimately dissolved:

- The Superintendent could serve as a TIA Lead, working directly with the other two TIA Leads (Early College High School Director and Curriculum Director). Bi-weekly TIA Lead meetings could continue to be held to move the work forward. Having the Superintendent involved in these meetings would provide the authority and convening power needed to sustain the program and its importance/value in the district.

- The district could change reporting structures so that all administrators (principals and partial administrators) report directly to the superintendent, rather than having partial administrators report to the principals. Many partial administrators have district-wide responsibilities (Response-to-Intervention coordination, curriculum, daycare coordination, grant coordination, TIA coaching) that would support this organizational rearrangement. This rearrangement could be part of an intentional rebranding of leadership roles, authority, and power dynamics; current “partial administrators” (who are often viewed as teachers with partial administrator duties) could instead be positioned as administrators with partial teaching responsibilities.

Additionally, in the event of the dissolution of a district-level instructional leadership position, such as an Assistant Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer. In rural districts with more typical central office staffing (e.g., superintendent, business manager, and administrative assistant), these recommendations illustrate potential ways to leverage lessons learned from the Rankin ISD context.

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28 These recommendations are also relevant for rural sites without a district-level instructional leadership position, such as an Assistant Superintendent or Chief Academic Officer. In rural districts with more typical central office staffing (e.g., superintendent, business manager, and administrative assistant), these recommendations illustrate potential ways to leverage lessons learned from the Rankin ISD context.
position, it will be important for the district to codify and delegate responsibilities for the other instruction-elevating actions that we have successfully undertaken this year. Here are some recommendations for continuing these important components:

- Continue instruction focus in Board meetings
  
  - Principals select teachers for Teacher Spotlight (rotating basis between the two campuses) and then work one-on-one with selected teachers to develop Teacher Spotlight presentations for monthly Board meetings
  
  - Principals work with TIA Leads to embed instructional information and data into their monthly Principal Reports to the Board
  
  - Superintendent selects leaders for Leadership Report and then works one-on-one with selected leader to develop Leadership Report presentation for monthly Board meetings

- Continue and expand instructional leadership team meetings
  
  - Rebrand the team as the district’s *Instructional Leadership Team (ILT)*
  
  - Include all current TIA Coaches and the JH/HS Assistant Principal in the ILT
  
  - Schedule ILT meetings *twice* a month, with one meeting a month being a TIA-focused meeting (planned and facilitated by the TIA Leads) and the other meeting being a general instructional leadership meeting with a broader instructional leadership focus. Determine who will lead these “general” ILT meetings and what their focus will be. Recommendation: Principals and superintendent co-plan these non-TIA, ILT meetings with a focus on
professional learning and teaming. These meetings could focus on collaboration and collective problem-solving; leaders must resist the urge to fall back into former “inform and advise” meeting dynamics. Regional educational consultants (e.g., ESC-18 leadership consultants) could support the superintendent and principals in planning these meetings.

● Continue instructional focus on social media
  ○ TIA Leads setup schedule/rotation for weekly social media classroom spotlights (one per campus). Include all TIA Coaches in this rotation, with each Coach highlighting instruction in one of their teachers’ classrooms every 3-4 weeks.

**Implementing Coaching and Growth-Focus for All Leaders**

A next step to increase the effectiveness of the TIA system (and instructional leadership across the district writ large) is to implement symmetry across the district by implementing a learning-focused culture for all positions—teachers and leaders, alike. District leaders can do this by collectively defining high-quality instructional leadership, providing feedback on leaders’ current level of practice, and then launching coaching processes to help all coaches improve their instructional leadership.

First, leaders can calibrate around a clearly defined understanding of high-quality instructional leadership. The T-PESS rubric would provide a research-informed starting point for this work. The Superintendent and Chief Academic Officer can work with
administrators to define the instructional leadership expected of each leader as articulated by the domains and indicators of the T-PESS rubric. In a similar process to that used with TIA this year, educational consultants from our regional service center (ESC-18) could lead a calibration professional development session to help all leaders develop a common understanding of the T-PESS rubric and which parts of the rubric apply to their roles. While the rubric is meant to encompass all leadership elements of a principal’s work (including scheduling, strategic planning, professional learning, human capital, coaching, and school culture, among others), the expansive leadership team at Rankin ISD delegates these varied responsibilities across multiple roles. To further improve individual and collective leadership practices, it will be critical to identify who is responsible for which leadership domains, why, how this work will be done, and what the implications are of these labor divisions.

Additionally, using a high-quality, common definition of leadership practice will also help leaders understand their current level of leadership practice and potential next steps to improve their leadership. Rankin ISD could implement a similar coaching and feedback stance when working with their district leaders as used with teachers. This could look like:

- Identifying Leadership Coaches in the district (or external to the district). These could be the Superintendent and the Chief Academic Officer. Alternatively—but with different risks and costs—the district can contract with external coaches from the regional service center or leadership consulting firms to work regularly on-site (or virtually) with leaders in the district.
• Strategically pair each administrator (principals and partial administrators) with a Leadership Coach.

• Develop protocols for individual coaching sessions and group meetings similar to those used with teachers in the TIA system. These protocols could be used for:
  ○ Leadership Coaching launch meetings, where each leader meets one-on-one with their coach to set leadership goals for the year (based on the T-PESS rubric) and define a plan for observing their leadership practice in action
  ○ Coaching sessions and/or learning walks (akin to classroom walkthroughs), where coaches observe leaders working on an element of their practice, then share feedback based on the leader’s practice and the T-PESS rubric
  ○ Monthly coaching sessions where leaders and coaches collaborate on problems of practice the leader brings to the meeting
  ○ Mid-year check-ins regarding progress on leadership goals
  ○ Monthly Instructional Leadership Team meetings (as previously described) that focus on growing instructional leadership and celebrating instances of ongoing growth

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29 In a similar way that teachers’ T-TESS evaluations were integrated into the TIA coaching process, administrators’ T-PESS evaluations could be integrated into their coaching processes. This would eliminate redundancies regarding coaching and evaluation, while also implementing the T-PESS process consistent with its design (e.g., focused on coaching, not just evaluating, leaders).

30 The National Institute for Excellence in Teaching (NIET) developed a coaching cycle for principals that includes professional development for principals, learning walks, analyzing student work, and strategic planning. In learning walks, the principal and their coach/supervisor jointly conduct classroom visits to identify, collect, and analyze evidence of student learning, then develop a next-step plan together for the principal and their instructional leadership (Szakacs et al., 2022).
In these ways, district leaders can codify and scale best practices from the TIA system that resulted in improved teaching practice across the district to strategically improve leadership practices, as well.

**Shift Leadership Team Dynamics**

Lastly, but critically, the district can develop and implement a strategy to shift the leadership team dynamics in the district. While some of the above recommendations will make inroads in this area, additional actions include developing a specific strategy, leveraging team coaching, finding alternative views of collaborative leadership, and aligning the district’s rewards systems with its vision of collaborative leadership.

First, the district can use a change leadership framework (like Kotter’s (2012) *leading change* framework) and best practices from the TIA system change leadership project to design a comprehensive strategy for shifting the leadership dynamics in the system. This process could include establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating the change vision, and generating short-term wins.

Second, the district could employ team coaching (in addition to the individual coaching outlined above) to help the team identify and address dysfunctions and counterproductive behaviors in order to maximize team synergies. The district can partner with leadership consultants at the regional education service center or in other leadership consulting organizations that specialize in supporting and shifting team dynamics.
Third, the district can seek out an alternative view of what collaborative leadership could look like in similarly-sized districts by leveraging the Superintendent’s (and the Assistant Superintendent’s) extensive professional networks. This could involve reaching out to connections at Texas’ education service centers, professional organizations (TASA, TCWSE, TREA, TARS, etc.), and professional learning networks (Thompson Academy, EdLD network, superintendent groups, etc.) asking for recommendations of sites that are effectively and collaboratively distributing leadership responsibilities across more than traditional leadership roles (superintendents and principals). The district could then plan a site visit to such a location to observe and learn from their leadership team dynamics.

Fourth, the district should address misalignments between core priorities, leadership assignments, and compensation/reward systems. One way to do this would be to center all leadership work in a parallel vision from the TIA system: Rankin ISD rewards excellent instructional leadership and helps all leaders grow to their next level of instructional leadership excellence. What would have to change for this vision to be true? The previous set of recommendations address how to create leadership coaching structures in the district; however, the district will also need to answer: Do our current practices reward excellent instructional leadership? Why or why not? If the district believes this is an important focus, then it will need to shift reward systems to mirror this vision. This might involve shifting partial administrator roles into titled, similarly-compensated administrative roles (potentially with part-time teaching responsibilities) as discussed in previous sections, as well as making administrative bonuses based on instructional
leadership available to all instructional leaders.

Implications for Sector

This capstone generates important learning for school districts and external organizations alike. Rural and non-rural school districts alike can adapt key learnings from this project by valuing instructional leadership across their district and community, while simultaneously adapting best practices to their local context. State and national organizations (including professional organizations, state education agencies, and philanthropies) can value rural spaces as centers of research and innovation through rural-centric initiatives, advocacy, networks, and funding opportunities.

School Districts: Value Instructional Leadership across the District and Community

This capstone highlights the critical importance of centering instructional improvement within district operations, especially in small and rural districts where competing demands of operations, management, and human capital often result in a diminished (or even non-existent) focus on high-quality instruction. While small districts face many challenges to centering instruction, they also contain a wealth of strengths that make instructional improvement possible. This project highlights the significant improvements small districts can make in instructional improvement in a short amount of time, as well as the ongoing nature of this continuous improvement work in order to
continue to scale growth across the district.

Small districts must have an instructional improvement strategy that centers the instructional core (teachers, students, and content—and their interconnected relationship) and that focuses on growth for students, teachers, and leaders alike. Instructional improvement should not be left to chance or delegated (formally or in absentia) to individual teachers to “figure out” on their own. (Similarly, instructional leadership improvement shouldn’t be left to chance or for individual leaders to “figure out” on their own, either.) Districts must develop a strategy and supporting systems to help all students, teachers, and leaders continuously improve. Districts can design these systems symmetrically in order to leverage what works best to support teacher growth to simultaneously improve leaders’ growth, too.

Teaching and learning are the fundamental work of school districts. As districts work to re-center the importance of teaching and learning, they should implement an instructional focus across multiple arenas. For example, districts can simultaneously coach teachers’ instructional practices, coach principals’ instructional leadership, celebrate students’ learning successes, integrate instructional spotlights and updates into School Board meetings, and amplify examples of high-quality instruction to the larger community. Using a multiple-fronts strategy will permeate the instructional priority across the district and surrounding community in a more robust way than a singular focus (e.g., teacher coaching) could.
School Districts: Adapt Best Practices to Your Local Context

While this capstone generates a number of best practices for implementing an instructional improvement strategy, what makes a strategy successful in a rural school district is local adaptation based on a deep understanding of the challenges and strengths in that context. As such, school districts should identify the strengths and assets in their communities, as well as the unique challenges they will face. This analysis will help the district refine best practices into a coherent, high-leverage strategy that is best designed for their particular context.

Additionally, this capstone illustrates the potential benefit of leveraging an external catalyst or opportunity (in this case, the state of Texas’ Teacher Incentive Allotment program) to create a predetermined sense of urgency and to drive change. In a similar fashion, school districts can strategically leverage external opportunities (be they grant programs, state-funded initiatives, philanthropic support, etc.) to catalyze a local change initiative aligned with the district’s goals. These opportunities can provide external deadlines, requirements, incentives, and benefits that can accelerate technical aspects of the change initiative; combined with change leadership (Kotter, 2012), district leaders can adapt these external programs for tighter alignment with the culture, goals, vision, and mission of their particular context.

This capstone highlights the importance of research-informed best practices (e.g., Kotter’s (2012) leading change framework and Hackman & Wageman’s (2012) six

31 Adapting strategies and initiatives based on local context is best practice in non-rural districts, too.
conditions of effective teams) and the importance of adapting these practices to the strengths and challenges of your local situation. Change and educational leadership research may not often be developed in rural locales, but they can be refined, adapted, and improved in these contexts—this is the work of rural education leaders. The unique challenges faced in rural school districts cannot excuse us from the need for high-impact, actionable instructional improvement strategies. Rural education leaders have the skills to adapt research to our local contexts, while also informing the larger education research ecosystem about best practices refined and innovated in our communities.

Rural solutions designed, iterated, and proven in rural contexts are of sufficient importance in and of themselves, as they have the potential to transform realities for thousands of rural schools and millions of rural children. While there is no extrinsic need for applicability to non-rural districts in order for these learnings to be legitimized or of greater value, non-rural schools have much they can learn from rural districts. For example, rural districts are often agile organizations with diminished bureaucracy; as such, they can design, launch, assess, iterate, and evaluate programs and initiatives on relatively short timelines. Non-rural schools can learn from this dexterity, while also exploring the unique characteristics of rural schools that allow them to innovate and scale so quickly (e.g. tightly loyal networks of people bound together by dual relationships). Non-rural schools can learn from what is working well in rural contexts, then adapt these promising practices to the strengths, challenges, and characteristics of their individual contexts.
State and National Organizations: Value Rural Spaces as Centers of Research and Innovation

State and national organizations must value rural spaces as centers of educational research and innovation. Too often, researchers and funders alike are drawn to large(r) suburban or urban school districts to enact research and/or to support innovative initiatives. We marginalize rural school districts to the detriment of these communities, students, educators, and to our larger collective knowledge base. As this capstone demonstrates, cutting-edge innovation, change leadership, and instructional improvement are occurring in rural school districts. Significant improvements—and codified professional learning—are possible over short timeframes in rural contexts.

State and national organizations can honor this rural expertise—and corresponding opportunity—by launching initiatives that center and support rural school districts. Examples of this support might include:

- Launching networks or organizations focused on instructional improvement in rural school districts
- Adding rural-facing support positions at state-level organizations (e.g., Texas Education Agency, Texas Association of School Administrators) to support rural school leaders in leading instructional improvement initiatives
- Funding innovative initiatives and/or research projects in rural school districts
- Engaging rural communities in educational research and reform honors the lived experience of rural students and educators.

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32 While rural-facing educational organizations exist, many have a non-instruction focus. For example, the Texas Association of Rural Schools (TARS) is an advocacy organization focused on adequate funding for rural school districts (TARS, 2022).
experiences of rural residents and students, while seeking to develop educational improvement strategies that will truly culminate in the changes we are all seeking. As Marietta & Marietta (2020) contend: “Across all of these elements of current educational reform that fail rural communities, perhaps the greatest is a centralized, top-down approach that hands down mandates from the federal and state level, without gaining input from rural communities or allowing for the accommodations that could make these approaches fit” (p. 169). To this end, external organizations can partner with rural school districts—coming alongside rural districts to support the incredible work already happening there—without doing to rural districts from an outside vantage point. Additionally, external organizations can partner with rural districts to understand the specific challenges they face (e.g., less administrative bandwidth for grant writing or reporting obligations) in order to design supports and networks that truly meet the needs of rural schools, students, and communities. Valuing and centering the expertise that exists in rural school districts—and fostering this expertise to the next level of excellence—is of utmost importance, “...for these rural schools determine the opportunities of millions of children and the futures of thousands of rural communities” (Tieken, 2014, p. 28).

Conclusion

In this capstone and change leadership project, I explored the following driving questions:

- How does a (small, rural) district develop and implement an instructional leadership
strategy to help all teachers improve their teaching practice?

- How might this process be codified so that it could scale to other (small, rural) districts?

This capstone answers both questions, presenting a codified process for designing and implementing an instructional leadership strategy focused on teacher growth, while also centering the need for rural districts to adapt this process based on the strengths and challenges of their unique context. Based on the learning from this strategic project, such an instructional improvement process must:

- Have significant investment from a district-level leader with the authority and bandwidth to champion the work
- Leverage leaders from across the district in an instructional leadership team that is focused on collaborative practices, improving teachers’ practice, and improving their instructional leadership practice
- Center a compelling vision that is growth-focused and aligned with the core values of the district
- Provide accountability (e.g., student data, feedback about instructional practice) and support (e.g., coaching, mentoring) to teachers to improve teaching and learning across the district
- Attend to leadership team dynamics in order to minimize team dysfunctions and maximize possible synergies in the name of improving teaching and learning
- Identify and address misalignments between espoused and enacted values in the
district’s systems, including reward and compensation systems

As previously discussed, teacher growth is important because it helps students become successful, equipped, grounded, and productive adults—while simultaneously, helping educators continually become more successful, equipped, grounded, and productive adults, too. The promise of this capstone is that teacher growth can be cultivated at-scale across small, rural districts—and this growth can foster the success and well-being of all people in the district, students and adults alike.
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Appendix A

Dimensions of Instructional Leadership

Markholt et al. (2018) define four dimensions of instructional leadership:

- Vision, mission, and learning-focused culture (Figure 2)
- Allocation of resources (Figure A1)
- Management of people and processes (Figure A2)
- Improvement of instructional practice (Figure 3)

Figure A1

*Allocation of Resources Dimension of Instructional Leadership* (Markholt et al., 2018, p. 25)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subdimension</th>
<th>The Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marshaling Resources</td>
<td>- Use data of student learning and teacher practice, aligned with the school’s vision and mission, to determine needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Identify and leverage the resources of time, money, technology, space, materials, expertise and partnerships innovatively and equitably for maximum benefit to all students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Creatively and proactively access additional resources that support strategic priorities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Deploying Resources</td>
<td>- Articulate clear decision-making processes and procedures for instructional programming and the equitable allocation of resources.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Plan for and align resources to support the implementation of instructional initiatives.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Use a continuous cycle of analysis with leadership teams to examine, assess and refine the effectiveness of programs and equitable use of resources.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
**Figure A2**

*Management of Systems and Processes Dimension of Instructional Leadership* (Markholt et al., 2018, p. 26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management of Systems and Processes</th>
<th>The Vision</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Talent Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use data to establish priorities for recruiting, selecting, inducting, supporting, evaluating and developing staff.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Engage in ongoing succession planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Professional Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Create and maintain supportive working environments with time and space for collaboration.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify and provide multiple types of professional development based on identified needs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Structures of Support</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Employ critical processes such as planning, implementing, advocating, supporting, communicating and monitoring of all leadership responsibilities including curriculum, instruction, assessment and school improvement planning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Use data to assess and monitor system performance on a regular basis to ensure viable support for staff and students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Sample Internal TIA Communication (Newsletter)

TIA Newsletter
RANKIN ISD | SEPTEMBER 2021

WHAT IS THE T.I.A. PROGRAM?

The Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) was created by the Texas Legislature to provide significant, state-funded stipends to highly effective teachers. Teachers can earn a 5-year designation (Recognized, Exemplary, or Master) that is added to their Texas teaching certificate.

The TIA system at Rankin ISD rewards excellent teaching and helps all teachers grow to their next level of teaching excellence. Rankin ISD’s TIA system is in its data collection year during the 2021-22 school year.

Additional Resources:
- TIATexas.org
- Rankin ISD TIA Field Guide

PREPARING FOR SEPT. 1 MEETING

ADVANCE WORK:

- Review this newsletter
- Review the Pre-Test Security & Accommodations presentation
- Jot down questions you have about the information in these two resources

CONTENTS

01 WHAT IS TIA? & PREPARING FOR 9/1 MTG
02 EARNING DESIGNATION & TIA TIMELINE
03 TIA COACHES & GOAL-SETTING
04 QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK
HOW DO I EARN A DESIGNATION?

Designations are earned based on:
• T-TESS observations (50%); and,
• student growth outcomes (50%).

TEA has established minimum performance standards for T-TESS scores and student growth (see table below).

Additionally, in order to be eligible for a TIA designation, teachers must earn a rating of Proficient or higher on each of the eight dimensions of T-TESS in Domains 2 (Instruction) and 3 (Learning Environment).

T-TESS scores will be determined from:
• 2 unannounced walkthroughs (15 min.)
• 1 announced observation (40 min.)

Teachers can work with their TIA Coaches to request additional walkthroughs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>T-TESS</th>
<th>STUDENT GROWTH</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RECOGNIZED</td>
<td>Average score ≥ 3.7 across Domains 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EXEMPLARY</td>
<td>Average score ≥ 3.9 across Domains 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MASTER</td>
<td>Average score ≥ 4.5 across Domains 2 &amp; 3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TIA TIMELINE: FALL SEMESTER

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>SEPT</th>
<th>OCT</th>
<th>Nov</th>
<th>Dec</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pre-testing window</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walkthrough window</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>MAPS PD (Sept. 27)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Observation window (continues in Jan/Feb)</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TIA coaching (optional)</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Review the full Rankin ISD TIA Calendar for exact dates and details.
TIA COACHES: HERE TO SUPPORT YOU

Teachers in TIA-eligible teaching assignments will each be assigned two TIA Coaches by mid-September 2021.

Rankin ISD’s TIA Coaches are:

Your TIA coaches will reach out in mid-September to schedule an initial meeting. In that meeting, you will share your TIA program goals with your coaches and devise a support plan that works for you.

The minimum requirement for the TIA program is to have your TIA coaches conduct two walkthroughs and one formal observation.

Depending on your goals, your coaches can also provide coaching and additional support to help you grow your teaching practice. This additional coaching is completely optional and is at your discretion. Additional possible supports include: on-site support from ESC consultants, funds to attend PD sessions, classroom resources, etc.

GOAL-SETTING: YOUR T.I.A. PLAN

What are your professional goals for the TIA program this year?

Some teachers will have a goal of participating at the minimum level to help the system become approved by TEA.

Other teachers will have a goal of earning a specific designation.

Your goal is your goal. We are here to help you reach it.
QUESTIONS I HAVE...

I'M EXCITED ABOUT...

QUESTIONS & FEEDBACK
The Rankin ISD TIA system improves because of your feedback. We want this system to successfully support you.

Help us make that happen by sharing your questions, insights, ideas, and feedback anytime. Share your insights with any of the TIA coaches and/or by email to TIAquestions@rankinisd.net.

FUTURE MEETING DATES
9/20 T-TESS REVIEW & WALKTHROUGH INFO
9/27 MAPS PD (HALF DAY) ANALYZING DATA
11/3 WALKTHROUGH TRENDS & OBSERVATION INFO
Appendix C

Protocol: Teacher Incentive Allotment (TIA) Coaching Launch

Name: ____________________________________________

TIA Eligible Teaching Assignment(s): ________________________________

TIA Eligible Teaching Block(s): ________________________________

Conference Period: ____________________________________________

TIA Coaches: ____________________________________________

Goal Setting

1. My TIA designation goal for 2021-22 is: (Circle one.)

   No designation  Recognized  Exemplary  Master

   Additional comments I have about my goal:

2. To help me reach this overarching goal, my **professional** goals for the year include:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal</th>
<th>Actions (What will you accomplish the goal?)</th>
<th>Targeted Completion Date (When do you anticipate your goal will be met?)</th>
<th>Evidence of Goal Attainment (How will you know your goal has been met? How will you know whether or not it has impacted instruction and student achievement?)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dimension:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Coaching Details

3. What would it look like for your TIA coaches to serve as “Elevators” for you? What do you want and need from your TIA coaches?

4. My professional strengths include:

5. How often do you want your TIA coaches in your classroom?

6. How often do you want to meet with your TIA coaches?

7. Are there certain times of the day/week when it is better for your coaches to drop in? Worse? Any scheduling insights to share?

8. What do you want your TIA coaches to know about your class(es)?

9. Questions I have for my coaches:
Sample TIA Teacher Meeting Agenda

**TIA Teacher Meeting Planning**

Mon., Sept. 20
3:50-4:50pm

**Objectives:**
- Co-create your coaching experience by describing what you want and need from your TIA coaches.
- Describe what teaching practice looks like at each performance level of the T-TESS rubric.
- Prepare for your first meeting with your TIA coaches.
- Collaborate with colleagues about your professional practice.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time / Lead</th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Materials / Prep</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 3:50-3:55pm | Welcome & Launch  
  - Connecting this session to previous & future sessions  
  - Review objectives for the meeting |  |
| 3:55-4:05pm | Co-Creating Your Coaching Experience  
  - Consensus protocol  
  - [2 min] Brainstorming -- Educators respond individually to the following prompts, recording as many ideas as they can in 2 minutes:  
    - What would it look like for your TIA coaches to serve as “Elevators” for you?  
    - What do you want and need from your TIA coaches?  
  - [3 min] Building consensus -- Participants go around the group one-at-a-time sharing one idea from their list. If all members agree with / support the idea, it is recorded in the center of the chart. Only record the ideas in the center that everyone agrees on. Groups do not need to agree on every idea.  
  - [2 min] E-L-E-V-A-T-E: Synthesize your conversation by creating a backronym (yes...it’s a thing…; a reverse acronym) for ELEVATE  
    - Wikipedia says: “Backronyms may be invented with either serious or humorous intent…” :) | Chart paper (4 corners graphic)  
Markers  
Letter paper (ELEVATE) |
| 4:05-4:15pm | T-TESS Rubric Analysis: Whole Group | T-TESS Rubric (6 extra) |
1. Model the process of deconstructing the T-TESS rubric for dimension 3.1: Classroom Environment, Routines, & Procedures
   - Start in Proficient column; highlight key words in one line of descriptors
   - Describe what this would look like in your own words (tell a partner)
   - Look to the left (Accomplished). Read the descriptor. Underline changes; circle ___.
   - Look to the far left (Distinguished). Read the descriptor. Underline changes and circle ___.
   - Return to Proficient, then look to the right (Developing). Underline changes and circle ___. Repeat this process for Needs Improvement.

2. T-TESS Rubric Analysis: Pairs/Trios
   - Trios/quads deconstruct another dimension of the rubric on poster paper on tables around the room. [5 min]
     - 2.1:
     - 2.2:
     - 2.3:
     - 2.4:
     - 2.5:
     - 3.1 [finish??]:
     - 3.2:
     - 3.3:

3. T-TESS Rubric Analysis: Classroom Examples
   - Pairs/trios brainstorm examples (for each column, particularly for Distinguished, Accomplished, and Proficient) of what that descriptor might look like in the classroom [write on the poster]
   - Goal: Create specific classroom examples of what these performance descriptors look like. This work will serve as a reference for coaches and teachers.

4. T-TESS Look Fors
   - Briefly review the T-TESS Look Fors document based on the work you’ve done with your pair/trio

5. Preparing for Your First Coaching Meeting [5 min.]
   - re: T-ESS & coaches’ roles
   - Teachers review and discuss with a partner relevant parts of the Launch form

6. Reciprocal Accountability [1 min.]
   - How will Rankin ISD help me reach my goal?
     - Coaching
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4:47-4:50pm</td>
<td>Closing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Review meeting objectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Individual reflection on sticky note or paper (choose one)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I learned...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- My next step is...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- I am excited about...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4:50-5:10pm</td>
<td>Optional: Office hours / extended time with coaches</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sticky notes</td>
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