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EXECUTIVE EDUCATION FOR EDUCATORS: A VEHICLE FOR IMPROVING K-12 SYSTEMS?

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Executive Summary

In the course of its decade-long work on education leadership in states, school districts, and schools, The Wallace Foundation in 2005 launched two executive leadership programs based in universities. The foundation envisioned programs that would prepare senior leaders in school districts and state education agencies to bring about system change. The programs would not only build the participants' knowledge and skills but also would influence their beliefs and behavior, equipping them to institute policies and practices that would effectively support schools and, ultimately, boost student learning. By engaging teams of leaders from Wallace-funded states and from districts within those states, and having those teams learn together, the programs were intended to strengthen statewide systems. In funding programs that would straddle schools of education, business, and public policy, Wallace also wanted to establish innovative models of executive leadership development that would strengthen the field as a whole.

Harvard University and the University of Virginia, selected in a competitive process, welcomed their first cohorts of participants in the summer of 2006. Program activities continued for almost five years, with three cohorts of state and district teams each engaging in up to three years of work with the universities. The design for each cohort included two annual week-long summer institutes, supplemented by school-year activities at the participating sites in each of the following years. By serving participants for years rather than weeks, the programs were expected to have deeper effects than conventional executive education offerings.

The Wallace Foundation charged the programs with bridging the divide between learning and practice, preparing the participants to change their systems. The implicit theory of change held that, by selecting teams rather than just individuals, the programs could make a difference at the organizational or system level; further, by bringing state teams together with district teams from around the state, the programs could potentially address state-district relationships.

This program evaluation, conducted by Policy Studies Associates, focuses on participants' experiences in the programs: the purposes and expectations that they brought; what they perceived that the programs offered; and how they applied what they learned. It relies on observations of summer and school-year sessions, review of documents (curriculum materials, participant rosters, progress reports that the universities sent to Wallace, and reports that sites sent to the University of Virginia), and formal interviews with 25 program leaders and faculty and 130 participants. This report thus presents a range of perspectives on the program activities and on what participants learned and did. In analyzing the data collected from all these sources, we identified themes for which there was supporting evidence from multiple, credible sources, and those themes are the ones emphasized here. We illustrate them with quotations and examples selected to illustrate perceptions and experiences that were frequently reported. From these perspectives, we draw conclusions about ways in which each university's program and the overall effort did or did not attain their aims.

The evaluation addresses the following questions:

- In what ways did the curriculum draw together different professional knowledge bases (e.g., from business as well as education) to inform education leadership?
- What learning opportunities were offered to participants through programs of teaching and support that continued over time?
- In what ways did the programs equip the participants to improve policies and practices, and what changes did the participants implement in their local and state agencies and systems?
- What do the participants' experiences, learning, and subsequent actions tell us about strengths and weaknesses of these programs?
- What are the implications of these programs' experiences for universities, foundations, or others who want to support educational improvement through executive education programs for teams of leaders?

What the Programs Offered

Each university's program included on-campus institutes in two successive summers, taught by university faculty. As a follow-up during the school years, the state and local teams were invited to meet in their own state for shorter institutes. Each program also engaged skilled professionals to work with the teams on campus and onsite as coaches or consultants.

Harvard's Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ExEL)

Harvard University proposed to (1) help leaders "strengthen their capacity to see, think, and act systemically and strategically," (2) develop individual and team leadership that can meet the "adaptive challenges" that require newly invented solutions and changes in system culture, and (3) give states, districts, and schools a common language for focusing on the instructional process. Its program was a partnership of the graduate schools of education, business, and government. Abbreviated ExEL, for Executive Education Leadership, the program had a framework emphasizing the following elements:

- The instructional core (teaching, learning, content) as the focal point of reform
- Strategic and organizational coherence as reflected in culture, structure, operating systems, resource allocation, and communications with stakeholders
- Leadership and teamwork
- State department of education-school district relationships

Another key component of the curriculum was examining the personal dimension of change: helping participants recognize and overcome the psychological barriers that stand in the way of them doing what they believe to be right. The ExEL curriculum also addressed issues of equity through presentations by both education practitioners and academic experts.

Each participating team was assigned a coach. Coaches, who were experienced in educational change and group processes, worked with their teams during the summer on-campus institutes and the fall and spring in-state institutes.

The University of Virginia's Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ELPE)

The Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ELPE) at the University of Virginia underwent changes in leadership and focus over the years, but its core commitment to enlisting business know-how in the improvement of education leadership and management remained a constant. The program was housed in the Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE), a joint enterprise of the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education.

Starting from an overarching notion of bringing tools of business into the practice of education leadership and management, the program offered presentations by Darden faculty and outside consultants. The curriculum increasingly focused on two specific tools, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and the Project Management Oversight (PMO) process, especially the Project Management Oversight Committee (PMOC). Consultants from a company called CELT played a key role in the program, visiting the participating sites to support and guide their use of these tools. Several Darden faculty members also offered on-site consultation on topics such as team dynamics and communications with stakeholders.

The Darden-Curry program devoted limited time to addressing state-local relationships. The assumption was that statewide use of a BSC would be a mechanism that would foster alignment in priorities and data systems, thus supporting greater cohesion in leadership.

Program Results

Based on participant perspectives, we found the following types of results in the sites:

- Participants in ExEL reported that in their regular work they paid more attention to aligning policy and practice to focus on the instructional core. ExEL participants in some states also reported increased appreciation and understanding of state and district roles, and some increase in productive communications between the state department of education and school districts.

- Districts and some states that participated in the Darden-Curry ELPE program achieved varying degrees of progress in developing BSCs and implementing PMOC processes, but most mentioned some use of these tools. Some leaders in the districts that established PMOCs reported discernible improvements in the

management of specific activities, with increased accountability for progress and completion. Participants also reported that they learned from the on-campus sessions and faculty members' follow-up presentations in the states and districts.

There were also characteristic shortfalls in the results of the programs:

- Implementation of system-wide changes in any site required a process of engaging the efforts of leaders and stakeholders who had not been on the team attending the on-campus institutes. This process was seldom very successful.

- While ExEL offered a strong conceptual framework, participants might lack the practical tools to implement the framework as part of their work. The ELPE program had the opposite shortcoming: its practical tools were not integrated into a vision that might drive system change.

When participants described their experience in the summer institutes, most focused on the high-powered presentation skills of the Harvard or Darden faculty members. The sessions they attended on campus were distinctly superior to typical professional development offerings, and participants appreciated the differences. The name recognition of the universities was an asset to each program as well. When we asked what they had learned from the summer institutes, however, many interviewees had trouble remembering more than a few catch phrases, especially from the business-focused cases. Several observed that they wished more connections had been drawn to education. Almost all said they wished they had had more time with their teams. At Harvard, the sessions that directly challenged participants' willingness to make changes in their own leadership were memorable to most participants, and most viewed these sessions as valuable.

Coaching from ExEL and consulting services from CELT reportedly helped participating sites apply what they had learned. Indeed, we believe that much less would have happened onsite had these program emissaries not worked with the sites over the long haul. The sites varied a great deal in how deeply they engaged in the changes that the coaches or consultants tried to support, however. Contextual factors made a huge difference, notably the existing priorities the agency had set, the vision held by key leaders, organizational capacity and culture, and stability or change in leadership.

All sites struggled to roll out the lessons learned to a larger group than the team that participated directly in the summer institutes. Neither program included in its curriculum a set of lessons that would help sites with the challenge of enlisting other agency staff or stakeholders in sharing a vision and working toward its realization.

Fostering cohesive state-district relationships was part of the original purpose of The Wallace Foundation in launching these programs, but this was the most difficult program goal to attain. ExEL did focus to some extent on vertical alignment and, especially, greater trust between levels. Some progress could be seen in the statements of local participants, along the lines of, "I've realized that the state is not actually the enemy." Most state participants, however, were frank in acknowledging that their agencies' practice had not changed much. The exception

was one state that had made a high-level commitment to working in partnership with districts; in this state agency, some commented that they saw a difference in their interactions. In the Darden-Curry ELPE program, where the original notion had been that use of a statewide BSC would bring alignment, there was less attention to working with states on their interactions with districts, and we saw less progress on state-local relationships.

Implications

At the heart of each program's approach was ongoing work with teams, and our findings suggest that the focus on teams was an underdeveloped part of the theory of change. Calling on the teams to understand and apply complex system-improvement strategies in their states and districts meant that the programs faced serious challenges. The members of each team brought a range of experience and perspectives to their engagement in program activities. In most cases what the team members did not bring was extensive experience working as team or a collective commitment to—perhaps even interest in—the changes envisioned by the university program leaders and staff. Moreover, each team was a mélange of people who would be responsible for carrying out changes in policies and practices, people who would lead the efforts, people who would hold others accountable for the changes and their success, and people who would be the focus of the changes. The programs were not designed to address the differences and potential clashes in participant perspectives consistently or in depth.

More fundamentally, participants approached the programs expecting professional development but not necessarily engagement in systems change. The issue of team composition reflected a basic gap in participants' understanding of the overall theory of change in this program: among agency leaders and staff who were invited to join the teams, most said they initially understood they would have an opportunity to learn things that would help them in their work, and they welcomed that prospect. In fact, the programs' agendas were more ambitious, aiming at fundamental changes in policy, practices, and systems. To make more progress toward such changes, the programs would have had to engage participants earlier, more consistently, and more intensively.

One lesson, then, is that the universities would have done well to specify more clearly the composition of a team in light of program expectations, to insist on greater continuity in team membership, and to give the teams more help in sharing their new insights more widely for system change in their sites. More advance work with leaders and teams might have enabled the universities to negotiate mutual expectations with participants.

Another lesson for a university seeking to offer a program, or for a funder supporting university-based executive education, is that substantive integration between different schools can pose major challenges. Developing a coherent interdisciplinary curriculum, as opposed to relying on the faculty members' existing repertoires of lessons, takes time.

Finally, the very notion of educating leadership teams over a multi-year period deserves careful thought. The types of changes in system function that were goals of this program might ask too much of any set of teams—who inevitably cannot represent all key constituencies in their

sites and cannot be expected to transmit every lesson learned to their colleagues—and of any curricular and pedagogical design. In particular, changing state-district relationships through team learning was a tall order. Nevertheless, these programs deserve recognition for having brought new ideas and tools to many sites and important results to some sites.

Introduction

As part of its decade-long initiative on education leadership, The Wallace Foundation in 2005 invited eight universities to develop proposals for executive leadership programs. The programs that Wallace envisioned would prepare senior leaders in school districts and state education agencies to bring about system change. The programs would not only build these senior-level participants' knowledge and skills but also would influence their beliefs and behavior, equipping them to institute policies and practices that would effectively support schools and, ultimately, boost student learning. By engaging teams of leaders from Wallace-funded states and from districts within those states, and having those teams learn together, the programs were intended to strengthen statewide systems. In funding programs that would straddle schools of education, business, and public policy, Wallace also wanted to establish innovative models of executive leadership development for education leaders that would strengthen the field as a whole.

Seven universities accepted the challenge of developing proposals. The two selected for funding at the beginning of 2006 were Harvard University and the University of Virginia. That summer, each welcomed its first cohort of state and district leaders to the program's inaugural summer institute. Program activities continued for almost five years, with three cohorts of state and district teams each engaging in up to three years of work with the universities; the design included two annual week-long summer institutes, supplemented by school-year activities at the participating sites in each of the following years. By serving participants for years rather than weeks, the programs might have deeper effects than conventional executive education offerings.

In ambition as well as duration, these have been unusual programs of executive education. Wallace charged them with bridging the divide between learning and practice, preparing the participants to change their systems. Wallace's implicit theory of change held that, by selecting teams rather than just individuals, the programs could make a difference at the organizational or system level; by bringing state teams together with district teams from around the state, the programs could potentially address state-district relationships.

Around the middle of the program period, in 2008, Policy Studies Associates began observing program activities and gathering data for a Foundation-supported evaluation of the two programs. Our evaluation focuses on participants' experiences in the programs: the purposes and expectations that they brought to their first summer institute; what they perceived that the programs offered during summers and school years; and how they applied what they learned.

Our methods were qualitative. We observed summer and midyear sessions, reviewed documents (curriculum materials, participant rosters, progress reports that the universities sent to Wallace, and reports that sites sent to the University of Virginia), and conducted formal interviews with 25 program leaders and faculty and 130 participants. This report thus presents a range of perspectives on the program activities and on what participants learned and did. In analyzing the data collected from all these sources, we identified themes for which there was supporting evidence from multiple, credible sources, and those themes are the ones emphasized here.

Each of the examples and quotations selected to illustrate a theme in this report reflects more than one incident or observation. On the many themes on which interview respondents offered different accounts or opinions (with differences arising within or between teams, among members of the program staff, or between participants and program staff), we identified features of the respondent's position, experience with the program, or context that could account for the perspectives. This analysis permits us to contrast the perspectives of program staff and participants in some cases, and also to present a systematic analysis of the contexts in which the programs were reported to have particular types of results. By "context," we refer to features of the team, the leaders' purposes, organizational capacity and culture, and staffing transitions. Thus, using evidence from multiple perspectives, we draw generalizations about ways in which each university's program and the overall effort did or did not attain their aims.

The following questions about content, pedagogy, and participants are central to an assessment of these executive leadership programs:

- In what ways did the curriculum draw together different professional knowledge bases (e.g., from business as well as education) to inform education leadership?
- What learning opportunities were offered to participants through programs of teaching and support that continued over time?
- In what ways did the programs equip the participants to improve policies and practices, and what changes did the participants implement in their local and state agencies and systems?

Our evaluation addresses summary questions as well:

- What do the participants' experiences, learning, and subsequent actions tell us about strengths and weaknesses of these programs?
- What are the implications of these programs' experiences for universities, foundations, or others who want to support educational improvement through executive education programs for teams of leaders?

We discuss each university's program in detail, then offer overall conclusions.

Harvard Executive Leadership Program For Educators

Program Design

Harvard University proposed to (1) help leaders "strengthen their capacity to see, think, and act systemically and strategically," (2) develop individual and team leadership that can meet the "adaptive challenges" that require newly invented solutions and changes in system culture, and (3) give states, districts, and schools a common language for focusing on the instructional process. The Executive Leadership Program for Educators (abbreviated ExEL, for Executive Education Leadership) was designed to address these initial aims.

Participating Schools and Staff

The core components of Harvard's proposed design built on the Public Education Leadership Project (PELP), an ongoing partnership between the Harvard Graduate School of Education (HGSE) and the Harvard Business School (HBS). The design also built on the Superintendent Leadership Program, a Wallace-funded collaborative program between HGSE and the Kennedy School of Government (subsequently renamed the Harvard Kennedy School). Many of the ExEL faculty from the three schools were involved in one or both of these cross-school programs.

Named as faculty chair of the program, Robert Schwartz brought a particular focus on state-district relations in education, having led the education programs of the Pew Charitable Trusts during the 1990s, when it launched programs for states and districts in standards-based systemic reform. The idea of alignment among state and local standards, curriculum, professional development, and assessment was at the core of systemic reform efforts. The key staff members brought on board to administer ExEL had experience in leading professional learning, in state and school district administration, and in program management. In addition, a cadre of coaches assigned to support and facilitate participant team activities complemented the core project staff.

Curriculum

The PELP Coherence Framework anchored much of the ExEL curriculum.[1] Consistent with ExEL's overall approach to the project, the curriculum focused on and reinforced four key themes, the first three adapted from the PELP coherence framework:

- The instructional core (teaching, learning, content) as the focal point of reform
- Strategic and organizational coherence as reflected in culture, structure, operating systems, resource allocation, and communications with stakeholders

[1] http://www.hbs.edu/pelp/framework.html

- Leadership and teamwork
- State department of education-school district relationships

Another key component of the curriculum was examining the personal dimension of change: helping participants recognize and overcome the psychological barriers that stand in the way of them doing what they believe to be right. The ExEL curriculum also addressed issues of equity through presentations by both education practitioners and academic experts.

Following this framework, the program had the central, underlying theme that education leadership and administration must be guided by a vision of high-quality teaching and learning. The framework also emphasized that leaders should craft and follow clear theories of action to guide efforts to align resources, policies, and programs. Together, the emphases on the vision of teaching and learning and the need for policy and program alignment articulated a very ambitious reform agenda. Attention to the instructional core had considerable appeal as educators' bottom line focus. The challenge was to get everyone in the three-tiered government system on board for their contribution to supporting and maintaining the core rather than viewing it as the purview of teachers, principals, and other school staff: how do SEAs, districts, and schools work together to establish a shared vision of teaching and learning, and develop a clearly defined set of programs and policies that support the vision?

Pedagogy: Summer and School Year

For the first two participant cohorts, teams of roughly eight members from each of four districts in two states, plus state-level teams, spent a week at Harvard in two summers. While there, they participated in case-based instruction and attended lectures and other presentations by faculty from the three partner graduate programs, as well as leaders from other districts and states. The schedule included time for team members to work together and some opportunity for cross-team, role-alike interactions.

In addition to the summer institutes, ExEL included semi-annual in-state institutes for the five teams in each state. Each in-state institute lasted about a day and a half. They were intended to supplement the summer activities and to provide opportunities for state and district teams to interact around topics of common interest. The agendas typically included invited presentations from ExEL faculty or other experts. In some states and for some teams, the in-state institute participants included state and local staff or other stakeholders who were not on the core teams and had not participated in the summer institutes.

In three of the four states, teams collectively identified a project that a volunteer working group, cutting across the teams and bringing in other colleagues from their own site, would work to address. The most intensive of these projects dealt with what principals needed to know about more effective services for English learners, a population that was increasingly a focus of policy and practice attention in the state. The in-state institutes were an occasion for advancing and showcasing this project, which also required a good deal of work between formal sessions.

A distinctive feature of Harvard's pedagogy was the involvement of coaches. Teams met together for several hours during the week at Harvard and were also expected to continue meeting during the school year. Coaches facilitated the team meetings. They were expected to help individuals with diverse experience and perspectives come together as teams and to understand and apply ExEL content to state and local improvement efforts. Coaches assigned to state departments of education were also expected to facilitate state-local networks as a step toward establishing vertical alignment between state and local policies and programs. Coaches worked with team liaisons and ExEL staff to plan the in-state institutes. Finally, the coaches' portfolios often included one-on-one support for individual team members, usually a superintendent or chief state school officer. Typically, these interactions focused on problem solving or involved the coach providing updates based on observations elsewhere in the district or state agency. Coaches also reported working with individual team members to ensure their active participation on the teams.

How the Program Design Evolved

Across the first two cohorts of participating states—Kentucky and Ohio, then Massachusetts and Oregon—there were not major differences in the way the program unfolded. The structure and areas of focus remained as planned, despite some shifts in staffing. For example, Ronald Heifetz initially delivered sessions on the personal dimension of change, and Robert Kegan succeeded him; although their conceptual frameworks differed, participants apparently experienced this part of the program in similar ways under each faculty member's leadership.[2] Several additional cases were developed and delivered, and there were presentations by leaders of urban districts who described their work and engaged in discussion with the participants. Elizabeth City, an experienced practitioner and professional developer, joined the team in 2007 and took a key role in both the summer and the school-year institutes.

There were also some changes over time in the assignments of coaches to teams, and ExEL insisted that a previously reluctant state team must work with a coach. Coaches were afforded somewhat more opportunities to provide feedback to ExEL leaders over time.

The third cohort was different. Despite apprehensions about the challenge, ExEL agreed to Wallace's encouragement for working with Illinois and New York and with their huge, unique districts, Chicago and New York City. Wallace and ExEL agreed that the design for this cohort would not include the participation of any other districts within the state but rather would focus on the large district, the state, and their relationship with each other. The first-year summer institute curriculum and pedagogy for the four teams closely resembled those offered to other cohorts, but things changed after that session. There was no subsequent summer institute for the cohort, and instead Harvard essentially provided a series of ad hoc coaching engagements. Tailored to particular requests and circumstances of New York City, New York State, and

[2] We note that we do not have as complete a picture as we would like of the summer sessions that addressed the personal dimensions of leadership. Citing the need to protect the confidentially of internal personal and team dynamics, ExEL did not allow us to observe these sessions. According to an ExEL leader, "Harvard determined that external audiences of any kind (including other ExEL faculty and staff) would not have been conducive to creating the conditions for solid outcomes in such a highly politicized group of senior education leaders."

Illinois, these provided modest amounts of high-level support and advice to the chief executive, a team, or both. With leadership turnover, the Chicago Public Schools chose not to participate further with ExEL. The Illinois State Board of Education (the state education agency) also declined further participation.

Program Design: Summary

In designing the ExEL curriculum, Harvard built on the existing PELP partnership between the schools of education and business and added new elements as well. From PELP, the program drew a "coherence framework" emphasizing strategic and organizational coherence around the instructional core (i.e., teaching, learning, and content as enacted in classrooms), The program also addressed the personal dimension of change as well as state-local relationships in education. In states participating in the first two cohorts, a state-local team worked together on a project during the school years. Coaches facilitated team meetings, and in some sites worked with individual leaders, throughout the program period. For the third cohort, which consisted of the SEAs of Illinois and New York and the states' largest districts, Chicago and New York City, there was only a single summer institute, followed by a series of ad hoc coaching engagements worked out individually with teams.

Participant Selection and Expectations

Here and in most of the remainder of the chapter, we focus on the participants' experience with ExEL. We illustrate our findings with quotations and specific examples (maintaining the anonymity of individual sources); these were chosen to reflect themes and perceptions found across sites. On most points our respondents were not unanimous, but we note the predominant view if there was one, as well as any contrasting perspectives that were found across sites.

Selection of States with The Wallace Foundation

States were chosen in consultation with The Wallace Foundation, where program officers had an opportunity to identify the states that might benefit from the ExEL approach more than the Darden-Curry approach, or vice versa. Reportedly, most of the states considering participation in a program expressed a preference for attending ExEL; a Wallace official speculated that the name recognition of Harvard drove this preference. For the first cohort, the fact that Harvard's Richard Elmore was already working with Ohio was a factor in assigning Ohio to Harvard rather than to the University of Virginia. Once that decision was made, similarities between the issues in Kentucky and Ohio argued for assigning Kentucky to Harvard as well. A senior program officer's advocacy could also influence the selection of a state for the ExEL program. Summarizing the factors that went into the process, interviewees at The Wallace Foundation acknowledged that it was highly subjective.

In each cohort, uncertainties plagued the selection process. With the universities receiving their awards in January, identifying sites able and willing to attend a summer institute—at their own expense—was a challenge. A senior Wallace official spent time persuading chief state school officers to participate and, in some cases, helping them raise outside funds to support their participation. Securing the commitment of Illinois and New York was an especially protracted process; each state discussed participation in an earlier year but then decided against it, finally agreeing to be part of the third cohort. This meant that in the earlier cohorts, other states were recruited especially late in the process as substitutes.

Selection of Districts: Looking for Need, Capacity, and Willingness

District selection involved several balancing acts. The original design focused on relatively large urban districts with challenging problems around instruction—but where capacity to address the problems was relatively high. In one state, for example, the SEA initially wanted to invite a group of relatively large, high-performing districts, which together contained the majority of the state's students. However, ExEL argued that districts must be selected based on the strength of their interest. The ExEL design, like the PELP design, had the premise that district selection would be a competitive process. Thus, districts were asked to complete written applications, and the successful applicants in this state were not uniformly large. As a participant from one of the selected districts described it:

> *The way it was discussed with me was they wanted districts that were already focusing on innovative practices in instruction and curriculum and willing to change, rather than highest or lowest performing districts… They chose districts that brought the right disposition to the table.*

An official of another state said in an interview that Harvard had told the state to create a formal process for choosing four of the eight urban districts that the state wanted to involve. As it turned out the selection process was not needed:

> *Harvard indicated they wanted a format to engage all eight [districts] and then pick four. The process was to include onsite visits to assess where districts were in leadership.… We started the application, but several districts were not interested because of other grants or issues, so it ended up being a scramble to get the four.*

The Wallace Foundation also played an active role in identifying and selecting districts, and this necessitated other balancing acts. In most states, a recommendation from Wallace was part of the selection process. A state official said, "Wallace wanted one of [three particularly large districts], so we had to have one opt in." The needed volunteer was found in a district that was changing superintendents. In another state, The Wallace Foundation strongly encouraged the inclusion of a district it had supported for leadership work, although a state official described it as "certainly not a high-need district or one with a large minority population."

Even with Wallace encouragement, the number of interested districts was barely equal to the number wanted. State officials and Wallace program officers worked with the ExEL team to

identify suitable districts. In a state where just two districts applied, two others were then invited into the program. The superintendent of one of these districts, which was considerably smaller than its more urban counterparts, said, "We were a mouse among elephants."

One stumbling block for district participation, as for state participation, was the financial commitment required. Districts had typically set their budgets for the year, including the summer, well before the recruitment season, which was early spring for each of the first two cohorts. Fitting an additional expense into that budget was difficult.

All in all, the selection process often turned into a fairly hectic recruitment process, as reluctant decisionmakers were cajoled into joining the program. The encouragement of The Wallace Foundation was an important factor not only in identifying candidate sites but also in persuading quite a few to participate.

Choices Made in Team Composition

State teams. In creating their own teams, three states reached out to many different types of stakeholders. One state focused more heavily on recruiting high and middle level administrators, department insiders who could make decisions and get things done. Another state found the inclusion of outsiders (e.g., business representatives, elected officials, or advocates) to be an eye-opening and positive experience, in part because they brought different perspectives to the conversations and did not always share educators' assumptions about what should be accomplished or how best to proceed. While in the past, the state's notion of stakeholder involvement had been "token representation," the state officials on the team learned about reaching out to develop allies and defuse concerns. Still another state had a different reaction. This state was responsive to Harvard's emphasis on engaging stakeholders outside the state department and made some "political" choices including a business representative and a representative of the state board of education. According to a key state official, this team did not comprise the right people.

> *No, we did not have the right people. … We had a few insiders and more outsiders…. With more [department] staff, we could have solidified relationships with districts better. The external members were also not as committed to the work. Districts didn't see a commitment. That was the disconnect to me.*

One state listened to suggestions from Harvard on forming the state team, but ultimately did not conform. With the exception of a state board member and an association leader, the team was made up of "senior staff that most closely touched instruction." Despite the focus on staff members whose work was most aligned with the ExEL focus on the instructional core, team members ultimately gave this group mixed reviews. They speculated that the selection was partly driven by who was willing to participate, since the coordinator reportedly "had to do a lot of convincing to get people to give up a week of their summer to go."

District teams. In creating their teams, the districts, like the states, struggled with the balance between insiders, who were experienced in working together and were perceived as

likely to get things done, and outsiders who would demonstrate stakeholder collaboration and bring different perspectives. Some "insider" groups restricted themselves to the district administrators whose work focused on instruction, while others brought in some noninstructional administrators.

Three superintendents explained the case for selecting their top leaders as the ExEL team. In one district with a new superintendent and several new cabinet members, the program offered the team an offsite opportunity to work together on setting goals and collaborating. In another district, the superintendent said that including board members would have made the work harder, characterizing work with the board as follows:

> *Working with a group of people who think they know more about education than do educators is a constant challenge.*

Similarly, a member of a third district team observed in hindsight that the superintendent had made a good choice in excluding board members or union officials:

> *We needed that time for open and honest conversations, interactions with people. I'm not sure they would have been willing to do that if the school board member or union were at the table. I think we really needed to go through that process as administrators first.*

An important underlying theme in these two observations and others that we heard is that heterogeneity in team members' knowledge, skills, and perspectives may lessen a team's capacity to apply program content and carry program activities. Here, team capacity is not the same thing as the capacity of the organizations represented by team members.

On the other hand, the opposite perspective was expressed by a team member from a district that balanced internal and external membership:

> *At the developmental level we were at, it was helpful to have external voices questioning what we were doing. [Also] it fully engaged the mayor and business, and philanthropic group and helped them realize the intensity of our work.*

Thus we found contrasting views on the strengths and weaknesses of heterogeneous groups as participants looked back on their experience in the program.

Participants' Understanding of the Program Purpose: A Continuum

Members of the state teams hoped that working together on common issues would lead to improvement in their relationship with the districts. The coordinator for a state team described it this way:

> *We asked all our urban districts to apply…. [We expected to learn] how to take good instruction to scale in the state, how to develop good, honest communication between districts and the department, and work on issues that are important to all of us.*

However, districts did not attend in hopes of improving their relationship with their states. District interviewees often commented on their poor working relationship, which they viewed as inevitable for structural reasons ("How do you have a partnership with an organization that is 90 percent about your compliance?") or the fault of state staff ("I hate the SEA. They have no capacity, and all they want to do is to tell you what is wrong").

Most members of district teams had little or no idea what to expect, except that that the program was at Harvard and that its goal was to develop leadership skills and collaboration. The exceptions tended to be superintendents or deputy superintendents who had more direct communication with the state education agency in the recruitment process. A comment typical of the majority of team members was the following:

> *I didn't know what to expect. I really didn't have a clue because I had minimal information other than this was funded and, are you available this week in July… [I went because] when you're invited, it's nice to do it.*

Those with process expectations seemed to put considerable stock in the power of collaboration and the expertise of Harvard.

> *I knew it was about leadership and that we had put together a diverse team. My expectations for personal development were – exposure to really, really smart people – to hear real, live Harvard professors – the varsity team. Not everyone gets that opportunity. I was personally and professionally motivated.*

> *I was told "you are going to Harvard." That is about all I knew and I said, "great." But then I started to understand what would be involved. I learned [the program] would involve the Kennedy school and business school, so I realized we would learn from outside of education how to improve education. Our team did not meet before the summer institute. So I was still up in air up at that time.*

Those few participants with both information and specific expectations were found among the superintendents and deputies. In a few such cases, the participant's expectations were aligned with a sense of the challenges facing the district:

> *What drew us to it was we had many initiatives to raise student achievement. As administrators, we wondered what we could do to move the district forward. Harvard had the know-how to put systems in place so the backbench could step up during leadership transitions. They weren't going to resolve our issues, but would help us determine how to organize to resolve our own.*

Summary: Participant Selection and Expectations

The recruitment process, which proved not to be easy, included the active participation of The Wallace Foundation both in matching potential sites to ExEL and also in persuading leaders to incur the costs of participation (in dollars and in staff time). Individual participants were

selected according to expectations and priorities that varied a good deal from site to site. Most site teams, but not all, included stakeholders from outside the state agency or district office. Most participants began the program knowing little about its aims or design, although there were exceptions among the superintendents and chief state school officers. The fact that team members did not come to the program with shared expectations limited the teams' capacity to use and apply program concepts and lessons and, consequently, the program's overall effectiveness, as we discuss below in reviewing program results.

Summer Institutes at ExEL

The ExEL summer institutes for the first two cohorts took place on the campus, but participants were housed at nearby hotels. Each institute lasted five days, with participants arriving in Cambridge on Sunday afternoon and leaving mid-afternoon on Friday. The days were filled with large- and small-group sessions, including team meetings. "We worked from seven in the morning until eight at night," a participant recalled wearily. A large volume of readings was sent out shortly before each week on campus. Some participants felt that the ExEL team should have organized itself to send out the material earlier:

> *They were trying to get [the faculty and staff] teams together to do their planning. So we would get [the readings] a week or a few days before the institutes. Everybody always complained about that. All of us wanted more time. And we would have used the time. We really took this work and what they shared with us seriously.*

Session Purposes, Content, and Perceived Quality

The daily schedules of learning activities included a variety of case-based sessions that examined cases from business (e.g., Taco Bell, Southwest Airlines), public sector organizations (e.g., the New York City Police Department, Children's Hospital), and K-12 education (e.g., Atlanta Public Schools, Long Beach Unified School District, Montgomery County Public Schools). Some new cases were developed for ExEL, but development was fairly limited. According to a person involved with the program, the intellectual-property agreement with The Wallace Foundation was a powerful disincentive for case development: faculty would have done more to craft cases, this person said, if they could have had ownership of the products.

Some sessions featured district leaders in live and video presentations. In other sessions, Harvard faculty made more traditional presentations on educational issues. The institutes also included several sessions intended to force participants to reflect seriously on their beliefs and practices. In these sessions, faculty actively and aggressively challenged participants to think about and, in some cases, publicly defend their views and their professional practice.

Finally, the schedules included opportunities for teams to meet to review session content and consider its implications for their work and plans future reforms. ExEL coaches, who were assigned to work with each team through the three-year duration of their involvement in the project, facilitated some of the team activities.

Participants in the ExEL institutes whom we interviewed gave the institutes generally positive reviews. As the following comments indicate, some participants saw a variety of strengths and payoffs in the summer institutes. One SEA team member, whose views reflected others that we heard, offered the following assessment of the summer institutes:

> *The experience was outstanding. The content was rich and engaging and really contributed to expanding our knowledge base on the role of leadership in bringing about change in our schools. The opportunity to engage with the faculty and other districts was invaluable. … To talk about the materials that you are reading and talk about how to use the information. The folks at Harvard were really intentional in terms of strategic planning, and promoting us as change agents in the districts – bringing a focus on the instructional core – a mission critical in our role: How do you define leadership, how to you model leadership, rolling up your sleeves and doing the work?*

A district leader from another state commented that:

> *Harvard was quite powerful. I liked the case studies. They were real-world actual experiences. The case studies were focused on organizational development and leadership and strategic planning, which fit well with [my] role in the district. I loved that it focused on what was not going well. I liked it because it was Socratic... It was invigorating, stimulating and the kinds of things you never get a chance to do.*

Participants also commented on the cachet associated with going to Harvard and interacting with Harvard faculty.

Participants welcomed the recurring emphasis on key themes in the summer institutes as well as in the in-state institutes. A state team member described this emphasis as follows:

> *I appreciated how Harvard kept constant in their theme. Systems, instructional core, leadership, and another. It wasn't just put out there and you moved on to something else, but they kept coming back and making those connections, even if you didn't see it yourself. Each step built on previous ones. The scaffolding was so well practiced and modeled. It forced us, not only in Harvard work, but in our other work, to come back to talking about the instructional core in different venues.*

However, some participants who had generally favorable views of the institutes also commented on what they saw as some unevenness. The following comments echo others that we heard in the interviews:

> *The lectures were not as stimulating as the case studies. They did not cause you to mentally engage. I valued the expertise but it wasn't interactive enough. They did panel discussions (very good) and role playing. The lectures were informative but not as powerful and challenging as the case studies.*

Some presenters were stronger than others. In some cases the presentations were academic and not completely relevant to what we were doing. The quality varied. Part of the problem was the amount of sitting we had to do.

The third cohort, as we have mentioned, was different in composition from the previous two. After considerable discussion among ExEL leaders, state education agency leaders in New York and Illinois, and leaders in the New York City Public Schools and the Chicago Public Schools, participants in the Cohort 3 ExEL summer institute included large contingents from both state agencies and both districts. Notably, both chief state school officers and both superintendents participated as well as members of the respective state boards of education.

The content of the institute was not entirely different, however. As in earlier institutes, individual sessions combined discussion of case studies and presentations by Harvard faculty. Although the cases did not focus specifically on K-12 issues, including the vertical alignment of states, districts, and schools, faculty presenters frequently drew explicit connections between the cases and issues in K-12 policy and practice in discussing the cases and in their presentations. They also drew connections between the various sessions and the four conceptual strands of the program framework. Although many of the whole-group discussions that we observed were lively and involved large numbers of participants, the substance of discussions seldom touched on the particulars of the four agencies and the working relationships between the states and the districts.[3] Similarly, while faculty presentations of the cases included references to K-12 issues, they did not delve deeply into issues in New York and Illinois.

Overall, this summer institute got uneven reviews, as noted in an ExEL progress report:

Feedback from the Cohort III Summer Institute participants was mixed regarding the rigor of our curriculum and teaching methods around instruction and strategy – some felt the institute sessions were very challenging, others less so. We believe the size of the teams and significant variation in roles and experience contributed to this variation in feedback. Some senior leaders report coming away from the Institute with a <u>new</u> understanding and deep commitment to re-establishing their system's strategy to focus on the instructional core (bringing to scale high quality teaching and learning for all children). The cases and cross team learning demonstrated lack of coherence around the core, and demonstrated to participants representing governing bodies as well as many different units within those systems how that lack of coherence impedes a system's ability to support teacher and school capacity to improve student outcomes.

As we noted earlier, ExEL leaders carried out some further work with some of the participating agencies, but the four teams did not return to Harvard for a second summer institute.

Across cohorts, some of our interviewees said there was not enough attention to the process of district change in the summer institutes. One observed that there is literature on this subject, but that the program's designers did not use it in building the curriculum. A district superintendent who valued the overall experience also noted:

[3] Reportedly there was more attention to the agencies' specific issues in the sessions that we were not permitted to observe.

I was hoping that Harvard would encourage us to do work on district reform, not just classroom issues. Harvard did a nice job on the instructional part, but not at looking at the entire district structure and system. I loved it when they brought in discussions of leadership, equity, and instruction. But it was not ever about reforming the system.

Sessions on the personal dimensions of leadership, in which the presenters were deliberately confrontational, made a number of participants uncomfortable and drew a large number of comments from the interview respondents. One state agency participant, reflecting the sentiments of a number of participants with whom we spoke, described the situation as follows:

In the first year, they almost lost us completely. When we left, I wasn't sure we would continue to work with them. In the end, we came to understand Heifetz and his work., Probably the biggest take-away was [his concept of] adaptive versus technical change. But his presentation skills—it was very offensive. He tried to tear down everybody's confidence. … We thought one superintendent was going to walk out and not come back. … There were some very hard feelings about some of those sessions…. Some of us got caught in the middle of some very personal issues, relationships we were struggling with. We learned that you have to put all that stuff out on the table, get over it, get beyond it or you can't continue to work. It came at us pretty harshly.

As the above comment illustrates, many did come to see the value of these sessions, albeit grudgingly. A more thoroughly positive assessment was the following:

I loved the Heifetz [sessions]. His approach was to agitate and get people out of their comfort zone. Without that, I am not sure the districts would have made progress. He forced people to talk in their small group. He didn't give them much choice.

The summer institutes attempted to address issues related to the relationships between state departments of education and districts and the role of the state departments in supporting improved instruction. To this end, the first summer for each cohort included a session structured to provide frank feedback to state departments from the participating districts as a way of stimulating discussions of how to improve the relationships among these entities. One ExEL coach described the sessions as follows:

At one meeting we did an exercise where the district teams posted comments on the state's role and their concerns. There were a lot of comments that said that the state agency was a monitoring and regulatory agency and in many cases just wasn't very helpful. What we also found out was that there were some things that were not under the control of the agency. NCLB was an example. The districts didn't understand that. Part of the solution was to try to establish better communications between the SEA and the districts.

Beyond the discussion of the quality of the state-local relationship, specific issues of state agency functioning received less attention than other topics in the summer institutes. Our interviews suggest that the sessions did, indeed, provoke "difficult" discussions about the current

quality of the relationships between state agencies and districts and the prospects for improving them. Nevertheless, state participants observed that the content of the summer institutes was more relevant to districts than to states:

> *[The program] was focused on district issues. Rightly so, and I can understand that, but state agencies have their unique responsibilities, political environment, etc. and not as much attention was paid to that. Maybe there's less literature on that, maybe it's not as exciting as going to a district, but whenever we saw videos of a district, it wasn't about how the state department worked with the district. It was about the district, not the district's relationship to the state.*

When asked what was most valuable about participating in the summer institute, this state agency official said the greatest value came:

> *When we sat in a room with districts and tried to work together. Not in the classroom where we were listening to an external speaker. Where we sat together with case studies or problem sets to work through. Those were the most useful. Sometimes our staff would go off and do things together. But if idea was to get districts and states to work together, the more we did that, rather than listen to someone else, [the more useful]. … There were some great speakers and they were provocative, but it's like they come in and leave. It gives you food for thought, but sort of—like everyone's attending a seminar.*

As several of the comments here suggest, state-local relationships were not prominently featured in the summer curriculum. The summer institutes introduced the four strands of the curriculum outlined above and made frequent references to them. Nevertheless, according to participants, the powerful case studies that focused on district reform efforts combined with other institute content and learning activities offered limited concrete help to state participants about next steps and how to take them. The challenge facing states was exacerbated by their distance from the classrooms where teaching and learning occur. Said one state official who also had experience at the district level:

> *The problem at the state level is that we were really very much removed. At the district level, they can start talking about the instructional core. At the state level, how do you support the instructional core in districts without having it seen as a top-down mandate?*

Summary: Summer Institutes

Summer institutes for the first two participant cohorts followed the basic program plan and included teams from states and districts. Participants' comments, as illustrated here, were generally very positive about the curriculum and pedagogy in the summer institutes. The reservation expressed most often was state agency leaders' view that more could have been done to address state-local relationships more effectively. The program provided a single summer institute for the third cohort, which included SEAs in Illinois and New York and teams from Chicago and New York City. The institute followed the same general format as the other

institutes, but follow-up was limited to ad hoc consulting arrangements negotiated with leaders in the various organizations.

School-Year Activities

ExEL offered three types of activities during the school year: onsite coaching, in-state institutes, and action projects of state-local teams.

Coaching

During the school year, coaches were expected to work with their teams for about 12 days. Although schedules varied, this typically meant interacting with the teams or individual members every four to eight weeks, either in person or by phone. Coaches also helped plan the in-state institutes. Finally, as an ExEL leader explained, the coaches assigned to state departments of education were expected to facilitate networking between these agencies and school districts. Substantively, the coaches were expected to help the teams focus on the PELP framework to guide their learning and to plan and implement reforms. Coaches were also potentially important sources of information about team needs, interests, and priorities that could inform the content and process of the summer institutes. A 2009 progress report summed up the coaches' role in this way:

> *Whether as facilitators of team process, advisor to individuals and teams, teachers of our curriculum or our "eyes and ears" between convenings, our coaches are a critical human capital component of ExEL.*

According to ExEL staff, the initial posting of the announcement for the coaching positions in 2006 drew about 75 applicants. As one leader put it, many of the candidates saw the positions as valuable learning opportunities in their own careers, and they certainly were not attracted by the pay. ExEL sought individuals who (1) were skilled facilitators of group process and collaborative work, (2) had some experience as coaches, and (3) were knowledgeable about K-12 education. Coaches came to their roles from varied backgrounds and with varied skill sets. All had experience in K-12 education, including several who had been superintendents or served in other central office positions, and most had prior experience as consultants or as coaches. With some exceptions, coaches did not have experience or prior working relationships in the districts or state departments in which they worked.

The first group of coaches was selected in late spring 2006, when there was little time for orientation or more extensive preparation prior to the first summer institute. Coaches reported receiving some materials electronically followed by a meeting several days before the first summer institute.

Continuing support for the coaches came through monthly conference calls with ExEL staff in Cambridge. These calls were intended as opportunities for coaches to report on and discuss progress in each of the sites, to review plans for next steps in site activities, and to

engage in joint problem solving. In addition, ExEL brought coaches from the two cohorts together for two-day retreats twice during the program. Coaches and ExEL staff worked together to plan the retreats. According to interviewees, the frequency of these conversations tailed off over the life of the project. Coaches valued these interactions and welcomed the opportunity to learn from their colleagues and to get help in solving problems.

Given the variation in team composition (e.g., membership, changes in leadership and membership, experience, and readiness to engage in reform) and the ambitious and not always well-defined expectations for team activities, coaching was difficult work. Combined with the fact that the coaches brought different skills and viewpoints to their work, these factors resulted in participants having a variety of perspectives on the coaches and the support that they provided.

In one district in which the coach was very highly regarded, several factors contributed to the shared perception of the coach as a valuable resource. Consider the following comments from a school board member who was on the team:

> *[The coach] is one of a kind, brilliant, a visionary and the way he asks thought-provoking questions is wonderful. He is dynamic….The way that we adhere to our strategic plan, ask questions of each other, and follow up. The way that we engage with each other in conversations is an outcome of that work. We are better at communication and reflection.*

Another team member added:

> *[The coach] was the lighthouse—getting us to shore. Sometimes he was the agitator, saying, "you're not really getting the point." He knows the content so well that he could remediate us and hold us accountable.*

In this case, the coach had a long working relationship with district leadership that pre-dated ExEL. This meant that the trust that is a necessary ingredient in any coaching relationship had been established prior to the ExEL work. As one district respondent told us, this "meant that we hit the ground running."

Members of one state team shared many of the same positive assessments of the coaching. A representative of a state education organization commented:

> *I was truly impressed with [the coach's] ability and skills. I managed to make all of the state team meetings but one. [The coach] was good about getting us on track. She would let us wander for awhile and then pull us back in. "This is what we have to be talking about."*

Another team member who worked inside the agency saw the coach as helping focus on partnerships:

> *Having an outside voice always helps. [The coach] always helped to steer us away from trying to fix the agency to working on our partnerships. People seemed to open up to her*

when she put some tough messages on the table. We needed to hear what she was saying about working with people outside the agency.

The comments included here echo comments from many participants. Overall, participants valued the role of coaches as facilitators and welcomed the coaches' efforts to keep the teams focused on key issues and tasks. A district administrator spoke of the value of a coherent document that emerged from intensive work with the coach:

Sometimes it was [the coach] pulling teeth to get people to focus, but through it we developed a one-page visual of our theory of action and challenge areas. So that [now] in talking with the community and schools they know what the priority areas are, and they understand the allocation of resources.

The participants' comments suggest that an important dimension of facilitating meetings was the coaches' role in drawing out differing points of view and helping the teams deal with them in constructive ways. The function was especially important on teams with more diverse membership and on teams that were primarily created for participation in ExEL, where team members had had little experience working together.

Based on interviews with participants and the coaches, the coaches faced several different but related challenges in working with the teams. One was getting off to a productive start in the absence of much information about the program. Two coaches interviewed commented that at the time of the first summer institute, neither their role nor the focus for each site had been fully figured out. As one said:

…they [the Harvard ExEL staff] were operationalizing this in the moment. They didn't have all their ducks in a row. We asked "What is the single vision that we would be helping the district focus on? How would it bring improvement in instructional quality in a large district?" I didn't see evidence that they had thought through how that would happen.

Another challenge was to establish a working relationship with the team, when teams had not sought coaching but instead received it as a condition of participation in ExEL. Coaches had to establish their own role in the groups, especially with state and local superintendents who served as de facto leaders of the teams. And a related challenge was to get the groups to focus on the ExEL agenda. As one coach put it:

No one knew very much about ExEL or the work, but they all wanted to go to Harvard. The work became more clear as they participated in the program.

Not surprisingly, the coaching activities varied across sites as coaches worked to establish their credibility as resources to the teams and, more generally, to districts and state departments of education. Coaches organized and facilitated team meetings, often providing background materials for teams to review. Coaches also worked with individual team members, often the superintendent or chief state school officer, to help address specific problems.

For the third cohort sites, a different coaching model prevailed. Harvard faculty members worked with teams and individual leaders, negotiating the focus and format of their services as it became more apparent that summer institutes were unlikely to be a vehicle for these sites' learning. These faculty members worked in a coaching capacity with state and city leaders on specific topics identified for each meeting. They also brokered other resources, such as a working relationship with a faculty member in another university who could help a state address issues related to English learners. For one state, a joint state-local meeting with 15 participants was held in the state capital in early 2010. However, as the months and years went on after the initial institute in summer 2008, the experience of the third-cohort sites diverged more and more from the experience of all the other sites. The formal ExEL design was essentially supplanted by a more ad hoc and tailored set of interactions. Harvard agreed to extend its engagement with this cohort into 2010-11, providing support to any of the teams at a fee structure comparable to that of the other cohorts. One of the cities requested and received six months of coaching on an instructional strategy for top leadership. One of the states participated in an institute in which a Harvard faculty member coached the Race to the Top planning team on ways of engaging districts.

For many coaches working with the first two cohorts, one-on-one work with superintendents continued through the life of the site's participation in ExEL. In some cases, these interactions focused on planning team activities; in other cases the coach helped the superintendent or chief work through issues or problems. For example, a coach of an SEA team reported working with the chief to develop communication strategies for important and complicated messages to various stakeholders.

In addition to the knowledge and skill of the coaches, the contributions of the coaching function depended on the willingness and capacity of the state and district teams to engage in ExEL activities. In particular, the coaches tried to help teams understand and apply the ExEL messages and framework in the education workplace. When commitment was present on the team, progress was possible. When commitment was combined with capacity more progress was possible. The levels of commitment and capacity varied considerably within and among teams, although few teams ranked high in both areas.

Based on the foregoing discussion it is reasonably clear that the coaches had extensive knowledge of state and local contexts that influenced teams' engagement and progress on program activities. Initial ExEL program plans recognized the potential value of this knowledge in guiding program activities. Interviews with the coaches suggest that early efforts to tap this knowledge did not continue throughout the program and that the program did not take full advantage of potentially important and readily available opportunities to understand and respond to team needs and interests. We return to this point later.

In-State Institutes

For Cohorts 1 and 2, each state had fall and spring in-state institutes, each lasting approximately one and a half days. Offering both presentations and team time, the institutes were hosted in rotation by a district or the state agency. (For the final institutes, held in 2009-

2010 when sites were facing increasing financial constraints, Harvard hosted a Massachusetts session, and a philanthropic partner hosted another state's institute.) Team members often commuted from their homes because of cost or because they could only attend for one day or less. The institute was organized by members of the Harvard staff with some consultation with coaches and the liaisons from participating sites.

In general, although most participants saw at least some value and benefits from the institutes, they were not as enthusiastic about the in-state institutes as they were about the summer institutes at Harvard. Respondents said the quality was not as good, the program was less coherent, and for some it was hard to focus during a shorter meeting closer to home. Some also commented on a lack of connection or coherence from one institute to the next or from the summer institutes to the in-states, and several questioned the usefulness or relevance of the more theoretical, research-based presentations at the institutes.

However, all agreed that the follow up was important. Respondents and observers perceived that institutes offered opportunities to communicate, both within a team and across districts; include individuals who could not attend summer institutes, including principals and in some cases teachers. For example, regarding communication, a state leader commented that the institutes:

> *… have been useful because they are another opportunity to get away and to share with the districts. They have helped the districts not be so siloed, not to be so defensive and feel so vulnerable. I have seen the districts be more willing to talk and to share their problems and concerns. I have enjoyed being with the districts when they report out after the work sessions. Their comments help me a lot to understand their concerns and challenges.*

The opportunity to bring an expanded team was valued, as illustrated in comments from both a state and a district participant:

> *The in-state institutes included more diverse groups. … Teams at these meetings included more principals and teachers, and the discussions became more tangible and practical.*

> *It is not a retreat setting and it is too easy to multi-task. But the advantage is the ability to invite other people, and I wouldn't have it any other way. ISIs are good for follow up, it is cost effective and it engages more people.*

Time with the team, working on specific issues of their district or agency, was especially valued. Several participants commented that the ExEL staff should have allowed more time for team work, rather than filling up so much of the agenda with presentations:

> *They ought to be able to give us 45 minutes of thought provoking presentation– and let us work on it. When we get back to work [at the district], we don't have much time."*

Often, participants who made positive comments mentioned the opportunity to work with other teams from their state, as well as citing the value of continuing engagement with ExEL:

In-states were very helpful. … They always gave prep work with case studies, topics and discussion questions. It was very valuable. It was helpful working with other districts…. We knew each other and had been on the same committees. We have some of the same issues. We came together around these and learned. But we become so busy in our own districts, now that ExEL group is over. Now I asked the group last Friday, how will we sustain this? … Those meetings hold you accountable.

Increasingly over time, site liaisons took advantage of opportunities to be involved in planning in planning the institutes with ExEL staff, seeking a better fit with their own needs and priorities. An ExEL leader described this process as a

…gradual release of responsibility and growing partnership with the sites. By inviting their participation in the planning and ownership of what work needed to be done, Harvard created the conditions for leaders to need to define a customized professional development experience. At the same time, Harvard needed to guide the curriculum based on its commitment to the Foundation to provide a particular set of outcomes.

Some participants reported that there was tension in the interactions around the institute agendas. In the following comments, four participants from three state departments of education offered varying views on how successfully the partnership was negotiated:

State institutes were good because we had some control over them. Harvard had some control too, so there was some bickering. We had to work through with some issues and we were able to request some specifics for the in-state.

I think [the in-state institutes] varied some in impact and usefulness. Some early on were not as meaningful, but we talked with the planners and engaged with them at Harvard about it. They made changes and adaptations in response. I think it was about being responsive to districts. Conference calls with district liaisons helped. They got comfortable with saying what they want.

It was always a little bit of a struggle—whose agenda was it? ExEL's, or the districts' or the state department's? We always had to make a very strong case if we wanted to change things. Harvard felt obligated to train us on these strategies. From their perspective, they might have felt an obligation to do some hard work on their own part, bring in the speakers they were being paid for. But when department or district staff were speaking, the most learning was going on. Not when an expert from Harvard came in.

I was really quite annoyed that this took so much fighting.

Some felt that the institutes gave short shrift to the issue of state-local relationships:

The goal or expectation for the in-state institute was not just to continue from the summer, but also looking at coherence between district and state. Every time we tried to

do that at a state institute, it never met my expectations or team expectations. It always fell flat. The weakest [part] was the district and state networking.

State-Local Team Projects

Another source of potential continuity in the ExEL experience during the school years was a project selected by participants as a way of applying what they were learning. The project was envisioned as a collaborative effort across state and local teams. Participation turned out to be intermittent on the part of some states and districts. At least one state's cross-team working group, however, put in long hours together. By all accounts this group brought passion and determination to finding a way to improve principals' understanding and support for the teaching of English learners. Group members reported that they held one another accountable for attendance and commitment.

The charge given to this working group was also cited by several interviewees as evidence that the district participants had moved into a more active role vis-à-vis the state. When all ExEL participants in the state initially discussed possible topics for joint work, the state team argued for a more broadly defined project on literacy, while the districts favored a focus on a more specific and, to them, more pressing set of issues around English learners. Several state officials mentioned that by agreeing to what the districts wanted, the state was showing a new level of flexibility that could help set a tone for better state-local relations.

Reflecting on the joint work, one state official commented that that it would have been productive to embark on more than one project, to start that work earlier, and to connect it more deeply to the summer and school-year curriculum:

They should have gotten us to identify a couple of initiatives much sooner. …. Because wasn't until the second summer that we did that. We could have come out of the first summer with that in mind and done some work during the first year. …And to have a lot of the trainings and meetings built around supporting that would have been a lot more concrete. They could have focused on using whatever initiatives we were doing as a platform for training, for strategic planning.

In another state, while the state education agency was a less active participant in the cross-team working group, the district-level participants commented that they had benefited from working with each other on issues of improving teaching and learning. They cited specific changes that they were making in their districts, and cited the teamwork as a useful support in this effort.

In still another state, a member of a state team who also managed the state's Wallace grant for education leadership saw a potentially productive connection between the state's involvement in ExEL and a statewide leadership network supported by the other Wallace project. During the state's involvement in ExEL the one-day network meetings, which drew several hundred educators from around the state, were scheduled for the day before the in-state institutes. This team member envisioned the relationship between the two initiatives as follows:

I used the ExEL work as a catalyst for [the network] and to leverage more resources. ... With ExEL we were able to add instruction to the [network's] focus. Having the two meetings together allowed us to bring the Harvard resources to more people. ... I have been pleased about how the two projects have worked together.

These examples illustrate the potential of the projects to build on and deepen the ExEL experience. We note, however, that in some states and for many participants the projects were not particularly salient.

Summary: School-Year Activities

ExEL teams and sometimes other individuals from their sites typically worked with coaches and attended in-state institutes during the school year; some participated in state-local team projects. Experiences with all these school-year activities varied a great deal, but we can generalize across the different experiences and perceptions. For the most part, the coaches were credited with keeping teams on track as meeting facilitators; some also provided valued coaching to individual leaders. In-state institutes garnered less praise than the summer institutes, not only because of their perceived weaker quality but also because participants found it hard to focus while close to home during the school year; however, the continuity that they offered was appreciated. Finally, the state-local team projects potentially forged new, strong working relationships among their participants.

Results: Use of What Was Learned

ExEL focused on four areas: the instructional core; organizational coherence; leadership and teamwork; and state-local relationships. We describe here the extent to which participants reported effects on their practice in each of these areas.

The Instructional Core

A number of respondents spoke of bringing discussions about the instructional core back to their districts or state agencies. For example, one participant talked of "engaging community members" in a discussion of what constitutes high quality instruction. Another spoke of discussions centered on the need "to have a theory of action that is attached to the instructional core. We never talked about those things before [ExEL] provided a common language." Another said that ExEL "forced us .... to come back to talking about the instructional core in different venues."

Some respondents described going beyond discussions to instituting specific practices with the intent of increasing the focus on the instructional core:

We took Elmore—"you recognize good instruction when you see it"—as a guide. Elmore and Tony Wagner have been here to help us with this. We decided we need to construct a

Quality Instruction Rubric. Do you know proficient when you see it? We got 60-70 teachers, reps from the teachers union, nationally certified teachers and those trained by [another] initiative to work on the rubric, as well as administrators.

The whole notion of focus on high quality teaching and learning and coherence across classrooms. …For us that meant looking at how to get consensus on what is high quality teaching and learning here. It was a multi-year effort. We engaged community members to answer what does "high quality" look like, and we began to roll out an instructional framework. It was huge.

I feel like I have grown. We talk about change, instructional practices, ideas that we have learned. … We now have districtwide expectations for all staff, with sections specific to each category, a narrative piece and a rating tool.

The instructional core work has guided this office [of elementary education]. We talk about the instructional core to principals. We do instructional rounds.

There were clear differences across states and districts in the degree to which the conversations about the instructional core permeated entire organizations or were followed by actions that tied the instructional core to a larger strategy for improvement. While a respondent from one district talked about the continued impact of ExEL, another spoke of drifting away from the framework:

It is how we measure what we are doing. This year we are applying it in professional development especially as a project management tool for our instructional coaches. It is also helpful in looking at equity. It fits with how we use the Strategic Plan: You reflect, measure, it continues to influence.

I think one of the things we are <u>not</u> doing is that we got away from the talk about coherence and the PELP framework. We were drifting away from it.

Organizational Coherence

Adopting the PELP "coherence framework" required participants not to adopt elements of the ExEL program piecemeal but rather to adopt a vision and approach. It also meant seeking to implement the framework as a whole to bring about organizational coherence.

Using the language of the coherence framework could be an important first step, demonstrating awareness of the need for organizational coherence and necessary tools for developing that coherence. For example, a district participant described the goal of aligning everything around the instructional core:

It taught us about two things. First, we learned about how organizations and systems work. Second, we looked at what it means to be focused on instruction. All systems in a

district must get in line with the instructional core. We all must use the same vocabulary and strategies to think through a problem. The case study approach helped with this...

The next step, however, is taking these lessons and awareness and applying them systematically back in the district or state agency. There were examples of steps in this direction. In one district, several participants spoke of the centrality of their vision, which they attributed to ExEL. For example:

The theory of change and mission would not have happened without the ExEL work. It is important because it guides our practice and what we focus on. We really look at that when we make decisions.

The same individual talked of the importance of "how to strategically say 'no' as well as 'yes'." Another participant in the district indicated that the framework helped guide her pursuit of grants.

Now I tie together in proposals, first, an alignment with district vision, and second, a theory of change that is aligned with the work and includes a logic model and metrics. I didn't do this five years ago. Then I chased money, but not with this foresight.

In another district, multiple respondents mentioned the adoption of three districtwide goals to drive their work:

The three goals [(1) numeracy and literacy, (2) professional practices for quality instruction, and (3) meaningful activities beyond the classroom] were communicated directly to central office staff and principals and then presented by the superintendent to every school. All activities are related to the goals. ... It led to more focus in the district. It highlighted the value of every area ... Now every child has to be above grade level at every time point. Every staff member is involved. Goal 3 included those who may feel on the outskirts [of the instructional core] such as art and physical education, but they were included. Our whole evaluation system was changed.

And in still another district, staff reported that reorganization followed from the substance of the strategies selected:

We also looked at coherence across the departments and how to create coherence around the instructional focus. We realigned the district around the instructional focus, using the five strategies we selected. The central office was realigned around the five strategies.

However, when participants returned to the district or SEA and tried to implement what they had learned through ExEL, not everyone was on board. They often ran into barriers including push back from those not part of the team that attended ExEL and the pressure of competing demands. Carving out time to apply the ExEL work was often difficult.

Our problem was that when we got back we are so busy doing our work we didn't have time for follow-up.

We run 100 miles an hour, constantly addressing crises. It is hard to get space and time to keep up the work encouraged by ExEL.

Leadership and Teamwork

In the ExEL curriculum, leadership and teamwork were also important elements, encompassing among other ideas the work of Heifetz and others on adaptive and technical change. For many participants the idea of adaptive change was new. Some respondents spoke of using the framework of adaptive versus technical change back in the district or state and pushing for a greater focus on adaptive change. In one district, not only were the principals helped to identify and work on their adaptive challenges, but a transportation department head (who attended the summer institutes) said:

The biggest thing that I brought back is about the technical and adaptive changes. In my world, we make technical changes, but I am working hard to make adaptive changes in my department, to make my staff understand what happens in the classroom.

There were opportunities for developing leadership and teamwork through formal and informal interactions among team members. At Harvard and, to a lesser degree, at the in-state institutes, participating teams had "time away from the stresses of the daily work." This time reportedly helped teams develop cohesion, and a number of participants expressed a desire for more team time.

The real challenge was extending this cohesion beyond the ExEL team, whether to nonparticipants in the same site or across site teams. When asked about diffusion within the state agency, beyond direct participants, a state-level participant's response was a common one:

No, and that is regrettable. There was never really explicit discussion about doing that. We did have updates with the directors of centers, but that was it.

Sites that adopted a special purpose or merged their ExEL team with a related team had success in building on the strengths of teaming that ExEL promoted. For example:

We have ExEL team meetings. The first year we met on definitions of relationships, rigor, and relevance. We did a lot of reading and continuing learning. Year 2 we expanded the group and focused on developing the theory of change and mission. The ExEL team is also [the district leadership team for school improvement]. The scope of ExEL is broader but includes [that team's] functions, such a theory of action and looking at data.

In many cases, the teams were created for the purpose of participating in ExEL, with members having had little or no experience working together. Although the summer institute

agendas included time for team activities, most of these activities were more or less structured as discussions of institute content and the implications for state and local reform. Much less time was devoted to activities focused on team building, according to participants' reports. Many team members welcomed these opportunities to learn together and to get to know other members of the team. At the same time, more attention to team building and team work was needed, especially given the ambitious scope of the reforms envisioned by the program plans and the expectations that teams would select and work on a reform project during their involvement in the program. Absent considerable external guidance and time, it is difficult to imagine these heterogeneous groups coalescing into functioning teams that would tackle issues related to organizational culture, inter-agency collaboration, and that would agree on how best to align state and local policies and practice to support improvement of the instructional core.

Developing teamwork around a specific project was a way participants in one state tried to sustain collaboration and teamwork. Tying the development of leadership and teamwork to a specific project that mattered to participants provided motivation for collaboration and teamwork and allowed them to transfer those skills back to the district and state agency. How successful they were in transferring these lessons to other work is an unanswered question.

> *One aspect of ExEL was to bring together four districts in the state and to collaborate and change the relationships between the districts, among the districts and between the Department of Ed and the districts. Having that narrow focus [on English learners] helped us do that. Before we narrowed down, the group was floundering to really build a network. Having that narrow focus we were able to create a real collaborative relationship. I wish that we had the opportunity to continue in the same frame we have.*

State-District Relationships

In addition to a focus on internal coherence to align support within a district or SEA for the instructional core, ExEL also focused on external coherence through vertical alignment of district and state support of the instructional core. ExEL created an environment in which there were opportunities to develop new relationships between districts and state education agencies. It is clear there were some efforts from all sides—districts, states, and ExEL—to establish new state/district communication patterns and collaboration. However, the evidence is mixed regarding the extent to which these efforts took hold, grew, and contributed to outcomes. Most respondents commented on some improvement of relationships between the state and district. This usually meant better mutual understanding of the conditions each faced and an ability to pick up the phone and make a call. But even this degree of improvement was by no means universal.

> *[There is benefit to] having time away from the stresses of the daily work and it has made a very positive difference in the quality of the department's relationship with the districts. Now we know who to call and they know us*

> *I think that of the three prongs of personal leadership, coherence, and vertical alignment,*

the vertical alignment really didn't work. Every time we tried to work on it, people left angry and not fulfilled. I am easygoing, but I started saying, "this is ridiculous." I'm not placing blame, but trying to do all three is too much. Maybe the vertical alignment is a separate topic in itself. Or maybe you must do the first two and then focus on vertical alignment. The first two succeeded to a great extent, and the third failed to the same extent.

Often the state-district relationship prior to ExEL drove improvement, or lack of improvement, in the state-district relationship after ExEL. States and districts that started with an unproductive relationship often made little progress as a result of participation in ExEL, while those starting with a firmer foundation made more progress as a result of participation in ExEL. A state-level participant from outside the state education agency described the predicament of trying to improve a poor relationship:

Ideally, we had an opportunity to drive an important statewide initiative. We were set up for success [by ExEL], but an external group couldn't make it happen. The agency couldn't make the shift from compliance and monitoring to the instructional core.

Similarly, a district participant said that in their state, "a district had to wonder if it was important to the state."

On the other hand, for a state agency with top-level commitment to an improved relationship, the ExEL agenda was said to make a difference in the results. A coach working in that state commented:

It was helpful for the department to have to highlight a goal in the first summer. The goal was: districts have to see us as more collaborative, supportive, involved; not "doing to them" but "working with them."... That affected what they did with the four districts, across the department, and with other districts.

Leaders in this state chose to take action on what they heard from districts at the first summer institute, according to a department official:

The tension, hostility in the room was enormous at the first institute, and the first and critical decision the department made was that after they heard really hostile things, people came back, and [a leader] said, "We may not like it, but that's what people perceive, and we need to figure out how to handle this [relationship] differently."

Summary: Results

The importance of the instructional core became more salient to most participants, and in some cases the teams made practical changes in their sites reflecting their deepened focus on the core. We also found instances of teams deliberately addressing organizational coherence in their sites. New visions for leadership, adaptive change, and teamwork appeared more difficult to apply, chiefly because the teams participating in ExEL usually were not composed of people

who worked together *as* teams on a regular basis. Finally, the program's reported effects on state-district relationships were less than hoped for, given the intractability of the problems in this area. The results in all of these areas depended a great deal on local and state contexts, including capacity, however. We turn next to our findings on that point.

Contexts for Use of What Was Learned

Clearly, the results of ExEL varied greatly in type and extent across sites. Context mattered. Important dimensions of the local or state context included the vision and purpose that leaders brought to their participation, team membership and the interactions with those who were not on the team, organizational capacity and culture, and staffing transitions.

Vision and Purpose

Some states and districts joined the program ready to apply what they learned. As just discussed, when a state articulated a high-level commitment to improving its working relationship with districts, its chances of doing so through ExEL were bolstered, although success was far from certain.

Some respondents described their organizations as particularly open to a focus on the instructional core at the outset of ExEL involvement. In one district, several respondents including the superintendent said that the district already had policies emphasizing the instructional core prior to ExEL, and an existing strategic plan could frame what the team learned and did. District leaders described the context and the results:

> *The strategic plan happened before ExEL – core standards, common measures and assessments. The strategic plan is the work of the district. That came from listening sessions with principals. ExEL helped us conceptualize, strengthen, understand the why not just the how. ExEL accelerated it and strengthened the strategic plan.*

> *[A focus on the instructional core] affects everything we do as we are finalizing what we do believe are core standards and how professional development should be carried out. It affects the budget, decisions and policies on use of time, our commitment to instructional coaches, rigor and content alignment. It permeates the organization.*

The superintendent from the same district noted that ExEL was implemented among other improvement approaches and not in isolation:

> *We got the whole staff, [hundreds of] employees, focusing on the system and how it affects student achievement. Even our classified staff focus on student achievement.*

In another district, an incoming superintendent saw an opportunity in ExEL to sharpen the focus on priorities. Indeed, through ExEL, the district formally narrowed its efforts toward three formal goals, increased strategies for using data, and developed a rubric that was later

adopted for a teacher evaluation tool. The superintendent explained that before the first summer institute:

> *There was a sense that the things we were doing that were good were too broad, too theoretical.... My goal going into the summer was to streamline everything, to simplify the focus.*

Team Composition

Participants often found that the membership of their team made a difference in implementation, whether in a positive or negative way. On the positive side, a team that included a range of managers from inside the agency could advance the likelihood of putting the ExEL lessons to work in agency operations, and one that included outside stakeholders could help build needed support for these changes. On the negative side, the absence of members of either type could hurt, and with limited team membership available, there was a zero-sum game between the two. This was the reason that one district, while recruiting diverse players from outside the central office, also targeted diverse players from within the district and swelled the implementation team to more than 20 members for ongoing local meetings.

In a district whose leaders reported noteworthy engagement and growth with ExEL, the chief financial officer was puzzled by his inclusion in the team, but later realized "how brilliant [the superintendent's] selection was." Another unit leader in the district explained:

> *Because [the finance officer] was on the team, our whole budget development process last year and even more this year was really aligned with the goal of improving student achievement. He gained a deeper understanding of his role in working with us.*

In another district, a respondent valued having a union representative on the team, since he gave feedback on how to get buy-in and where there would be pushback. Teams seldom included rank-and-file teachers, which one teacher described as a weakness in the design:

> *I was the only one saying, "How will we get this stuff into the classroom?" Everyone says they are a teacher at heart or was a teacher, but it is hard to see the operational realities of getting change into the classroom if you don't have a teaching load… And this isn't just about teachers getting a fair shake; [teachers] have understandings of what is a quality teacher in context.*

Approaches to Communicating with Others in the Agency

Bringing non-members of the ExEL team into the process of implementation often posed challenges. Colleagues might react negatively to the very mention of "Harvard," thinking that team members were using it to assert superiority. As a state staff member said:

There was jealousy: we had to quit calling any of this "Harvard" or "ExEL." That was turning people off if you mentioned it.

Although this participant described a difficult process of trying to bring multiple agency offices on board with the ExEL vision of supporting the instructional core, there were reportedly some lasting results:

We had meetings, talked with each other, and some of that has remained. What was probably the strongest thing that came out: the state department realized that no longer could the different offices work independently [if we were going to] serve districts in way we needed to. There are still issues about what the state role really is, but we did open lines of communication, and added folks from other departments to planning teams. We have made great strides, and it wasn't happening at the state level before ExEL.

More fundamentally, structuring a process of learning within the agency was a formidable challenge for which few teams were prepared. A member of a state team described an inadequate approach:

One of the worst things that can happen is for top management to go away to get some new knowledge and to come back and apply it without other people knowing about it. We said why not bring all of the agency staff together to learn what we learned and to share our new theory of action. [There was] a day-long agency wide meeting. It seemed to go well, but it was only one day and then it was over.

Engagement of Outside Stakeholders

Several sites found that including external members on the team improved the ExEL effort and promoted support from key constituencies. One superintendent said that building a broad-based group was intentional from the beginning:

We had a theory of action—bring in people from the community, other stakeholders, and they energize.

At the same district, a leader emphasized the benefits of having different participants and working through their differences to arrive at a common vision:

ExEL is a shared experience, which is ideal. We have to share with others that don't necessarily share our perspective, in order to move forward with our mission. … For example, the Chamber [of Commerce] and union person have a lot of reason not to see eye to eye. Having [the Chamber representative] see what the union president struggles with … was monumental, because he can be a thought leader with his group, like supporting a bond issue. [Passing our bond issue] took huge efforts on the part of the Chamber and everyone else.

In another district, including a board member on the team meant that the district leaders had an advocate on the board when an influx of new board members wanted to review district policy:

> *We have made decisions about instruction through the mission and vision statement, and so the superintendent wanted to bring the board into the formal ExEL process. The first step is to engage them all in discussion about this work, so we recently did a Powerpoint for them. [Our board representative from the team] did some presenting and took questions.*

On the other hand, some state and district leaders regretted that they had included external participants on their ExEL team, feeling that in so doing they made it impossible to bring together a critical mass of agency staff. In one district, for example, while the superintendent continued to believe that the choice to include a range of community members had been the right one, this choice created some opposition to the ExEL ideas among district staff who felt they had been passed over for team membership.

In one state, a deputy superintendent wondered if the inclusion of members from outside the department hindered her team's work, which respondents said had produced limited outcomes. Team members agreed that there was a lack of team cohesion, especially early on, and this respondent suggested that having a diverse team representing many organizations was not worthwhile in this case:

> *We did not have the right people….Some of the choices were for political reasons. Part of what I struggled with was throughout the three years [of our participation in ExEL]was our team. Each district had a team clearly focused on work of the district. But we did not have majority of SEA staff, as some members were not from the department. So we became a "state" team, and members had difficulty seeing their niche on the team. … We had a few from inside and more from outside. … There were not enough people to focus on inside work.*

In another state, similarly, two external members of the team commented on the lack of commitment from middle managers in the state agency who were not on the ExEL team.

Capacity and Culture

Group dynamics and conflicting interests could derail ExEL efforts, as in the following case at the state level, where work began without a coach initially:

> *It is a wrong assumption that you can put well meaning intellectual people in a room with a problem to solve and you don't need to do anything else. That can create a second problem, a relationship and communication problem. Good intentioned and smart is one thing, but you need team building. I suggested that when they put us in teams, have a facilitator for team building—and you need to look at potential conflicts and interests. They assumed we would automatically coalesce around teaching and learning. There were growing pains.*

The need for more team building in ExEL was echoed in a district that did have coaching, and where respondents ultimately could point to positive outcomes from their group work. One respondent who believed ExEL provided team building assistance, suggested "Harvard should do more and do it earlier," describing the team's early interactions after the summer institute:

> *The first year, early on, we sat downstairs in the board room and talked about issues. The superintendent asked a direct question and everyone else was silent. So the relationships among members took time and facilitation. It is more team deconstructing, than team building—deconstructing the perceived conflicts of interests and roles. We had a central office team, and it is easier for them to work together. Then introduce externals like me, and that throws their work off. But it is necessary for real change.*

State education agencies have traditionally focused on monitoring compliance, which can run counter to helping districts focus on the instructional core. The state agencies that were heavily compliance oriented, or were perceived to be so by districts, had an uphill battle. One state participant clearly described this challenge and the suspicions that remained among districts in the state:

> *[ExEL] made clear the schizophrenic role of the state. We ensure compliance, yet want to be partners. We enforce No Child Left Behind. So we tried to not allow the compliance role to fracture partnership. But you could hear [the districts thinking], "See, I knew nothing changed."*

Leadership and Staff Transitions

Leader turnover disrupted implementation in some sites. For the third cohort, where high-level work between the state agency and the state's largest district was the intended focus, the departure of one of these two leaders in each state derailed progress. In the first two cohorts, two of the four state agencies experienced changes in leadership during the period of their involvement in ExEL, and all four experienced significant staff transitions. A staff member from a state education agency that experienced a change in leadership described the impact as follows:

> *When we hit rough spots the first year, … [the former chief], who is a great facilitator, could get hold of the whole team and keep us moving forward and found common ground. When we lost [the chief], we lost that, and also the collective vision of where this work was supposed to go. We kind of lost control of the work at that point.*

Another example of serious disruption was found in a district whose superintendent left just as ExEL was to begin. Following the superintendent's departure, other district administrators also left, with the result that the ExEL team was made up of members who were new to the district or to their positions. Although the turnover might have been an opportunity for new district leaders to embrace ExEL as a vehicle for their vision, this did not happen, as there were too many challenges in building a unified management team, reorganizing the district, and acclimating new staff to their jobs.

On the other hand, while turnover might impede implementation in a district, this did not mean that implementation would have gone smoothly had the existing leadership continued in office. For example, in another district a team member described a change in superintendents between the first and second year of ExEL, yet pointed out that the work was already faltering under the first superintendent. In another site, a state team member pointed out that turnover is a natural part of any organization. Rather than blame turnover for problems that the state team experienced, this individual pointed to other issues that could have been more controllable, such as those related to team leadership, communication, and strategy.

Indeed, there were instances of ExEL providing a source of stability in times of transition. In one district, for example, the cohesive vision of instruction nurtured by ExEL smoothed the path through major leadership transitions and helped the district sustain momentum. Two managers in this district explained:

> *[It] keeps your boat afloat through the transitions. ExEL is a way for [the new superintendent] and [the new chief academic officer] to come in and quickly get a global focus of upper management. It has helped them quickly grasp the highest priorities."*

> *We shared the definition of high quality teaching and learning before [the new superintendent] came….What also was helpful was that we had our one-page visual so she didn't have to come in and say "we're going to do something new" because then we would have lost momentum with our teachers, principals or community. It had already been talked about at a number of different forums and it was in a tool, so it was easy for her to say "you've already done this work, you have this, so we're going to continue on with it." It's positioned us to move forward.*

In the state where a team member said the loss of the chief caused the team to lose its "collective vision," the same team member nevertheless said emphatically that ExEL helped sustain important work during a period of transition:

> *If it had not been for the ExEL project during this time of transition, I can't even imagine where this state would be as far as education. ExEL was at least some kind of glue around us to keep us going forward.*

Summary: Contexts for Use of What Was Learned

Several contextual features of the state and local sites came up repeatedly when participants told us why their sites had or had not realized particular types of results from ExEL. Where a site had a prior commitment to making the types of changes that ExEL sought to support, or where a leader strongly embraced the vision, more change was likely to happen. The composition of the ExEL team sometimes was said to matter, although we found no consistent pattern indicating that the inclusion (or exclusion) of particular types of members made a positive or negative difference across sites. What did come up more consistently was the difficulty of engaging those agency staff members who were not on the ExEL team in learning ExEL's lessons and implementing changes. Leadership transitions, too, could derail progress or

(less often) could facilitate it. All in all, the substantial—but varying—effects of context on results help to highlight the difficulty of working with leadership teams to begin to make a difference in organizational functioning and, still more challenging, in state-district relationships.

What the University Learned

The lasting legacy of ExEL at Harvard, according to program leaders, was that it paved the way for development of a new Ed.L.D. degree in education leadership. The new program, which admitted its first class for fall 2010 after 18 months of planning, is a joint effort of the same three schools that collaborated on ExEL—the schools of education and business and the Kennedy School. It seeks to forge direct connections between leadership theory and practice, with key elements that were also found in the ExEL framework, such as a focus on supporting the instructional core. In developing the new program, Harvard drew directly on the ExEL faculty and staff from the different schools, and incorporated themes developed in ExEL. Thus, while the ExEL model of working with teams of senior leaders from states and districts over time has not been sustained, Harvard program leaders would contend that the new program builds on some of the practical and philosophical dimensions of ExEL.

When they were first planning ExEL, program leaders at Harvard saw it as an opportunity to extend and build upon the PELP model. In particular, they wanted to maintain the notion of interdisciplinary collaboration between the schools of education and business, while adding an increased focus on public policy and, importantly, lengthening the program far beyond PELP's one-week duration. One observed: "Working with people over time was different [from the usual practice in executive education,] and it was interesting to faculty." This program leader added that in ExEL the faculty

> *…had to work together, understand each other's material, and grow and learn. With the way ExEL was accountable to groups over time, [the faculty] had to have an integrated answer.*

Interviewees at the university had different opinions on the extent to which ExEL summer institutes differed from what they termed "the parade of talking heads" that is typical in executive education. Most said that ExEL faculty listened to each other to an unusual degree. All said that more time for collaborative planning would have helped them develop more coherence for the first institute, and some said that by the second summer their continuing efforts had paid off the in the development of a clearer "storyline" across sessions in the institute. Moreover, the faculty members who had been least willing to work with others were not invited to participate in the new Ed.L.D. program. As one interviewee described it: "If you can only teach your own thing, sorry, we can't work with you."

ExEL program leaders were proud of the thematic foci that they brought to executive leadership education. They believed that their focus on the instructional core was memorable, as our interviews with participants generally corroborated. As one said:

The big message people associate with us is: we're the people who talk relentlessly about instruction, and no matter what your role is in the organization, it's important to develop a shared conception of what good instruction looks like, and get that widely shared, and then use it to drive down to the classroom level.

Another agreed, and further observed that ExEL was also distinctive in challenging participants to do the hard work of determining how to reshape their own work:

It's not about Harvard saying, "Do it this way, and here are the six steps." We don't have six steps. … [But it's hard] to sell a theoretical approach that says we're going to work with you and coach you and customize it, [because people say,] "What? You're going to sign me up for something you don't have the answers to?"

Having engaged a top-flight group of faculty members in ExEL, program leaders found that delivering the content that the faculty wanted to deliver generally took precedence over tailoring the program to the purposes of participating sites. They expressed regret that in the rush of site selection there had not been enough time to follow the PELP practice of more thoroughly familiarizing the sites with the program purposes, and gathering more in-depth information about the districts' issues. But one of the leaders was critical of the group's approach, commenting that their planning had given too little attention to the participants' perspectives and situations:

There was never a conversation about what do these people really need to know, and what are the experiences we need to give them. It was more: " we have these things we want to tell them."

This is a view of ExEL that many participants shared, according to our interviewees, several of whom noted that they felt overloaded with content and had too little skilled guidance in applying the material to their own contexts.

Some program leaders also concurred with the participants' assessment that more attention could and should have been given to team building. One said candidly:

One of the lessons is that we probably need some more upfront team building stuff. We need to help teams learn how to manage and work through the change process, and we need to help them apply what they learn.

Coaches were the linchpin of the program's support for team building and for the application of what teams learned. A program leader spoke highly of their contribution:

The good coaches were the reason why there is knowledge [remaining at the sites]…. To customize, stay with it, keep going back, ask about relationships, keep the operations person in the conversation, they were the best investment.

Many coaches commented in our interviews that they were underused, however. They felt their time commitment was too limited to permit them to do more than basic process facilitation,

although many believed they were well qualified to do much more in the sites. As we have noted above, they also felt that they could have contributed much more to ExEL's program planning, given their knowledge of the sites.

A program leader observed that although there was frequent communication with the sites during each year, the mechanisms were awkward. Each site team included a liaison who spoke for his or her team in regular phone meetings, but this liaison was seldom the superintendent or deputy, and he or she did not necessarily have a clear overview of district issues and needs. Coaches might have helped identify these issues and needs, but they had little chance to do so.

Harvard program leaders also commented on the challenge of the transiency of district and state leadership. Looking on the bright side, one said that working with teams could at least "minimize the washing away of whatever learning there is," despite the turnover in individual leaders. But this person acknowledged that "you can't predict from meeting to meeting who's going to be on the team" in ExEL, given the amount of turnover. Another interviewee said that Harvard could have insisted on more stability, commenting that ExEL allowed sites to send different individuals to different events when the original participants were still on board. Still another said that more could have been done to address leadership transitions, perhaps by building in a special session for new superintendents at the beginning of each summer institute.

Finally, none of the program leaders expressed real satisfaction with the progress made on state-local relationships, although they noted some positive trends such as a diminution in "finger-pointing" and greater engagement in joint work in some states. One acknowledged that site-level work had taken priority over cross-site work in ExEL. All pointed to the deeply entrenched habits of thinking and working that impede more trust and respect across levels.

Summary: What the University Learned

For Harvard, a notable and positive result of the ExEL experience was scaffolding for a new degree program in education leadership, which would build on cross-school and faculty partnerships within the university. Program leaders felt that ExEL had improved upon traditional executive education and had successfully incorporated a central focus on the instructional core. To some extent, they acknowledged that the program's tailoring to site conditions and purposes could have been stronger—a point heartily echoed by many participants whom we interviewed. Program leaders expressed few regrets over the coaching component of the program, although several coaches felt that they could have been allowed to contribute more. Finally, program leaders recognized that their successes with regard to the state-district relationship were limited, but they felt that the program had made some inroads on the longstanding and serious issues in this area.

Conclusions: ExEL

The ExEL curriculum, assembled rapidly in the first six months of 2007, was notable for the coherence of its conceptual framework. Participants took away a set of basic understandings and lenses that they might apply in their work. The summer institutes conveyed the curriculum in a more polished and consistent way than did the in-state institutes, according to participants, but for some participants the cross-site projects within states were valuable learning opportunities.

The inclusion of coaching in the program model was generally viewed as a strength of ExEL. While coaches' work might have been more tightly integrated into the program and coaches' observations might have more systematically informed program leaders, participants in several sites pointed to their coach's key role in engaging the team in potentially productive improvement efforts.

Trying to address multiple purposes with the program's structure of participating teams posed persistent challenges for ExEL. Recruitment was difficult given limited time and the requirement that teams pay for participation. Team membership varied tremendously across sites, with some teams largely comprising agency officials and others including a range of outside stakeholders. Bridging the different perspectives was hard work for the teams and their coaches. Turnover was high, not only in agency leadership but also in team composition, from meeting to meeting, and the fluidity of participation impeded a sustained focus on coherent improvement efforts.

The teams' application of what they had learned depended in part on their clarity of vision: some teams learned how to frame a theory of change and how to act on it. But translating the team's shared language and understandings into a broadly shared purpose for a whole district or state department was a formidable challenge that few sites could meet.

Improvement in state-local relationships was the most difficult program goal to attain. The organizational cultures and interorganizational interactions already in place would have been hard to change even for teams ideally positioned—with stable leadership and broad buy-in—to try to change them. Some state participants pointed to modest improvements; others shared the view of most local team members that the problems in the state-local relationship remained deeply entrenched.

In summary, ExEL opened participants' eyes to ways of thinking about educational improvement that most found stimulating and many found useful. The serious application of the new ideas in busy, high-stress environments was more the exception than the rule, however.

University of Virginia Executive Leadership Program for Educators

Program Design

The Executive Leadership Program for Educators (ELPE) at the University of Virginia underwent changes in leadership and focus over the years, but its core commitment to enlisting business know-how in the improvement of education leadership and management remained a constant.

Program Leadership and Faculty

The Wallace-supported program was housed in the Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE), a joint enterprise of the Darden School of Business and the Curry School of Education. Begun in 2002, the partnership initially provided executive training to educators from school systems in Broward County and Palm Beach County, Florida. With funds from the Commonwealth of Virginia and later from Microsoft, it created the Virginia School Turnaround Specialist Program. Funds from Phillip Morris, USA, also supported a PLE executive leadership program for school officials and board members in the Richmond, Virginia, Public Schools.

Faculty and staff from the schools of business and education shared leadership and program implementation responsibilities in the early phase of the Wallace-supported ELPE. The program underwent leadership shifts, however. In first year of operation, the key leaders were veteran administrators from two large school districts in the region: John English from Fairfax County, Virginia, and James Pughsley from Charlotte-Mecklenburg, North Carolina. Each brought practical experience and convictions related to effective district administration. The program was disrupted when Pughsley left for other opportunities in 2007 and English died in fall 2008. After PLE leaders held the program together for an interim period a new program director, Eleanor Smalley, joined PLE in spring 2009. Smalley was also an experienced district administrator, having recently served as superintendent in Clarke County, Virginia. She left for a new position outside the university in 2010, after the formal program offerings had been completed.

In the first-year summer institute in 2006, presentation responsibilities were divided among the two partner graduate programs and several consultants. By the final summer, the summer program consisted of Darden case presentations plus some presentations by consultants and participating teams. Two Curry faculty members made presentations at mid-year retreats in the final year, and another completed a volume profiling the leadership challenges faced by individual state and local leaders who had participated in ELPE, but the Curry presence in the program had greatly diminished.

Curriculum

Starting from an overarching notion of bringing tools of business into the practice of education leadership and management, the program offered presentations by Darden faculty and outside consultants. The curriculum increasingly focused on two specific tools, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) and the Project Management Oversight (PMO) process, especially the Project Management Oversight Committee (PMOC). The Balanced Scorecard, as presented in ELPE, provided a comprehensive framework to help districts set goals, identify strategies for meeting the goals, monitor progress, allocate resources, and report to stakeholders. For participants, a selling point of the BSC was its utility in an impressive turnaround effort undertaken by the Richmond Public Schools. The PMOC was introduced to provide a process and strategies for districts and state departments of education to use in monitoring and reporting progress on their various improvement projects included under their BSC. Together, these tools introduced a data-based system of accountability for achieving state and district goals which would engage substantial numbers of leaders and key staff in defining, overseeing, and managing various improvement efforts. Learning how to apply these tools and strategies became a major part of the curriculum, delivered chiefly through onsite consulting during the school year. In addition, the tools were viewed as a comprehensive alternative to traditional state and district planning efforts.

Increasingly, the curriculum offered in the summer institutes relied on the repertoires of the Darden faculty who were engaged to participate. As they did for groups ranging from business students to corporate leaders, faculty members offered case-method lessons on such topics as team dynamics, human resource management, and communication with stakeholders. Most of the cases came from the private sector or from public-sector domains other than education (e.g., parks and recreation or fire departments). Despite the potential substantive connections between the Darden instruction and the technical assistance around the application and use of BSC and PMOC, these connections were rarely if ever explicitly addressed in formal ELPE sessions.

In mid-year retreats, which were one- or two-day sessions conducted in the participating states, faculty from Darden and Curry offered presentations, and state and district teams made presentations on their work.

Pedagogy: Summer and School Year

Different instructional approaches were used by the Darden faculty, who relied chiefly on the case method, and the Curry faculty, who preferred a lecture approach. Consultants made presentations in each year, especially in the early years. Leaders from participating states and districts also offered presentations in the summer institutes, sometimes in person and sometimes by video. Small-group team sessions, generally conducted without facilitators, were intended to give the teams opportunities to apply their learning to their own issues.

As the use of the BSC and PMOC became increasingly prominent in the ELPE curriculum, consulting help from the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology (CELT)

took on corresponding prominence in the program. Through technical assistance and consulting, the CELT staff worked individually with districts and states that were interested in learning about or applying one or both of these tools. They provided feedback, tailored assistance, and troubleshooting for ongoing work. They also facilitated some sharing of artifacts, especially samples of BSCs and project charters used by the PMOCs, among the sites.

Districts also received onsite "instructional reviews" from another team of consultants. For the review, the district assembled a good deal of information about the education program and its results; the consultants examined this material, conducted onsite interviews, and produced a written report on strengths and weaknesses, with recommendations.

How the Program Design Evolved

The program's two longest-tenured leaders, English and Smalley, each modified the program offerings in response to emerging difficulties and opportunities. The initial expectations were that teams would leave their first summer institute with "90-day action plans" and that soon afterward, instructional reviews would, in effect, provide diagnostic help as districts identified projects and problems to address. An early program design summary described the ELPE approach as follows:

> *The focus is on aligned governance and leadership using case studies and current literature on business and best practices. Development and implementation of the Balanced Scorecard with Project Management Oversight is taught and subsequently used to monitor and report results over several years. Each team commits to a 90 Day Next Steps action plan and commits to an instate midyear progress review. Technical assistance is provided to create a unique Strategic Plan management system for each state department and district. The majority of the goals and measures for the Strategic Plan and Scorecard are determined by the third-party instructional review conducted in each school district.*

The teams rebelled, however, calling the pace and demands of this design infeasible in view of their existing workloads. English responded by providing more support from experts, enlarging the roles of CELT and other consultants. This brought a concomitant increase in emphasis on the CELT tools, especially the PMOC process. There was less attention to the 90-day plans, and the instructional reviews were scaled back from the original model used by the Council of Great City Schools, an early partner in the program. Instructional reviews were conducted in the 16 districts that were willing to participate in the process when it was made available to them.

Over time, the sites focused more on their progress on developing BSCs and PMOCs. Technical assistance and reporting addressed the process side of the work—learning to use the management tools—more than results.

Subsequently, as Smalley spent time visiting and listening to the sites, she offered and negotiated increasingly tailored assistance offerings. Consulting on program management,

constituent communications, team building, and other topics continued as requested by sites. Much of the summer programming was turned over to members of the Darden faculty who had a well-honed repertoire of general-purpose executive education. Smalley also emphasized assistance for districts in raising educators' expectations for students. She enlisted members of the Curry faculty and others, such as participants in the PLE school turnaround program and other practitioners with whom she had worked, to help her provide this assistance.

Overall, the ELPE program served three cohorts of states and districts. Participants included eight- or nine- person teams from state departments of education in Delaware, Indiana, Georgia, New Mexico, Louisiana, and Virginia, and a total of 27 districts in those states. Not all teams participated in all of the program activities.

Summary: Program Design

The ELPE curriculum and pedagogy built on the existing repertoires of the PLE (formally constituted as a partnership between the schools of business and education) and the business faculty who routinely offered executive education for groups of participants from many sectors at many different levels of seniority. The program's substantive connection to the Curry School of Education was never particularly strong, and it lessened over time. Consultants from the Center for Educational Leadership and Technology played a major role in working with participating sites on implementing some version of a BSC or PMOC, although the work of these consultants was never aligned with other elements of the program.

Participant Selection and Expectations

The process of selecting states, districts, and individual team members for participation in ELPE was similar to the process for ExEL. Here again, The Wallace Foundation played an active role, and here again most individual participants arrived on campus with little idea of the program's specific goals or expectations. We illustrate our findings in this and subsequent sections with quotations and examples drawn from our interviews; these quotations and examples reflect perceptions and experiences that we found to be typical of multiple sites.

Selection of States with The Wallace Foundation

For ELPE, Wallace Foundation program officers focused on their grantee states that might have a particular affinity for the data-based tools that were featured in the program design, especially the BSC. According to Wallace interviewees, one state was already "down the path with the BSC"; another was "at the front end of discussions of something that sounded like a BSC"; another "had done work around the use of data [and] had their own system, a data management system for tracking progress against measures." Each of these states appeared to be a good candidate for participation in this program.

It was not immediately obvious to chief state school officers that this was an opportunity they wanted to seize. Foundation officials had to engage in at least some persuasion in every case. For one state in particular, an individual familiar with these conversations described them as "arm twisting" and observed that this impeded the working relationship between the university and the state. Moreover, in two states where Wallace was funding agencies other than the state education agency to spearhead leadership work in the state, those grantees were particularly skeptical of the potential value of the program, and did little to encourage the state education agency or districts to participate. An observer commented that these grantees "were seen as obstacles to making [ELPE] successful." In retrospect, according to an ELPE leader, the challenges of recruitment should have been addressed through more discussion between the university and the states:

> *If we had maybe done some upfront work, had different conversations with them, or decided not to work with them if they were really dead set against it, it might have been better.*

Selection of Districts

The original University of Virginia proposal was silent on criteria for selecting the participating districts; indeed, it implied that The Wallace Foundation would specify the participants. As the flagship institution in the Commonwealth of Virginia, the university did argue for the inclusion of Virginia in the program, and the foundation agreed to this. Otherwise, we did not find evidence that the university played a very active role in selection, although it is possible that if we had interviewed John English on this point, he might have provided such evidence. The Wallace Foundation identified several districts whose participation it wanted to secure, especially districts that were Wallace grantees or were the largest districts in their states. Chief state school officers in several states made choices about district participation. One state's largest district declined to participate, but in the other five cases the largest district agreed. An official of a large district described a reluctant agreement to participate, at the behest of the chief state school officer:

> *The timing was very challenging for us… Almost no one felt they could do it. … But we had to go because [the chief state school officer] wanted to send a team from [this district]*.

In another state, the chief state school officer carefully selected a range of districts for participation, attending to the mix of counties, of district types (including a vocational-technical district), and urbanicity. The chief also commented in an interview that personal characteristics of the participants were part of the selection process:

> *I deliberately took people from districts who I thought would invest the time seriously and had a good sense of the importance of organizational growth.*

Choices Made in Team Composition

A feature of the university's original proposal was its emphasis on the inclusion of school board members in the site teams attending the summer institute. The idea was that the program would help bring together governance and management around shared aims. In the first cohort, both states adhered to this plan and brought state board members. One of these state teams consisted of "all ten members of the agency's executive management team and two members of the state board of education," according to an interviewee. For the other state team, the chief tried to identify top staff members who were likely to remain with the department for several years.

In the third cohort, state teams no longer included board members. However, most of the local teams continued to do so. All the local teams included people outside the district administration; several included principals; and some reached into the community at large. At the narrow end of the continuum of team membership was the team selected by a new superintendent, who chose to bring only top central-office leaders and one board member for a particular reason:

> *I was a new superintendent and wanted to solidify my executive team, and this seemed like a good opportunity to work on that.*

More commonly, the teams were a mix of central office staff, principals, and key local stakeholders. A typical comment from a superintendent about the rationale for this mix was the following:

> *The team was composed of staff from central office (the superintendent, assistant superintendents in charge of both academic and administrative services), three principals, a school board member and the union president. It was a good mix because when they had team time at the summer institute, there could be more alignment, and more opportunity to know if something could work. For example, when principals talked about wanting to change the math curriculum because math achievement was very low and they didn't think the existing materials were adequate, the district leaders responded that they were not able to do that because of contracts with vendors and funding. Similarly, if a change in policy or practice was proposed, the school board representative could say that he thought the board would support that.*

Some community stakeholders on the teams spoke highly of the design that brought them to the table. A municipal official said this made sense in terms of the local power structure:

> *I think that it was strength to have non-school district persons on the summer teams. Unlike many others, our school district mirrors local government and city boundaries. At one time the local government used to appoint the school board. So we act as partners with the school system… There is integration between the school and local government…*

Not all team members from outside the central office saw the benefit of their participation, however, either because the program did not address their purposes or because they were disappointed in what they saw of the local follow up:

> *The superintendent asked me to attend. There were not a lot of principals in attendance. I expected that the program would be related to program evaluation…I see the benefits of the initiative for executive leadership, but not necessarily for building heads. I don't think that the information presented was especially applicable at the school level.*

> *Two people declined to return this summer. One was our foundation member. He started with the original team, but he didn't see the value…he explained that it was good information, but pointed out that the team never met to debrief, and he felt that the group didn't move forward.*

Participants' Understanding of the Program Purpose

Both state and local team members most often spoke in generalities about their initial understanding of the program. Two superintendents' comments were typical of the vaguely positive expectations, based solely on institutional reputation, that prevailed:

> *The goal of the initiative was unclear at first, but knowing The Wallace Foundation, knowing the University of Virginia. I knew that the Curry and Darden schools would be involved…obviously I knew that there would be some relatively high return on the investment…*

> *We didn't know anything when we first heard about it. I went online and checked out the UVA program and thought that the leadership training work looked very good and it certainly was something that we were working on. We hoped that we might learn some things that would help us with our leadership development work.*

Some participants focused on the idea of bringing business approaches to education and looked forward particularly to the involvement of Darden, which they expected would lift the program out of a narrow mindset:

> *It was my understanding that they were going to bring business models to help improve education outcomes. I expected that there would be a merging of insights from the Education and Business schools at UVA to bring business thinking into the education arena.*

> *I have always been interested in what we can learn from business and non-profits not in education… I wanted to know how we can improve in education by applying business practices… In education we need to be held accountable…we need to see students as customers and clients, and to understand that we need to meet their needs as consumers of our education services…. I wanted to learn what were best practices, not clouded by the education lens.*

The participants who were most likely to have more information about the program before attending the first summer institute were the superintendents and their deputies. The following comments, referring specifically to a focus on project management and planning, came from this group:

> *I decided to participate because [the program director] explained the program, and extended an invitation. At the initial meeting, he talked about project management and project ownership. At the time, we were getting ready for an efficiency review, we were also about to start a number of large projects, and were focused on rebuilding. All of these seemed to align with the program objectives. Also, I thought that it would be a good opportunity to team build.*

> *A few years ago we had put together a strategic plan but hadn't operationalized the plan… The whole notion of project management approach was appealing to us.*

By contrast, the team members from outside the central office typically described an especially unclear notion of what they were signing up for:

> *I was told that The Wallace Foundation was supporting it and the state would be involved in the outcome of what we were learning, and that school board members needed to be involved, needed to know what they were doing so we could pass on to the other school board members what was going on. So I went not knowing what we were going to do.*

> *I felt honored to be part of the group. I hoped to learn about best practices.*

> *I didn't know what to expect, I was going as a parent representative to get a better understanding of some of the challenges that [the district] faces and strategies for improvement.*

While these participants knew little about the program and what to expect from it, a recurring theme in their comments is that they did expect that they would learn something and that it might help them do their work better. What they did not anticipate were the various improvement tasks that they would be asked to complete as part of their involvement in the program.

Summary: Participant Selection and Expectations

Our findings on participant selection and expectations were very similar across the two university programs. For ELPE as for ExEL, The Wallace Foundation played an active role in selecting states and districts for participation and in persuading decision makers to participate. Teams varied in composition: although ELPE was originally designed to bring together management with governance (in the person of board members), not every team included board members, and those board members—along with other outside stakeholders initially included in

the teams—fairly often chose not to stay involved. Other than chiefs and superintendents, most participants arrived on campus with only a hazy idea of the program design and purposes.

Summer Institutes at the University of Virginia

We describe here the structure and content of the summer institutes, how participants assessed their quality and usefulness, and our observations on the curriculum and pedagogy.

Session Logistics

The summer institutes took place at the Darden School of Business, with participants staying at the Sponsors Executive Residence Center, which is operated by Darden. The facilities, located on the campus in Charlottesville, include large lecture halls, smaller seminar rooms, and variety of other meeting spaces. They also include hotel-style accommodations and several comfortable dining rooms.

Participants in the summer institutes arrived late on Sunday afternoon, with institute activities beginning with a welcome dinner and speaker. Institute sessions generally began at 8:30 am and ran through 4:30 or 5:00 pm Monday through Thursday, with a shorter schedule on Friday. Evening sessions featured speakers or opportunities for teams to work on assignments or to review the day's content. Participants could have conversations with team members from other states and districts over meals and during off-hours in the evenings.

For the case-based sessions conducted by Darden faculty, participants were expected to review the cases in advance and come to the sessions prepared to discuss them and several study questions which were also distributed in advance. Some cases were distributed in advance of the institutes; others were distributed upon arrival on Sunday afternoon or the evening before the session in which the case was to be discussed.

Without exception, our interviewees were impressed by the Darden facilities and appreciated the smoothly running administration of the summer program. Several also took care to note that they had worked hard in the institutes, and that the university setting had been a help, not a hindrance, to their concentration. For example, a school board member commented that his friends had teased him about the opportunities to play golf while in Virginia, but that the instructors "drove us hard…. We were in meetings from 7 to 7 pretty much all day. It was great."

Indeed, a few interviewees said the workload was too intense in the first summer, in 2006:

> *It felt like a college course....Lots of homework. That first year it was a lot; it was intense. I had to think, could they ease up a little bit? Let us catch our breath. I certainly wasn't bored and was overwhelmed at times…. It was the combination of*

readings and activities, just too much, and [it] left little time to digest…. The next year they had listened to recommendations and feedback and they toned it down.

Session Purposes, Content, and Perceived Quality

Participants reported that they found many of the individual activities interesting and useful. They also reported some unevenness in the quality of the sessions and the relevance of the content to their work.

The cases offered by Darden faculty focused entirely on public and private sector organizations and businesses. The bibliographic information provided with the cases suggests that none was specifically prepared for the Wallace-funded program. Key themes in the cases included (1) strategies for communicating with stakeholders, especially in difficult situations, (2) leading and guiding change in complex and sometimes dysfunctional organizations, and (3) reflecting on routine organizational behavior to improve practice. Case-based sessions reviewed case content, with special attention to reviewing what various actors did, why they did certain things, and the results. Additional questioning invited participant thoughts on how things could have or should have been done differently in the various settings described in the cases.

Many of the case sessions that we observed generated lively discussions, as participants responded to questions about case content and the implications for leadership, management, organizational change and reform. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of these sessions was the presenters' ability to draw large numbers of the participants into the discussions.

Notably, almost all of the case-based sessions lacked explicit connections to K-12 education. Presenters did not attempt to make these connections in introducing the cases and the rationales for examining them in the discussions or in concluding comments and observations about the discussions. For their part, the participants generally did not offer comments or ask questions about the possible implications of case content for K-12 education. On the few occasions that we observed participants raising questions or making comments about the possible relevance to K-12 education, session leaders offered limited responses and did not take advantage of opportunities to encourage participants to reflect on the implications of the cases for their work.

Some of the case sessions were followed by break-out sessions during which teams were asked to respond to discussion prompts. There was little or no facilitation of the breakout sessions, and little time was devoted to reporting out or discussions among the teams after the breakouts.

Many participants welcomed the business perspective reflected in the cases. Typical comments along these lines were the following, from interviewees who found it easy and useful to translate the content to the world of education:

The quality of people who did the presentations was outstanding. What focused it more for me was the non-educational people. I was able to take from the school of business the

perspectives that they use in their processes. And some of the case studies they did: though not education, you could understand where you could take the implications from it. In the first year, there were a couple of simulations that were interesting. It was a great experience.

Learning about the business perspective is very important. We need to get out of our boxes and see things in other ways. … I know about education, and I need the non-educator focus. When educators get together we want to talk about school problems. [But] we need to talk about broader issues.

Participants found cases from other public-sector agencies useful as well. A case about leadership transition in an urban parks and recreation department sparked a spirited discussion of steps that a new chief executive might take—led by superintendents who had themselves taken the reins of their districts recently. Cases about firefighters brought organizational issues to the fore in a way that was dramatic and memorable. In short, a number of participants welcomed the cases which in their view brought a different lens through they could look at critical issues.

Some participants, however, expressed reservations about the relevance to education. As one observed:

If you look at the case studies from some of the presenters from Darden there is a connection to process but not always to education reality.

Similarly, when asked whether case studies with an education focus might have been more useful, another participant responded agreed and went on to say

I think that there may have been a disconnect. In the business model you can select your…resources, but [in leading a school district] you can't select who you want to educate.

A superintendent commented that the discussion of communication strategies would have been "really useful" if it had addressed the pressing issues of district budget cuts—but it did not.

The parts of the curriculum that focused more directly on education were sessions led by Curry School faculty and those that featured presentations by education leaders, including participants in the program as well as chief executives from other states and districts. The educator presentations focused on success stories about improving low-performing districts and statewide reform strategies. Other sessions included presentations by participant teams which provided updates on progress in developing and using BSCs and PMOCs in state and district improvement efforts.

Here, while the content was relevant for educators, the presentation skills came in for some criticism. One superintendent earned plaudits for a compelling speaking style as well as for the content of the reform story that the presentation conveyed. However, the Curry professors did not fare so well in participants' comments:

Overall, the program was excellent. The most striking thing for me: some of the presentations by the business professors were absolutely outstanding. Those from the education folks were not as outstanding.

The case study approach was terrific. I wish the college of education would use that methodology. [It] requires us to really dig in. … The UVA college of education was not engaged, not as *engaged [as the business school]*.

Some participants also criticized the presence of consultants on institute agendas, calling them "the vendors."

Some commented that the breakout sessions represented a missed opportunity. Without facilitators to keep the discussion on track, teams could flounder. We saw groups bogged down in details and failing to address the larger points made in full-group sessions. Some tried to use one or more sessions as mini-retreats in which the team could move forward on an important task—such as developing indicators for a BSC—but not everyone who should contribute to that task was in attendance. After the first summer institute a Wallace staff member encouraged the ELPE leaders to deploy facilitators for the group sessions, but ELPE said it did not have the staff resources to do so.

Presentations in the summer institutes introduced the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) as a tool and strategy to focus state and local reform efforts and to report on progress. Sessions on creating project management oversight committees (PMOC) complemented the sessions on the BSC and provided participants with ways of defining and managing projects designed to achieve goals set in the BSC. Institute schedules also included opportunities for participant teams to work on their BSCs and plans for operating the PMOCs. These sessions were led by leaders from CELT, who also provided training, technical assistance, and consulting services to participating teams both during the institutes and at other times throughout the year. CELT leaders were able to draw on observations from their consulting activities to provide concrete examples in subsequent presentations at the summer institutes.

In each of the three cohorts, the first summer institute introduced the BSC and PMOC models and underlying concepts and provided guidance for getting started on applying the models in state and local settings. Breakout sessions provided opportunities for teams to begin working on these tasks. The second institute for each cohort included additional preparation and training for use of the BSC and PMOC and more opportunities for teams to work on the related implementation tasks. CELT staff were available to provide assistance. The summer institutes also included participant team reports on progress and sharing of artifacts and strategies. Although these reports often took the form of show-and-tell presentations, they did provide a forum for sharing these artifacts and for discussion of common concerns and challenges.

Reflecting on the summer experience, an SEA staff member expressed the enthusiasm that many participants shared:

During that first summer, we were all in tune with each other and we were really impressed…. I can't say enough about it. The sessions were fabulous and really great

learning opportunities…Most of the presentations were made by [two particular Darden professors]. The content of the lectures was excellent and there was a real dynamic in the presentations. We got real fired up.

A superintendent captured a fairly widespread sense of the summer program's strengths and weaknesses in this way, praising the case method while criticizing the "dull" presentations and the role of consultants:

The first couple of days were riveting! [A particular Darden professor] was wonderful; the case studies were exceptional. But the week tailed off in quality. When the practitioners took over, some were deadly dull. There was a disconnect between the first part of the institute and the second part. It was not coherent. In fact, I was put off by the consultants trying to peddle their stuff…. No, I was insulted by it. The sales pitch was offensive.

A critique of the overall curriculum came from a participant with an unusual perspective, having earned an MBA in finance and held a high-level position in a Fortune 500 company. This person, while enjoying the chance to learn through the case method again, thought the curriculum failed to bring the most up-to-date and relevant business knowledge to participants, limiting its focus to tools of data-based planning and reporting while ignoring challenges of implementation at the high levels of organizations:

The emphasis was on strategic planning, but once you move beyond that, what are you going to do to actually implement it?...I wasn't sure it was realistic. [Back home,] department heads that are strong will fight for their things, and who's influencing the superintendent? … I felt like the underlying objective [of the program] was, "Business has something to teach education, and if you just adopt common business practices, you guys would be able to pull yourselves together."…[But the program did not address] human resources and organization development. They could have done a lot with organization development, or how are people aligned, how does power flow…. [The program] was tailored to what Darden does, and most business schools are number crunchers.

Adding Up the Disparate Pieces of the Curriculum

In our observation, based on a review of the summer institute program materials and our attendance at the sessions, connections were missing. Clearly, the rapidly shrinking role of the Curry School over the years left a void in education-related content. As several interviewees explained, one reason for the shift was that Curry faculty were not comfortable with the case method, preferring a more traditional presentation style. Another was that relatively few members of the Curry faculty had been practicing administrators or, reportedly, had a strong interest in providing executive education for administrators. A Curry faculty member said regretfully:

I would have liked to see more involvement by Curry faculty, but we just don't seem to have the interest or the capacity.

Not only was there little effort to connect the Darden cases to education, but more generally almost no connections were drawn among the various components of the curriculum. Presenters and session leaders typically made no references to the content of other sessions on the agenda, and the institute materials did not suggest connections. At a more fundamental level, although use of the BSC and PMOC as organizing frameworks for state and local reform efforts could entail significant changes in how districts and state agencies communicate with stakeholders and manage reform efforts, the discussions of cases that addressed communication and management made no references to the BSC and PMOC. Similarly, the presentations on the BSC and PMOC made no references to potentially relevant and important case content.

The lack of connectedness between the business cases and K-12 education and among the various sessions on the institute agenda is not surprising, because our interviews indicated that the presenters and session leaders knew very little about the overall agenda. Program leaders invited individual faculty to make presentations, but after initial planning sessions prior to the first summer institute there was little or no ongoing faculty involvement in institute planning. The consulting partners responsible for the instructional audits and introducing the BSC/PMOC reported that they were not involved in planning the institutes and were generally unaware of the content of other parts of the institute agenda, and similarly university faculty said that they were not aware of the work around the instructional audits and the BSC/PMOC. As one the partners put it when asked about the curriculum:

It's hard to speak to the issue of curriculum. Typically, I shoot in for a day and then back out.

Overall, the institutes lacked unifying themes. They did not provide an overarching framework or theory of action to guide comprehensive reform, fundamental changes in leadership practice, or aligning state, district, and school priorities for reform. As the participant with the MBA commented, the problems of implementation were absent from the curriculum.

Also largely absent was substantive attention to state-local relationships. There were two instances of state departments of education that participated actively and consistently, among the six participating states. In one state in particular, the chief state school officer embraced the program as an opportunity to build the department's capacity and to establish solid working with relationships with districts around a common set of reform priorities. The chief said:

I attended both summer institutes and midyear retreats. I felt strongly that if the leaders didn't invest time and energy others would take it lightly and not take it as important.

This chief saw the BSC and PMOC as potentially useful tools for organizing reforms, and participation in ELPE as a timely opportunity to apply the tools statewide.

To be sure, state agencies in the other states sent teams to at least one of the two summer institutes, and some other chief state school officers made presentations (in person or on video) about state reforms. However, their participation and enthusiasm were limited.

Whether as a result or a cause of this limited state engagement, the summer institutes did not address state-local relationships as a key theme in education reform or in education leadership. None of the Darden cases addressed the issues either implicitly or explicitly. Although the chief quoted above made a presentation, and a Curry faculty member led a discussion of that state, no other sessions seriously probed the issues of state-local relations, strategies for improving them, or alignment between state and local policies and initiatives.

Summary: Summer Institutes at the University of Virginia

The ELPE summer institutes were an amalgam of sessions and activities of varying quality—some very high, others not high—and varying amounts of relevance for leadership in K-12 education. While some participants saw value in immersing themselves in a business-oriented program, several regretted the limited attention paid to education, and some commented that the consultants who made presentations appeared to be vendors selling their wares. The summer sessions paid very little attention to state-district relationships. Participants did, however, appreciate a number of the individual sessions and reported taking useful lessons and insights from them. Progress on developing BSCs and applying project management strategies also speaks to the impact of the summer institutes, augmented by technical assistance and consulting during the school year. We turn next to those and other school-year activities of the program.

School-Year Activities

The ELPE program provided consulting and technical assistance services to participating sites, including help in developing and using BSCs and PMOCs; external instructional audits; and visits by program staff and faculty to the sites, including one-time workshops and presentations requested by district leaders. Midyear retreats in the states were occasions for convening the participants as well as offering additional consulting help and presentations.

Assistance in Developing a BSC and Establishing PMOC Processes

As a follow-up to the summer sessions that introduced the BSC and PMOC tools, CELT staff were available on request to provide training and technical assistance to participating states and districts. Initial assistance typically provided basic information about the BSC and PMOC models and was available to staff who had participated in the summer institutes as well as others who had not. In most cases, state or district leaders had made a decision to use one or both of these tools and sought help to familiarize staff with the tools and how to use them. Depending on needs and priorities, these sessions could last several hours or, in some sites, extend over several days. Later, as work in the sites progressed, technical assistance focused on clarifying

goals and indicators to be included in the BSC, addressing issues related to collecting and reporting appropriate data, and the mechanics of the PMOC process, especially the preparation and ongoing review of project charters.

Individuals familiar with this part of the ELPE activities offered several observations about the challenges of introducing these tools. First, as one noted,

> *A lot of people [with whom we work] have never been project managers. You are asking people who have always been leaders to be managers. This experience is unfamiliar in education. Typically, people don't receive very explicit direction. They are just not accustomed to specificity.*

This individual went on to observe:

> *The PMOC catches on more immediately and more easily than the BSC, even though theoretically they are connected. The BSC faces several problems. There is a need to connect a district's strategic plan to the BSC. Districts have a hard time cutting through the political issues to replace the plan with the BSC. Often we see a superintendent keeping the BSC as his or her own tool and the strategic plan remaining more for the public. Another problem is that the BSC has been quite substantially diluted from the original model. In the model we use student achievement is the analog to the bottom line. This, in turn, creates a problem in defining stakeholders as opposed to customers. And this makes it difficult to identify strategies.*

Summer institute presentations to introduce and explain the BSC and PMOC processes used familiar terms (e.g., mission statement, goals, strategies, indicators, accountability, stakeholders) to introduce what to many participants were unfamiliar tools. These early presentations called on participants to begin using these tools in their work and to be prepared to share progress at upcoming ELPE sessions. A number of participants told us that they were unsure about the usefulness of the tools and were not at all confident about their capacity to use them. Hence, a number of the CELT follow-up activities consisted of re-introducing the BSC and PMOC processes or introducing them to staff who had not participated in the summer institutes. In some cases, these follow-up sessions paid off as district leaders and staff began to grasp the fundamental principles of the BSC and PMOC processes, to see utility in these principles, and to apply them. The following comments from a superintendent are similar to others that we heard in the interviews:

> *We had trouble with the BSC/PMOC at first—during the first summer and after we came home. That first session seemed really long to us because we really didn't know what we were doing. We just weren't sure that it was for us. [What changed our minds] was when [the consultant] came to talk with the principals. That helped us understand the process and how it could help us. I guess it was just a little more exposure.*

In other cases, the follow-up activities did not have much payoff. As we discuss below, the results varied across district and state contexts. However, for those sites that did move forward with one or both of the tools, the consulting assistance was cited as a crucial ingredient.

Instructional Reviews

According to the university's February 2007 progress report to the Wallace Foundation, "the third party Instructional Review of each district examines the connection among policies, practices, and strategies which inhibit or promote teaching and learning success." The original program plan had anticipated that the findings from the instructional reviews would contribute to districts' development of their BSC and the identification of appropriate reform strategies and projects that would be guided by the PMOC processes. The review process was to include a four-day visit to review district programs and policies, a review of documents, and preparation of a report.

The instructional review process was based on a model developed by the Council of Great City Schools (CGCS), and CGCS worked with the university on the initial design of this program component. The first instructional review was conducted by a team organized by the council, and the participating district was a member of the organization. However, districts resisted the review process, expressing concerns about the burden that it would impose on districts and the prospect of public reports on problems and gaps in district programs and policies. A person who attended the first summer institute and spoke with district leaders afterwards described their response in this way:

> *Superintendents that came into the first week, the first summer, thought they were hit with a demand that they didn't want to do. The council's audit is public, and it uses a lot of staff time. It has to be a choice by the board and superintendent—can't be forced on them.*

Under the final arrangement for these reviews, the project hired a consultant to identify members of the review team, called the Strategic Support Team, and to coordinate and lead all of the reviews. Overall, the team completed 16 instructional reviews and submitted reports to the districts.[4]

According to a person who was familiar with the instructional reviews, they were "only loosely connected to other parts of the program." There was no substantive planning or coordination with program staff or other consultants, including those who were responsible for introducing the BSC and PMOC processes to participants. The consultant who led the review process reported being unfamiliar with the BSC prior to her involvement with the program and took it upon herself to learn about the model after learning that it was a central part of the program content and focus. As she explained it,

> *Our references to the BSC in our reports to the districts were mostly because of my sense of obligation to UVA and because I knew that other parts of the program dealt with the BSC. If we found a district without a strategic plan or a district that had just left the plan on the shelf, we recommended developing a BSC.*

Reports to the sites were organized around a standard template. They began with a description of the review process and a profile of district demographics and patterns in student

[4] Nine of the 16 districts agreed to have UVA make their reports available to the evaluation team for review.

achievement on standardized tests. Next, the reports presented the team's findings and recommendations. The finding and recommendations were organized around the following 10 topics associated with improving student achievement:[5] political pre-conditions; goals; accountability; curriculum and instruction; professional development/training; reform press; data/assessments; low-performing schools and students; early education and elementary schools; and secondary schools.

While this process was derived from the original CGCS model, the reporting process was quite different. The ELPE review team was typically able to submit reports to the districts within four to six weeks of the visits. This required a short, intensive debriefing immediately after the visit and coming to consensus about key observations and recommendations, which were then organized into the report. In the CGCS process, on the other hand, reports took almost a year to complete. More time was devoted to preparing the initial draft, and there was also an internal review process that, among other things, included circulating the report to the CGCS research office for review and comment. There was no such review process in the ELPE program. Perhaps more important, there was no plan or support for follow-up with the participating sites.

Across the reports, the discussions of the topics began with assertions such as "one of the key features of improving school districts involves the political unity of the school board, its focus on student achievement, and its ability to work with the administration on improving academic performance." Next, the reports listed (in bullet form) areas of strength, areas of concern, and recommendations. The discussions of strengths and areas of concern, which spanned 10 to 12 pages, did not cite evidence to support the findings or to explain how and why they might be important. In some cases, the lists of strengths and areas of concern seemed contradictory. For example, in discussing political pre-conditions, one report noted that "district-level personnel, parents, and community partners have a positive attitude about the district." Later, in discussing areas of concern, the report observed that "some parents are concerned about safety [in] schools, discipline issues in schools…and the level of rigor for high achieving students." Absent any further explanation or supporting data, these observations would be difficult for a district to reconcile.

The final versions of the reports were transmitted to the superintendents, and it was up to them to decide what to do with the reports. Our interview data indicate that very few members of the district teams were familiar with the review process or the findings and recommendations included in the reports. This in turn suggests that the review process and the reports added little value to district improvement efforts.

[5] The factors were derived from *Foundations for success: Case studies of how urban school systems improve student achievement (2002),* a report prepared for the Council of Great City Schools by Jason Snipes, Fred Doolittle, and Corinne Herlihy.

Site Visits

ELPE staff and faculty also traveled to the sites between sessions. Eleanor Smalley, as program director in 2009 and 2010, made it a point to visit sites. In addition, faculty members were available for other sessions requested by the participants.

In an example of one of these visits, Smalley and a senior faculty member from Curry who had been involved in early phases of the ELPE initiative visited three districts and a state education agency after they had participated in the two summer institutes. For Smalley, the visit had two purposes: to learn more about the districts and state agency and the extent to which they had benefited from their participation; and to identify possible follow-up activities. For the Curry faculty member the trip was an occasion to gather information for developing products related to introduction and use of the BSC and PMOC. In one district, an extended conversation with the superintendent and the opportunity to sit in on a regular meeting of the PMOC revealed several examples of how the district was using the program's tools and the extent to which it had benefitted from CELT training and technical assistance. In a second district, the conversation included the assistant superintendent and two central office staff who served on the PMOC. Here, again, the conversations provided concrete examples of how the district was using both the BSC and PMOC. Because of a last-minute schedule conflict, the visit to the third district was cut short and did not get into any substantive issues. The visit to the state education agency coincided with a CELT BSC training activity intended for agency senior staff, which the visitors observed.

Across states and districts, consulting by Darden or Curry faculty took the form of traditional one-time activities that lasted from several hours to a full day. Typically, these sessions were provided at the request of a superintendent and focused on the superintendent's priorities or questions and issues of interest to stakeholders. Topics covered in these activities included the following:

- The importance of high expectations for all students
- Strategies for communicating difficult and complex messages to stakeholders
- Creating and organizing effective teams and team activities

These topics were consistent with topics included in the on-campus activities, but the consulting visits were not necessarily organized as follow-ups to those activities. Rather, program leaders actively encouraged site leaders to take advantage of university expertise at no cost to the site, other than the cost of time for participants to attend the sessions.

In interviews, superintendents mentioned that they appreciated the expertise brought to their districts through these workshops. Some had members of their leadership teams—those who had been to the summer institutes and those who had not—participate in a process of identifying their own styles of team membership through a survey instrument, then learn from a Darden professor about the characteristic strengths and weaknesses that each style brings to a

team.[6] Another district invited a Curry professor to conduct a survey of its teachers and rate the teacher efficacy beliefs prevailing in each school, following up on a presentation that this professor had made at a mid-year retreat. The results of the teacher survey showed a correlation with student achievement (controlling for demographic and other variables), helping the superintendent make the point that educators in the district could and should do more to bring about student success.

Mid-Year Retreats

In each state, an annual one- or two-day "retreat" was held in the winter. Teams attended from participating districts and, in some cases, the state education agency. Attendees included some who had attended the summer institutes and some who had not. The overall purposes included reports from the sites about how they were applying what they had learned in the program, as well as presentations from faculty and technical assistance from the CELT consultants. Other PLE content might be brought in as well. For example, in a Louisiana mid-year retreat in early 2010, the presenters included a Darden professor who had worked with the group over the summer, a Curry professor who had not, a district leader from Cincinnati who was working with the PLE on district leadership for school turnaround, and the teams themselves, each team describing how they were applying BSC or PMOC process in their ongoing work.

Our interview respondents were less positive about the mid-year retreats than they were about the summer institutes at the university. One blamed the circumstances as well as the retreat's structure, saying that attending a day-long retreat while receiving urgent messages from her nearby office was a challenge. She said:

> *In-state retreats were not as useful as the summer experience. They were very short in most cases and there was not a lot of time to focus. There were more distractions interfering with the ability to focus. We were supposed to be sharing progress with the BSCs. In the beginning we talked about the PMOC. The retreats were choppy. In one day they introduced a variety of different topics. It might have been better if [the retreats] were on weekends.*

Strong leaders who were most positive about ELPE and who used it fulfill their goals tended to be more positive about the mid-year retreats. A chief state school officer claimed:

> *The state and representatives from districts came in for the retreat and we did a huge amount of work on common measures, offered to districts free of charge. CELT did a lot of work with the state and districts and helped districts with BSC…. Districts brought people who hadn't been at UVA, and the state brought people who hadn't been at UVA.*

[6] This process of identifying team styles and seeing how they play out in a simulation is part of the Darden executive education curriculum. The team roles are based on the research of Meredith Belbin at Henley Management College, beginning in the 1970s. See R. Meredith Belbin, *Management Teams: Why They Succeed or Fail* (Butterworth Heinemann, 3rd ed., 2010)

The midyear retreats were not case-study-driven. It was a "check in": "where are you, how can we help you, what kind of support do you need?"

Another favorable description was given by an assistant superintendent in a district in another state:

That meeting was powerful because it was intimate. Only two or three people came from each district.

This participant concluded that all of the participants in that event left with a sense of having benefited because they had a better understanding of how to "operationalize" what they had learned about PMOC and the BSC for their specific needs and circumstances.

However, there were few others as favorable to the mid-year retreats. A district staff member said the retreat was more like a reunion than an active learning opportunity. A superintendent contrasted the weaknesses of the retreat with the "very good" tailored assistance that CELT provided onsite, saying that the retreat was geared to providing detailed instruction on a process that few participants had begun to understand:

It was clearly geared toward the terminology and being exacting on deliverables. I'm not sure whether it was too narrow or it was too detailed. It seemed to me that we were starting on our BSC and we needed to get our feet wet with some experimentation before we got so bogged down with terminology…maybe it was too much too fast. Not pertinent enough. … Now, when [the consultant] came to the district it helped because he took a look at what we personally had done and it was customized so we could personally grow. ..He would say this is a very strong part of your BSC where you might want to extend your thinking, maybe this part is weak and might be strengthened if you would try this …yes, it was very good.

In one district where there had been a great deal of turnover, new team members who had not attended a summer institute commented on their response to the mid-year retreat. One said that he learned from the other teams' presentations on their use of the BSC and other strategies, especially since "the other districts were way ahead of us." The retreat also had other outside presenters which he thought were not useful. "It was dated stuff. It was facilitated well, but the content was dated." Another team member, new to a senior role in this district, found the mid-year retreat largely baffling and not a good use of time, having had essentially no previous exposure to the material being discussed.

Interestingly, some of these flaws come into focus when we look at a different activity that one participating district initiated and that the university was happy to support. This large district requested a mid-year retreat for its entire 20-member leadership team at the campus, facilitated by Darden with CELT participation. A deputy superintendent spoke highly of this event and its results:

It was really helpful for the leadership team to interact with the Darden people. It helped the district do strategic planning for this school year. There was a high benefit in terms

of team building and focusing on strategic goals. The [single-district] retreat was an important event because it provided an opportunity for us to get away from distractions and we could focus on our priorities. We spent time figuring out what we had done well. We celebrated those things. It was an intentional goal of the facilitator at UVA. He was skilled at helping us recognize our strengths.

Across the other sites, the scope and depth of mid-year activities was very much shaped by participants' willingness and capacity to engage in the available activities. It is likely that when participants viewed these activities as clearly representing potential solutions to problems they were addressing or, more generally, as helping them do their jobs better, they were willing to do the work expected of them. When they viewed these activities as less than relevant to their work or somehow duplicative or irrelevant they were less likely to take on the added burden. Based on our interviews, the consultants were ready and willing to provide more help and at least some additional resources were available to support the additional help. In this case, the supply exceeded the demand.

Summary: School-Year Activities

Consulting assistance from CELT was a major part of the ELPE experience and was said to be critically important for the many sites that chose to implement a BSC or PMOC approach in some way. Similarly, tailored consulting help in site visits from university faculty members was valued by the smaller number sites that requested and received such help. Less significant, according to participants, were the instructional reviews and the mid-year retreats. Although the various consulting services were arranged in discussions with the sites and were tailored to address site-specific interests and needs, most of these activities were ad hoc, one-time events, with little or no systematic follow-up.

Results: Use of What Was Learned

The tools featured in the UVA curriculum, the BSC and the PMOC, were mentioned by participants interviewed in a large majority of sites. Some reported that their use of the BSC tool was related to improving organizational coherence in that it helped them align an organizational vision with strategies and indicators of success. More cited the PMOC as a means of tightening up the management of the particular projects to which their agency applied this technique.

Some participants also used follow-up assistance from Darden faculty members in fine-tuning particular aspects of their agencies' work. District teams were coached in understanding the roles that individuals characteristically play, based on the Belbin analytic scheme; leaders relied on advice from a Darden professor in crafting their communications with constituents. Below, we examine what participants reported learning, the extent to which they applied what they learned in their district or state agency, and the degree to which the lessons of ELPE extended beyond those who attended the summer institutes.

For some teams, participation ended after the first summer institute. Two state teams declined to return, as did three local teams. We were told that some agency leaders did not believe the program had been a good use of their time and resources, and that some simply found the cost prohibitive. Two additional local teams did not return for their second scheduled summer institute because of difficulties in finding the funds for participation, but did return to the campus in a subsequent year.

The Balanced Scorecard and Project Management Oversight Committee

Among the districts and state agencies that persisted in the program beyond their initial summer on campus, virtually all reported at least preliminary use of the BSC or PMOC. In particular, they focused on this aspect of the program when prompted by ELPE to document "successes." In advance of the summer 2010 summative session and to "assess the impact of the executive alignment program create to create awareness of the program's most effective aspects, to maintain strong gains made through the program, and to influence other states and districts,"[7] program leaders invited participating states and districts to prepare white papers. They provided a template that included four sections: an executive summary, a problem summary, an action summary, and conclusions. The action summaries were to describe the alignment of key priorities and processes, review the instructional system, describe strategic management systems, and describe plans for the sustainable engagement of stakeholders. Finally, the guidance document from ELPE included specific questions that sites could address in preparing each section of the white paper. Two state education agencies and 16 districts submitted white papers.

Looking across the white papers, several themes emerge. First, in summarizing the problems they initially faced, the two state agencies and virtually all of the districts described inadequate communication processes within their organizations, and most lamented the fact that there was inadequate management and oversight of individual projects and reform initiatives. As one white paper noted:

> *Communications was a concern, with departments working in isolation and not sharing a common goal. Data was segmented across the district, even though it was being used by all stakeholders. The data was not focused or aligned from the building leadership level (principals) in meeting the needs of all classroom teachers…. Communication barriers have hindered the success of district wide initiatives.*

Some sites also commented on the lack of clarity and consensus around organizational goals. Several districts noted the challenges associated with recent changes in district leadership.

Not surprisingly, in discussing the actions they were taking to address these problems, both states and most of the districts reported that they had developed a BSC and/or were implementing a PMOC. Based on these very short summaries it is difficult to draw conclusions about the actual level of implementation and use of these two tools across the states and districts. The descriptions do suggest two things. First, implementation varied considerably. Several sites reported considerable progress and claimed that the BSC and/or PMOC had become part of

[7] The PLE distributed this statement of purpose to the sites to guide preparation of the white papers.

routine operations. Other sites reported less progress or, in several cases, less fidelity to the particulars of the tools, but saw the potential payoffs in continued development and implementation. Although no sites reported concluding that the tools were not for them, several of the white papers did report problems or concerns. For example, two noted that the processes associated with the tools slowed down decisionmaking and made it somewhat difficult to change directions quickly:

> *The big disadvantage to the use of the BSC is that it involves a specific process which requires more time to implement and come to completion of a project. This creates a [problem] when a decision must be made immediately or if there is a short time span to implement a project. In that case, the BSC process will be bypassed or only used in part.*

Several white papers also commented on the steep learning curve necessary to effectively implement the tools, and at least one noted the district staff continued to find PMOC process cumbersome even after considerable experience with it.

On the plus side, sites reported improved internal communications across operating units, improved management and completion of key initiatives, and improved ability to communicate about progress on key initiatives with stakeholders, especially school boards. In addition, several districts reported improved communications with school leaders around priorities and expectations. Finally, one state and two district white papers commented on the extent to which developing and using a BSC helped link state and local reform efforts and reporting processes.

Two of the 16 district white papers specifically mentioned the instructional reviews as a source of guidance about their improvement efforts. One white paper indicated that the instructional review helped the district understand the need for better management of reform initiatives. In a later section, the white paper reports on district progress in developing a BSC and implementing a PMOC. A second white paper lists four areas of strengths and concerns identified in the instructional review: accountability, curriculum and instruction, professional development, and data/assessment, and asserts that "these findings have served as a springboard to facilitate improvement in the educational process," but it gives no further specifics.

Overall, the white papers provide testimony to participants' views that their involvement in ELPE provided them with several valuable tools and that early application of those tools contributed to improved communications and increased accountability and effectiveness in management. The nature of the writing assignment did not lead to many specific examples of actual improvements that occurred or assessments of the magnitude of the changes. In addition, the impetus for a number of changes that are reported appears to have come from other reform initiatives already under way in the states and districts. It is likely that these initiatives drove the changes reported in the white papers, with facilitation and support from the BSC and PMOC.

Our onsite interviews confirmed the variation in use of the BSC and PMOC across the sites. At the high end, one state made its version of the BSC a cornerstone of its planning and reporting systems during the tenure of a chief state school officer who viewed this tool as a key means of aligning state and local visions of educational success and programmatic priorities. At the other extreme was a district in which designating a leader for each project and asking for

progress reports was a new way of working; this district did not use the specific procedures associated with either the BSC or the PMOC, but its leaders said that a methodical approach to identifying and tracking project responsibilities was indeed an innovation in the district, and that it was attributable to ELPE participation.

In a handful of districts, we found participants who reported developing a clearer vision of their goals as an organization and a sharper focus on the mission as a result of participating in the program. For example, one district administrator described the team identifying three priorities for the district, saying:

> *Successfully agreeing upon priorities was a huge accomplishment. … One of the most positive outcomes was the fact that the superintendent was able to provide very clear directions to principals about the district's priorities and goals during a leadership conference last August.*

In this district, too, leaders put the PMOC to work as a system for organizing managerial responsibilities for projects.

The statewide use of the BSC in one state illustrates the extent to which an interested and committed site could apply what it learned from ELPE. In that state, the chief brought the team to the university with the intention of using BSC structures and strategies as the framework for planning at the levels of the state, districts, and schools. As implementation went forward, ELPE allowed flexibility for the state to adapt the BSC to its own needs. The BSC became a structure and support for the evolving consolidated application (which districts submitted to the state for state-administered funds), and then morphed into a planning document called the Success Plan. This was not only applied in the districts that participated in the ELPE program, but also was rolled out statewide. In particular, districts and schools identified for improvement were required to complete Success Plans. The PMOC has also been applied at both the state and district levels.

However, this state also illustrates the fragility of a managerial innovation. Technological glitches plagued the initial rollout, and many state and local staff were reportedly more preoccupied with the mechanics than with the philosophy behind a balanced scorecard. A state agency staff member described the gulf between the intended vision of BSC implementation and the "checklist mentality" that arose in some districts:

> *The BSC is a complete mindset change. One district said they had BSC, but they didn't have outcome goals.*

Another staff member traced the implementation shortcomings to technical issues that arose in implementation:

> *In the beginning, the information that went into the system was not good. It was done mostly as a compliance response, and not as a useful process. We need to refocus on the process, understanding what the process of improvement needs.... But we had cutbacks,*

fewer professional days in the districts, and a new administration in the [state education agency] as well as new staff. So things are changing.

With the transition to a new chief, and in response to local concerns, this state has made further refinements to the planning process and lessened its insistence on standardization. However, a common language did remain in place, as did a standard data dashboard, and some participants said that data-based decision making increased in the state thanks to ELPE.

At the district level, there were examples of newly appointed superintendents using the BSC or PMOC as a way of directing staff attention to new priorities. A central-office staff member described implementation in one district in this way:

What happens is that [the superintendent] creates her BSC for the whole district. And then she requires that every administrator under her take their coinciding section and put down their own goals and objectives that will help her meet the goals of the BSC. … So right now her very first instructional objective is to improve student achievement by aligning the curriculum with the state standards and grade level expectations.

Similarly, a new district superintendent in a different state saw that the PMOC could be a vehicle for significantly ratcheting up district staff members' sense of accountability for carrying out improvement initiatives. With a sense of urgency about closing the achievement gap, this superintendent reorganized the central office staff, launched a wide range of initiatives, and began using the PMOC procedures. The superintendent saw the PMOC as a tool that would help change the district culture, putting staff members in a position to take personal responsibility for the district's success. As the superintendent described the effort in a verbal report at a midyear retreat:

Most important, this process gives us the opportunity to build capacity with our staff. … Superintendents are hired to change schools. That's what I do. We put together a [district] plan, looked at the needs of these schools, and we began to plan for their success in ways that hadn't been done before. We had people who were open to move on. [I am trying to] unleash talent within the system, develop it, and let it go. And getting board support to move it forward.

A number of districts reported changes in their project management approach as a result of their participation in the UVA program. Respondents most often reported more efficient meetings, better follow through on the completion of projects, and elimination of projects not clearly tied to the mission. One district assistant superintendent attributed two changes in managing project meetings to the use of the PMOC: requiring an agenda and placing a time limit on items in the agenda. According to this respondent, the changes ultimately led to increased meeting attendance and improved attitudes among meeting participants:

It feels good to know we are focusing our discussions on priority issues and managing our time better.

Several respondents spoke of the PMOC helping them be more strategic and deliberate in their choice and management of projects. As one respondent put it, after the introduction of the PMOC, there was "not just this big mess of fuzzy projects out there." Another reported the PMOC helped the district become less reactive.

> *As an organization we have generally operated in a state of reaction. Although we are agile as an organization, we sometimes move too quickly which can pull us off the project path. Inherent in the nature of the PMOC process is the ability to slow down and re-evaluate.*

The chief information officer in this district claimed that the management approach changed once the PMOC was introduced. The district had previously tried unsuccessfully to implement a new student information system:

> *The project failed because of communication gaps…we tried implementing a product that was not mature…After getting the training from Darden, we restarted the project through the PMOC lens, we identified deliverables and set timelines. We put the project management model in place, and in implementing [the new system], everyone knew their role.*

Nevertheless, this district's efforts to spread the use of the PMOC beyond the central office and into schools were reportedly less successful:

> *There's isn't the uptake…When we've introduced the project charter to principals, some were on board, others did not understand…very varying degrees of uptake.*

Leadership and Team Building

Team building and leadership development were more a result of time participants spent together at the summer institutes than they were the result of an explicit curriculum. Many participants spoke of the value of working with their site teams and wished there had been more opportunities for team building. Transferring the experience of the summer back to the realities of day-to-day work, however, was a challenge for many of the states and districts. Asked whether ELPE had an impact on team building within the state education agency, one participant responded: "Not directly as a result of [this program]. I have had many team building experiences [in addition to ELPE] so I'm not sure of anything that stands out."

A participant in a district in one state spoke of the team building as extending beyond those who attended the summer institutes, while a participant in another state indicated that team building went nowhere upon return to the district.

> *We still are meeting but as bigger group of all combined principals. It isn't the team that went to UVA. The administrative teams in buildings have strong support from district office.*

There were no presentations to the entire staff – no bringing it back to the system. There were no team meetings in the district once they got back!

High staff turnover or reductions due to budget cuts meant in several cases that those who had attended the summer institute were no longer present to advocate for implementation.

State-District Relationships

The state was largely a missing player in the ELPE program. According to one participant the state/district relationship piece was "[p]robably the weakest part of the program." One participant, when asked about any changes in the relationship between her district and the state, responded that she "didn't know that [improving state-district relations] was an outcome of the project." Consequently, it is not surprising that few reported progress in relations between the state and districts.

The nature of the state district relationship prior to the initiative seemed to largely determine the nature of the relationship after the initiative. In one state, "the relationship may have solidified, but we are a small state and relationships are pretty strong." In another state, a relationship that was not particularly good to begin with showed little improvement. One district participant characterized the state participation in ELPE as "horrible, and that's kind." Others in the same state made similar if not quite so strongly worded comments.

I don't remember details but had a feeling that this isn't going to go anywhere. It really seemed for change to be effective the state had to be involved.

They should have made the state come and be engaged from the beginning. The first day only one person from the state was there. It was not a priority for the state.

In another state, some districts looked to the state for guidance but found it lacking and so moved on without the state.

We waited a year. The first year, we were part of a state team and so we were looking for guidance from the state, so we could wrap our plan around theirs. They took a long time and didn't end up being specific. I said, look, the process is what we're getting from UVA. The outcomes are what we're going to make ourselves. Let's pick what our district wants. About January or February last year we realized that what [the state was] doing was well intentioned but wasn't going to drive what the district was going to do.

In still another state, a state staff member spoke candidly about the lack of progress in implementing—or even understanding—the BSC at the state level, and how this prevented the state from working in the aligned way that had originally been envisioned:

At the beginning of the second summer session it became really clear that we were going to struggle. We had started to implement the BSC, but it really didn't get any traction…As we moved forward the wheels began coming off. [We recognized that] three

of the four districts were way ahead of us and it was clear that we didn't have anything to offer them. We just recognized that we didn't have the capacity.

Summary: Results

The BSC and, to a greater extent, the PMOC were the legacies of ELPE according to respondents in the participating sites. While it is important to note that the versions of these tools implemented were almost always highly simplified, they nevertheless were reported to serve agency purposes. Notably, systematic approaches to project management were said to improve the likelihood that sites would finish what they set out to do. In one state and at least some of its districts, the BSC was said to have facilitated a more organized and coherent approach to managing data and initiatives; it also was said to have these benefits at the state level in another state. ELPE made less difference in team building, which was not very systematically addressed, or in state-district relationships, which was a subject almost absent from the curriculum. The limited participation of state leaders in the program also greatly limited the program's potential effectiveness: some states simply opted out, saying they saw little value in the program as designed, while in one case mentioned just above the state agency employees felt that using a BSC would be beyond their capacity. Issues of capacity were among the contextual conditions that shaped the uptake of ELPE content, as we describe next.

Contexts for Use of What Was Learned

In interviews and the white papers, participants made it clear that local events, purposes, and capacity heavily influenced the ways in which they applied what they learned from the ELPE program. Readiness for the program content made a difference, as did team composition and organizational factors. Leadership and staff transitions were a pervasive theme as well.

Vision and Purpose

An existing state or local vision in synch with the ELPE content, especially the BSC and PMOC, clearly boosted implementation in a number of sites. In several cases, a newly appointed leader found that these tools were an especially good fit for his or her leadership style. The superintendent of one district described a clear vision for the district, as well as a clear vision for how the BSC would support district changes. This superintendent was already inclined toward the use of measurable goals, accountability structures, and clear procedures, and wanted to institutionalize and refine tools and strategies. When asked whether ELPE had helped establish a vision throughout the district, this superintendent described a deliberate process of using the BSC as an extension of existing organizational routines:

Oh, absolutely. The BSC is a perfect example. I've been into goal setting and measurement of progress for a while. It's been the Title 1 work in the district, and I've had to train principals to set meaningful goals to measure growth toward those goals. The scorecard coincided with the way we'd done it. We came back and established the

BSC and I put it into play. We were very proud of our little scorecard. We used it internally for the first year, experimenting with it, getting comfortable with it, keeping [the two principals on the tea]) in the loop. We knew they would be our agents the following summer when we had the opportunity to share the BSC at our [district] summer institute.

Additionally, this superintendent spoke of other ways of using the ELPE tools, such as demonstrating progress to the school board and the public, adapting the PMOC for ad hoc project committees, and incorporating measurable goals into administrative evaluations.

Similarly, another district was ready to run with the ELPE experience, having already used a PMOC-like process and recently begun grappling with strategic planning. Staff entered into participation open to new ways of working and new tools, while also having a specific application at hand. A district administrator believed:

The need for the Executive Leadership Program was strong…We were just stepping into strategic planning, and anything like that is difficult to implement…This group was already moving towards the business model, and the program strengthened and clarified our tools.

In another district, a superintendent saw the PMOC as a management process that would help initiate and monitor a large number of projects made possible in part by an influx of federal stimulus funds. In order to manage the many projects, this superintendent needed to delegate responsibility to others and give them a tool to handle the workload more efficiently and with great attention to goals and accountability:

I had done enough putting band-aids on things, and wanted to look further down the line. I wanted a staff that's independent of me… feels empowered.

A senior member of this superintendent's staff, who had not attended the summer institutes, spoke of the benefits of using a more systematic management process, emphasizing that it had addressed a problem traceable to the superintendent's management style:

[The superintendent] is a wonderful guy; he will tell stories, but at the end of the meeting sometimes that's all we were left with. Now, [the meetings] are more productive. We've got a timeline, goals and objectives.

Reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of ELPE, a member of the program leadership team commented that working more extensively with superintendents ahead of time would have helped pave the way for use of the program content. It would have both acquainted superintendents with the intended content and informed the program leaders about participating organizations' strengths and weaknesses. The missing step, according to this interviewee, was:

…a sit-down with the superintendent before we get ready to collaborate with them on a program, so everybody has a clear idea of what we're trying to accomplish. I wouldn't

dream of starting to work with a district now without a face-to-face sit-down… a half day with the superintendent and cabinet to get a real feel for what's going on.

Team Composition

In general, agency leaders did not initially know enough about the ELPE curriculum to allow them to select a team of staff members who would be actively engaged in implementing what was learned. In some cases, though, team composition did make a positive difference in implementation. For instance, one district leader expected the BSC to be used by principals, as well as all central office staff. An elementary and a secondary principal were members of the team that attended the summer institutes, and the superintendent kept the principals involved during the first year as the team used and refined the BSC for their purposes. The next year, the two principals helped to train others in using the tool, as the superintendent explained:

[The two principals] became our BSC experimenters and they taught their peers the following summer how to do it….The first year we just had [the five district participants] use the BSC, but the second year we had everybody from the central office and every principal use one.

Inevitably, in some districts it was possible to see in hindsight that potentially valuable team members were excluded. An official in another district pointed out that a finance officer should have been included in the summer institute:

The link between reality and vision is planning. We had the wrong people at the table. . You need a CFO. Because what controls plans in districts is the money…. It would have been nice to have the CFO there to hear that this is an integrated approach to planning that focuses on academics.

Approaches to Communicating with Others in the Agency

Because not everyone in a state or local agency who could potentially use the ELPE content had participated in the summer institutes, communicating this content to other key staff members was a crucial step in implementation. Since the content most often implemented was the BSC or PMOC, visits from the CELT consultants were often helpful in this process. In some sites, the rollout was deliberate and had successes; in others, it was incomplete, confusing, or missing.

For a new superintendent who wanted to use the PMOC process to transform management and accountability in the district, instruction from CELT was a major intervention. About 200 district staff members attended CELT sessions on the PMOC in this district.

On the other hand, there were reports from other sites that those responsible for implementing the BSC or PMOC work were not included in activities that would help them do

their job. In these cases, the work was hindered, perhaps coming to a stop or being isolated among those who attended the summer sessions:

> *Because the cabinet members who attended the ELP are so busy, it has been difficult to transfer the tools learned to subordinates…*
>
> *We came back with a 90 Day Plan and concepts, but others in the district were not in the loop. There was no staff meeting where it was all explained…There was no follow through. It was not a systemic change.*

The head of the Parent Advisory Council in one district spoke to the issue of the need for a more structured rollout:

> *We need more follow-up. Is there some sort of template that we could have brought home to use to train others [on the BSC]? This could have been used to help bring new people on board. I really wish that there could be some follow-up activities. How often should they look at the BSC to see if it's still the right thing? I don't know when that should happen. Where does the leadership come from to keep it going? Where are the reminders to keep it going to come from?*

A state department of education organized a session for senior agency staff after the first summer but did not clarify what, if anything, the agency was going to do with the BSC and PMOC. Given this unclear message about potential applications, senior officers sent representatives to what they believed to be an information session, with the expectation that the representatives would later brief the senior officers. The fact that no one in the session seemed to know that the BSC and PMOC were even being considered to replace or complement the existing school improvement framework led to considerable confusion among the attendees, and the BSC and PMOC never gained any traction in the agency.

In another state agency, a staff member commented that the chief state school officer had not seen the need to educate staff members about the new tools:

> *A problem was that [the chief] had the idea that you could just tell people to do something and it would happen. [The chief] was big picture but not operational. There was no follow-up to things, and we really didn't have the infrastructure."*

Engagement of Outside Stakeholders

Some superintendents had selected school board and community members for membership on the team for strategic reasons of their own. For instance, one superintendent included not only a school board member but also a Chamber of Commerce leader to help maintain community leaders' support for the school system, and a local foundation official "because [the foundation] has the checkbook."

Including community members also allowed influential leaders from outside to better understand the constraints and context involved in translating a business model to education. Several community members were impressed that a district was adopting business techniques, and participation gave them an eye-opening opportunity to see the team wrestle with the complexities. A community leader came to the understanding that the district was using more strategic planning, citing the following takeaways from the summer institute participation:

> *You should strive to improve the educational enterprise—got to be intentional, figure out what you think is going to make the difference, then organize yourself….Too many things [can be] going on, and you've got to choose.*

On the other hand, including board members and others outside the district staff could expose vulnerabilities in a way that could be uncomfortable and potentially counterproductive. For example, one superintendent who had invited several board members to join the district team was frankly dismayed when these board members eagerly joined the evening team sessions when team members began to consider developing a BSC for the district. The superintendent welcomed their input in setting goals, but said:

> *I had to talk to them and explain that it was not their job to set the indicators, to generate the projects, and to analyze the data. They were the audience for a lot of our work and we needed to report to them. We didn't need them to micromanage. The [ELPE] program could have done more to help us understand this problem.*

Capacity and Culture

Some agencies were very much ready for implementation, having the needed capacity and placing a priority on the use of the ELPE tools for their own purposes. In one district already discussed here as an example of high-end implementation, measurable goals and a focus on instructional leadership were already a part of the culture. Staff in the district were not new to the underlying concept of the BSC, which provided an opportunity to formalize the behavior as a top district priority. Despite some initial reticence, within three years the district had the BSC ingrained in administrators' work and also in some schools. A district supervisor who was new to the district and had not attended summer institutes explained that the superintendent met with her in her first hour on the job to clarify her responsibilities and ask her to develop her own unit BSC based on the district's. She reported that the superintendent showed her the district BSC and said:

> *"I have certain expectations of my administrators, and I need to go through this [the BSC] and explain what it is and what it's used for and what I expect your role to be."*

At the other end of the spectrum were some districts and states that lacked the capacity and infrastructure for success in adopting the ELPE tools. A state administrator spoke about that agency's lack of capacity to adopt the PMOC:

We talked that to death. We created charters. We created report processes and forms. And on and on. … [A CELT consultant] came to the department several times and tried to help us. He knew his stuff, but as far as we were concerned, he spoke a foreign language. We were a wagon train and he was on a space shuttle. But we kept talking, but we really didn't do very much. We just didn't have the capacity.

Organizational culture could also impede implementation. Staff in many district and state agencies find little reason to work across department boundaries. Organizations often have silos, and some simply lack a culture of collaboration, cohesion, or communication. For instance, one district administrator explained:

The hard piece to break through is getting departments to engage other departments. Trying to get to a sense of collective ownership of the work has been a challenge.

In some cases, inertia was a problem:

I think the biggest obstacle is the organizational culture is that "we never did this before; why do we need to do it now?" [My district] has a view that we can solve all the problems internally because we have smart people here. [It] is not used to looking outward.

One of the challenges is that we self replicate, we get the people for which the current system has worked, and these individuals tend to be more resistant to change.

Leadership and Staff Transitions

Turnover among superintendents, as well as their staff members, is not unusual during any multi-year implementation period, and indeed, it figured heavily in implementation and results at some sites. Sites that experienced superintendent turnover were faced with a crossroads of sorts, in which the new leadership either embraced or downgraded the ELPE work, depending on whether the leader thought it would help or hinder in carrying out a vision for the district.

A few districts were notable for the extent to which new leaders took advantage of ELPE as a timely opportunity. As we have described, they seized the tools as a way to signal that a new way of working had arrived, and they attended to the processes of rolling out the use of those tools.

Leadership turnover could also hinder or halt implementation. New superintendents bring their own priorities and preferred tools, and may be disinclined toward picking up a predecessor's project mid-course. In some such cases, use of the ELPE tools ended after the transition.

Similarly, when much of the original team left the organization or moved on to other positions, continuity and implementation were seriously disrupted. A district official explained

the limited implementation of the ELPE tools in this way, seven months after the second summer session:

> *The problem is that there have been so many staffing changes in the district, and so many who were involved at the time are no longer here.*

Resources and Time

Budget cutbacks were cited as hampering implementation of the BSC. This is somewhat ironic, since the BSC itself could be used as tool for prioritizing what to cut and what to save. One district administrator, however, acknowledged that this would be a hard message to sell, especially to those who had not attended a summer institute:

> *Crafting a message that says we will be doing new things while cutting old things is hard because [the people affected by these decisions] were not down in Charlottesville. That message is difficult.*

Several sites described recent reductions in staff positions or a large work load as barriers to full implementation. One state described losing members of its original team to layoffs, and also described a cascading effect in which downsizing created a work environment in which staff elected to leave or were reassigned to new jobs. The turnover disrupted implementation, said officials in this state.

Summary: Contexts for Use of What Was Learned

In a few cases, states or districts entered ELPE primed to absorb and use its lessons. Much more often, we heard that various features of the site context seriously limited the program's results. Because most participants had not initially known what to expect from the program, the teams did not necessarily include the agency staff members who could best use the program content. Then, not having been given much advice on how to share what they had learned, the participants struggled to engage colleagues who had not attended a summer institute. The inclusion of outside stakeholders on the team sometimes worked out well for the sites but sometimes did not; in particular, the mix of management and governance (i.e., board members) on teams was very seldom seen as a strength. Some participants told us that implementing what ELPE was teaching exceeded their agency's capacity, in spite of the consultants' help, and budget cutbacks were sometimes a factor in the capacity problem. Turnover in leadership and staff was often said to impede implementation. In short, the lessons of ELPE appeared to have a fragile foothold in participating sites, subject to disruption by a number of contextual factors.

What the University Learned

The Partnership for Leaders in Education (PLE) remains active, still under the joint leadership of the deans of the Darden and Curry Schools at the University of Virginia. Program

leaders commented in interviews that the legacy of the Wallace ELPE program can be seen in their ongoing School Turnaround Specialist Program. In particular, based on exposure to the Wallace idea of aligned, cohesive leadership, the turnaround program has shifted its focus: previously oriented to building turnaround capacity in individual schools, it now emphasizes the district role in supporting schools. A person who was instrumental in this change of emphasis echoed the Wallace cohesive leadership framework in saying:

> *We still believe in having right principal in place, but just getting the right [school] leadership won't solve turnaround problems…. The district creates the environment and conditions, removes barriers, provides a strong and supportive infrastructure.*

The way in which PLE works with districts now has the benefit of learning from some missteps in the Wallace-supported program. Having encountered pushback and disappointment from some of the teams after they arrived on campus for the ELPE program, PLE now devotes time and care to "the upfront work" before a district begins the turnaround program, including an effort to communicate clearly about expectations, and also to customize the program for participants:

> *We're working now on a district readiness assessment. So there's a clearer understanding of what the expectations are. The district knows what we expect; we get a better handle on where they stand, their strengths, weaknesses, what we need to focus on.*

Another contrast with the ELPE program, based on learning from experience, is the inclusion of more structured team time in the current turnaround program. This design feature has been added in an effort to connect the case-based sessions more directly to educational practice:

> *We have the case method session, but then some kind of an exercise, so there'd be a structured kind of workshop, get the team to focus on lessons they should have learned from the case session preceding. Now they break out with their team, come back, and we debrief on that.*

Some faculty members showed mild regret over the limited interaction between Darden and Curry in the ELPE program, but most did not see larger issues of program design as their concern. One program leader said that more engagement of the university president could have helped bring the two schools together.

In general, our interviews with program leaders revealed little sense of disappointment in any regard, and few lessons learned. PLE program leaders expressed pride in the results that they reported to The Wallace Foundation at the end of ELPE. In particular, they were pleased with the statistic that most sites attributed increases in student achievement to the program. We attempted to locate evidence for this assertion, but have found only the statement in PLE's final progress report: "RAND also conducted a study that demonstrated that most participants believe they've experienced significant academic achievement gains as a result of their focus on alignment work." The report also cites a CELT finding, based on self-reports, that "60% of the districts have maintained their implementation of a Balanced Scorecard and Project Management Oversight

processes." Our site visits, however, suggest that the self-reporting in the CELT survey reflected a great deal of exaggeration: while most sites did say they were using tools learned from the program, what they called the BSC or PMOC was considerably simplified for local use, and in most cases only a handful of administrators were using their locally adapted tool.

Summary: What the University Learned

With the departure of the last ELPE program director from the university, it appears that program leaders are closing the book on this experience, largely satisfied with the self-reports that they elicited from participants and a set of upbeat case studies that faculty composed on the basis of site visits. They credited it with reshaping the PLE turnaround program in two key respects: district support for school leadership is now emphasized in a program that aims to turn schools around; and they spend time visiting and listening to prospective participants when initiating a working relationship with a district. They did not address the issues of the program's limited attention to education-specific content or to state-district relationships, which to us appeared to be notable weaknesses.

Conclusions: ELPE

The ELPE program at the University of Virginia impressed participants with the teaching approach of the business faculty and provided districts and states with tools they could use, albeit often in heavily modified forms, for planning and project management. The curriculum had only a limited focus on the field of education, in part because faculty from the school of education took a lower and lower profile over the years of the program's operation. Increasingly, the presentation skills and case method of the business faculty dominated the summer offerings.

Consultants played a key role in the program, visiting the participating sites to support and guide their use of the BSC and PMOC tools. Participants found this hands-on help to be useful. With sites using the tools in quite different ways and for different purposes, tailored onsite assistance was a valuable component of the program.

Because teams entered the program with only a general sense of what they would learn, they did not commit to the very structured process of BSC development and implementation that the program planners originally envisioned. Instead, most adopted the program's practical tools slowly and to a fairly limited degree. However, some enthusiastically embraced and used these tools. Some leaders found that use of the PMOC approach increased accountability and progress in task assignments; a few found that they could advance system improvements by using one or both of the tools. Rolling out the use of the tools to all key staff, including those who had not participated in the summer institutes, was always a challenge, however.

Including board members and other stakeholders on the teams had some advantages, such as strengthening lines of communication about educational issues and agency priorities. On the other hand, to the extent that teams tried to focus their work on specific management processes and tasks, the presence of non-agency staff on a team could be uncomfortable and even

counterproductive. The lack of facilitation for team meetings at the summer institutes exacerbated this problem.

The program did not focus on state-district issues. These interactions were part of the curriculum in one way: the original program design assumed that statewide use of a BSC would strengthen alignment between state and local priorities. Two of the six participating state agencies did find the tools useful in statewide communication and in carrying out state priorities. On the other hand, some states participated more sporadically in the program, in some cases citing a lack of quality in the offerings and in other cases simply saying that the program did not address their priorities.

Conclusions

These executive leadership programs had several parts, each requiring participants to contribute time and effort, and each potentially offering value to the sites:

- First, at a basic level, the universities provided on-campus professional development requiring an investment of about 15 high-level person weeks per site over two summers, as well as a cash payment. With the exception of the teams that did not return for a second summer, our interviews indicated that most participants perceived this professional development to be of high quality.

- Second, the universities also offered follow-up assistance for the sites in the form of coaching, consulting assistance, and brief in-state retreats. The perceptions of this assistance varied a great deal, with some teams and individuals finding it to be a good support for their work that introduced some improvements in policy and practice. The greatest amount of change occurred in sites that identified specific local or state tasks with which the programs could help them.

- Third, at a fundamental level, the programs offered something else: the opportunity to embrace complex strategies for system change that, if fully implemented, would entail fundamental changes in the sites. Not surprisingly, neither university's signature strategy was fully realized in any site, but bits and pieces could be found in many sites.

Overview of Results

As a capsule summary, we found the following types of results in participating sites:

- Participants in ExEL reported that in their regular work they paid more attention to aligning policy and practice to focus on the instructional core. ExEL participants in some states also reported increased appreciation and understanding of state and district roles, and some increase in positive communications between the state department of education and school districts.

- Districts and some states that participated in the Darden-Curry ELPE program achieved varying degrees of progress in developing BSCs and implementing PMOC processes. Some leaders in the districts that established PMOCs reported discernible improvements in the management of specific activities, with increased accountability for progress and completion. Participants also reported that they learned from the on-campus sessions and from follow-up presentations on topics such as communications with stakeholders and team building.

There were also characteristic shortfalls in the results of the programs:

- Implementation of system-wide changes in any site required a process of engaging the efforts of leaders and stakeholders who had not been on the team attending the on-campus institutes. This process was seldom very successful.

- While ExEL offered a strong conceptual framework, participants might lack the practical tools to implement the framework as part of their work. The ELPE program had the opposite shortcoming: its practical tools were not integrated into a vision that might drive system change.

Our study showed strengths and weaknesses of each aspect of the university programs' design and implementation, judging chiefly by the results found in the participating sites. We focus here on what was common to both programs with respect to their summer institutes, the coaching or consulting, the local work with which they connected, and the theme of state-local relationships.

When participants described their experience in the summer institutes, most focused on the high-powered presentation skills of the Harvard or Darden faculty members. The sessions they attended on campus were distinctly superior to typical professional development offerings, and participants appreciated the differences. The name recognition of the universities was an asset to each program as well. When we asked what they had learned from the summer institutes, however, many interviewees had trouble remembering more than a few catch phrases, especially from the business-focused cases. Several observed that they wished more connections had been drawn to education. Almost all said they wished they had had more time with their teams. At Harvard, the sessions that directly challenged participants' willingness to make changes in their own leadership were memorable to most participants, and most viewed these sessions as valuable.

Coaching from ExEL or consulting services from CELT reportedly helped participating sites apply what they had learned. Indeed, we believe that much less would have happened onsite had these program emissaries not worked with the sites over the long haul. The sites varied a great deal in how deeply they engaged in the changes that the coaches or consultants tried to support, however. As we have discussed in detail in this report, contextual factors made a huge difference. These included the existing priorities a participating agency had set, the vision held by key leaders, organizational capacity and culture, and stability or change in leadership.

What was common across sites, though, was a struggle to roll out the lessons learned to a larger group than the team that participated directly in the summer institutes. Neither program included in its curriculum a set of lessons that would help sites with the challenge of enlisting other agency staff or stakeholders in sharing a vision and working toward its realization.

Both programs missed some opportunities to make their content, pedagogy, and assistance more relevant and useful to the participants. After the first year, in which a very rapid program launch was necessary, leaders in both programs could have spent more time working with participating sites to identify site-specific issues and priorities to address in campus-based activities. On the other hand, more extensive tailoring would have depended on the active

involvement of and consultation with leaders at the sites, and it is an open question whether they would have been willing to invest time and energy in such a process.

The school-year activities (coaching, consulting services, and in-state institutes or mid-year reviews) potentially offered valuable opportunities to tailor program activities to participant needs and interests. In a very real sense the coaches and consultants were the programs' eyes and ears in the sites. The ExEL coaches, with a long-term relationship with the sites built into the program design, were especially well positioned to provide information to the program faculty and staff that could have informed efforts to make program content and focus more relevant to the sites. Early efforts to take advantage of the coaches' insights fell short of what would have been possible. The ELPE consultants, especially those from CELT, were also in a position to provide insights about site interests and needs, but the program did not have any mechanisms—formal or informal—for taking advantage of this resource to inform decisions about mid-course corrections.

It is also possible that more extensive tailoring of program activities could have included attention to issues of sites' organizational capacity. To be sure, an important purpose of both programs was to increase organizational capacity to improve education. At the same time, a key finding of the evaluation is that limited organizational capacity to effect change was a significant impediment to more extensive application and use of two programs' concepts in several participating states and districts. Should the two universities have done more to identify and address capacity issues? In our view, remediating specific problems in organizational and team capacity is beyond the scope of what the two programs could have reasonably been expected to do as part of their work with participating states and districts. A more practical, although still imperfect solution to the capacity problem would have been more explicit discussion and negotiation about program content and expectations and more targeted selection of sites and team members.

Fostering cohesive state-local relationships was part of the original purpose of The Wallace Foundation in launching these programs, but on this score the programs' achievements were disappointing. ExEL did focus to some extent on vertical alignment and, especially, greater trust between levels. Some progress could be seen in the statements of local participants, along the lines of, "I've realized that the state is not actually the enemy." Most state participants, however, were frank in acknowledging that their agencies' practice had not changed much. The exception was one state that had made a high-level commitment to working in partnership with districts; in this state agency, some commented that they saw a difference in their interactions. In the Darden-Curry ELPE program, where the original notion had been that use of a statewide BSC would bring alignment, there was less attention to working with states on their interactions with districts, and we saw less progress on state-local relationships.

In reflecting on the operations and results of these programs, we are struck by the importance of two ways in which they departed from conventional executive education: they worked with teams; and they called on participating sites to engage in long-term change efforts. The challenging dimensions of these program choices deserve serious thought by anyone contemplating a similar intervention in executive education aimed at education agencies. We elaborate below.

Teams as the Units of Change, and System Improvements as the Goal

At the heart of each program's approach was ongoing work with teams. Calling on the teams to understand and apply complex system-improvement strategies in their states and districts meant that the programs faced serious challenges. The members of each team brought a range of experience and perspectives to their engagement in program activities. In most cases what the team members did not bring was extensive experience working as team or a collective commitment to—perhaps even interest in—the changes envisioned by the university program leaders and staff.

A central finding in our evaluation is that there was a fundamental mismatch between program goals and content on the one hand and the participant teams as they were constituted. The teams included people who would be responsible for carrying out changes in policies and practices, people who would lead the efforts, people who would hold others accountable for the changes and their success, and people who would be the focus of the changes. The two programs simply did not anticipate or address this diversity in participant perspectives in meaningful ways.

Strategic selection of states and districts. The two programs faced a significant challenge in spring 2006: they needed to both finalize their curricula and recruit state departments of education and districts that would send teams to week-long on-campus institutes in that summer. Thus there was very little time to communicate with state and district leaders about the nature of the curricula, the programs' expectations for participation and engagement in significant system-change activities, the kinds of additional support that were planned, or the extent to which the program components might mesh with and support state and local priorities. There was even less time for state and local leaders to consider the program expectations and whether they wanted to commit themselves and their organizations to meeting them, or to craft team membership around the various tasks that might be associated with meeting program expectations .

The solution to this problem seems obvious: allow more time for recruitment. More time would have permitted states and districts to ponder their options more carefully as they decided whether to participate. More extensive discussion of expectations for state and local participation would have posed a further challenge, though: it would have required more detailed upfront explanations of those expectations. The universities would have had to explain more about the kinds of system changes that they envisioned, the magnitude of state and local investments of time and personnel that would likely be necessary to carry out the system changes, the expectations for public accountability for progress in achieving program goals, and the kinds of support that the universities would provide over the period of engagement in the program.

In retrospect, what looked like a timing challenge may have been a marketing challenge as well. The two universities were marketing their programs to states and districts, and they had to close the deal on relatively short notice. Marketing week-long summer learning activities on the campuses of two well-respected universities was easier than marketing engagement in complex, long-term system changes, even with ongoing support. Some state and district leaders recognized that the program offered opportunities to advance their initiatives. Others saw

something simpler: opportunities for professional learning and for improving relationships with key stakeholders.

It is important to note here that the marketplace and hence the marketing efforts were constrained by Wallace. While The Wallace Foundation believed the two leadership development programs could inform future offerings in colleges and universities around the country, it also viewed the initiative as advancing grantees' work that was already under way. To achieve both ends, Wallace worked with the two universities and its state and local grantees to ensure grantee participation. States and districts that had already received Wallace support and had become part of a national network welcomed additional support and continued participation in the network, although many were unsure about unsure about the possible payoffs and opportunity costs of participating in the leadership programs.

In the end, The Wallace Foundation's influence in identifying and encouraging states and districts to participate made the marketing task easier and less complicated. The downside was that it undermined the larger experiment by eliminating the need for the two programs to actively compete in the leadership development marketplace. The result is that we do not know much about how the leadership development strategies and resources developed by the two universities would have fared in a more open market.

Once the programs began and the dimensions of the expected agency commitment became clearer, many participants pushed back. For example, sites in the Darden-Curry program said they did not have staff time available for developing 90-day plans or undergoing intensive instructional reviews. The program scaled back its expectations in response to these objections. But on the more fundamental expectation that the innovations taught in the program would reshape local or state planning and management, the result was simply limited implementation, not overt rebellion.

Strategic selection of team members. For both programs, state and district leaders selected team members based largely on their own expectations and priorities for involvement in the programs. The teams typically included agency leaders as well as important stakeholders (e.g., state and local school board members, community representatives, union leaders). Several teams included principals, and a few included teachers. Team composition varied, often a great deal, from one session to the next, and, in the case of ExEL, team membership expanded during the in-state institutes as additional state and district staff and stakeholders joined the teams.

Among agency leaders and staff who were invited to join the teams, most said they initially understood they would have an opportunity to learn things that would help them in their work, and they welcomed that prospect. When superintendents and chiefs invited key stakeholders from outside their agencies, they typically intended to help these stakeholders better understand the agencies, strengthen existing partnerships, or lay the foundation for new partnerships. They did not necessarily expect to engage them in planning and implementing complex, long-term system changes.

Team composition created some tensions when the teams tried to tackle system changes. This work required teams to figure out not only how to carry out the changes (e.g., develop a

BSC, organize and operate a PMOC, bring programs and policies into alignment in support of the instructional core) but also how to involve stakeholders. If the decisions to participate in the programs had been based on decisions to embark on the kinds of system changes that the programs envisioned, state and district leaders could have selected individuals who would be responsible for planning and rollout of the change efforts. For team members who might not have roles in planning and early implementation, their role on the teams was not clear, and some lost interest. Because team composition usually had not been shaped by planning for specific system changes, the heterogeneity of the teams sometimes undermined team activities. Further, it does not appear that the universities recognized that the diversity in perspectives and experience probably diminished the teams' capacity to act, despite the knowledge and skills of individual team members. The opportunity cost of excluding key individuals also could impede progress on system changes.

Throughout this evaluation we have looked at the Wallace-funded leadership development programs through two lenses: as professional development, and as change initiatives. As professional development, the programs provided generally engaging learning activities, especially during the summer institutes. ExEL was organized around a well-developed set of core themes, with program activities that addressed those themes fairly consistently. The Darden case-based learning activities were engaging, but generally not explicitly linked to K-12 issues. In addition, the overall portfolio of activities in the University of Virginia's ELPE program lacked coherence. At the same time, the introduction of the BSC and PMOC provided tools that districts and some states found useful.

But the difficult intersection of the programs as professional development and as system change initiatives was visible in the "homework" that both programs assigned and the teams' efforts to complete their assignments. Here, we would argue that the assignments (e.g., developing 90-day plans and theories of action, developing BSCs, establishing PMOCs, identifying and carrying out changes that addressed the instructional core and that reflected collaboration between state departments of education and districts) were consistent with and logical extensions of the content of the two programs. In our view, the participating teams signed up for professional development and unexpectedly got system change, or at least pressure for system change, as part of the bargain. Put somewhat differently, sharing the professional learning experiences and reflections with a diverse group from your state department or school district was a worthwhile activity and afforded opportunities to bring diverse perspectives to bear on important issues. Moving those conversations from the campus to state and district offices was a very different matter and almost certainly required commitment and participation from different people if the conversations were to be translated into meaningful action and progress on system change.

Lessons from These Programs

Although no two programs of executive education are alike, and clearly these two differed in many ways, nevertheless the strengths and weaknesses we found can serve as guideposts for program design for other universities that might contemplate offering executive

education to teams of education leaders, and for funders that might contemplate supporting executive education as an instrument of system improvement.

Lessons for Universities

First and most fundamentally for program design, the very notion of educating a team over a multi-year period deserves careful thought. To be sure, there are disadvantages to working only with individuals or convening a team only once (chiefly the likelihood that what is learned will not make a lasting difference in a site), but as we have seen the stability of team membership and the ability of any team to drive change is questionable. In hindsight, the universities would have done well to specify more clearly and thoughtfully the composition of a team in light of expectations for team engagement and progress on reforms, to insist on greater continuity in team membership, and to give the teams more help in sharing their new insights more widely for system change in their sites. At the same time, even with any or all of these design steps, a university would also have to anticipate a great deal of turnover in team membership and to provide continuous orientation and support for the newcomers.

As we have emphasized in this concluding chapter, most participants brought unclear expectations to the ExEL and ELPE programs, and local leaders had rarely been able to assemble their teams strategically based on an understanding of the program design and goals. More advance work with leaders and teams might have enabled the universities to communicate the program's central goals more clearly, to understand the purposes that the program could serve for each site and the capacity that each site brought, and to negotiate mutual expectations.

For a university seeking to offer a program like these, there are characteristic strengths and challenges. Strengths can include the faculty's knowledge and skills, which all participants in these programs appreciated, and the on-campus sessions that give participants a chance to step away from their daily routines and consider new ideas with their colleagues. A challenge for a university-based program, however, is striking a balance between the faculty's existing teaching repertoire and the content or pedagogy that might best address participants' purposes. Participants in these programs, while impressed with the on-campus institutes, noted that some of the offerings reflected what was available rather than what they most wanted to learn. In these particular programs, too, the substantive integration of content between education and other schools in the universities posed challenges. The pre-existing alliance between Harvard's schools of education and business allowed that relationship to work well, but the Kennedy School's role was not as prominent, and at the University of Virginia the schools of education and business were conspicuously unable to forge a partnership.

A related issue of missed connections arose in the reliance on coaches and consultants, respectively, in the programs. Our evidence from the sites indicates that these program ambassadors were a notable strength of each program: their hands-on work with participants—and, just as important, with others in the sites—was critical in supporting implementation of program lessons. Yet the universities' efforts to incorporate them as partners in the work, tapping their knowledge of the sites to inform program design, could have been more consistent and extensive.

Lessons for Funders

For a foundation or government agency hoping to stimulate education improvement through executive education, there are related lessons. Again, the notion of educating teams deserves thought: program design features could potentially make this approach more effective, but the funder should consider what aims might be best attained through team learning. The types of changes in system function that were goals of this program might ask too much of any imaginable set of teams. In particular, changing state-district relationships through team learning was a very tall order; cross-team learning opportunities were few, and the problems in state-district relationships were entrenched.

In working with universities, a funder must be realistic about the difficulty of bringing together the faculties of different schools, and should be prepared to monitor this process closely if a strong, substantive alliance is deemed essential. In addition, the funder should recognize that intellectual property rights offer an incentive for faculty members to put their best efforts into the development of curriculum and materials, and should consider making those rights available to the faculty.

We have commented on the challenges of marketing these programs to states and districts. Finding the necessary dollars (even at subsidized prices) and staff time to participate was daunting for the sites. The programs studied here were in a special situation, however: the universities were marketing their services to a captive clientele of a foundation's grantees. This means that we cannot assess what the demand might be for similar programs offered on a more open market. What we did observe was that tensions arose from both the perceived high price and the foundation's role: few sites saw their university program as a priority freely chosen and consistently embraced. Had they chosen a program because they believed it was best suited to supporting their highest priorities in system improvement, conceivably the results would have been greater. It was also the case that the sites' power as consumers was constrained by the foundation's role in encouraging their participation. If a funder were to support a university program without simultaneously providing grant support to the participants, the dynamics would have been different in many unpredictable ways.

Having noted all these struggles and challenges, however, we must still salute the ambition of these programs of executive education. The programs brought new ideas and tools to many sites and important results to some sites. The Wallace Foundation and the universities tackled the challenging job of educating leadership teams, and their efforts may have paved the way for further progress in fostering organizational learning.