



A Cultural Change With Momentum



Des Moines Public Schools'
Journey of Implementing the
**Wallace Foundation's Principal
Supervisor Initiative Grant**

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Matt Smith, Associate Superintendent and Dr. Tom Ahart, Superintendent observe and discuss how Findley Elementary is implementing teaming (Barb Adams, Principal in background).

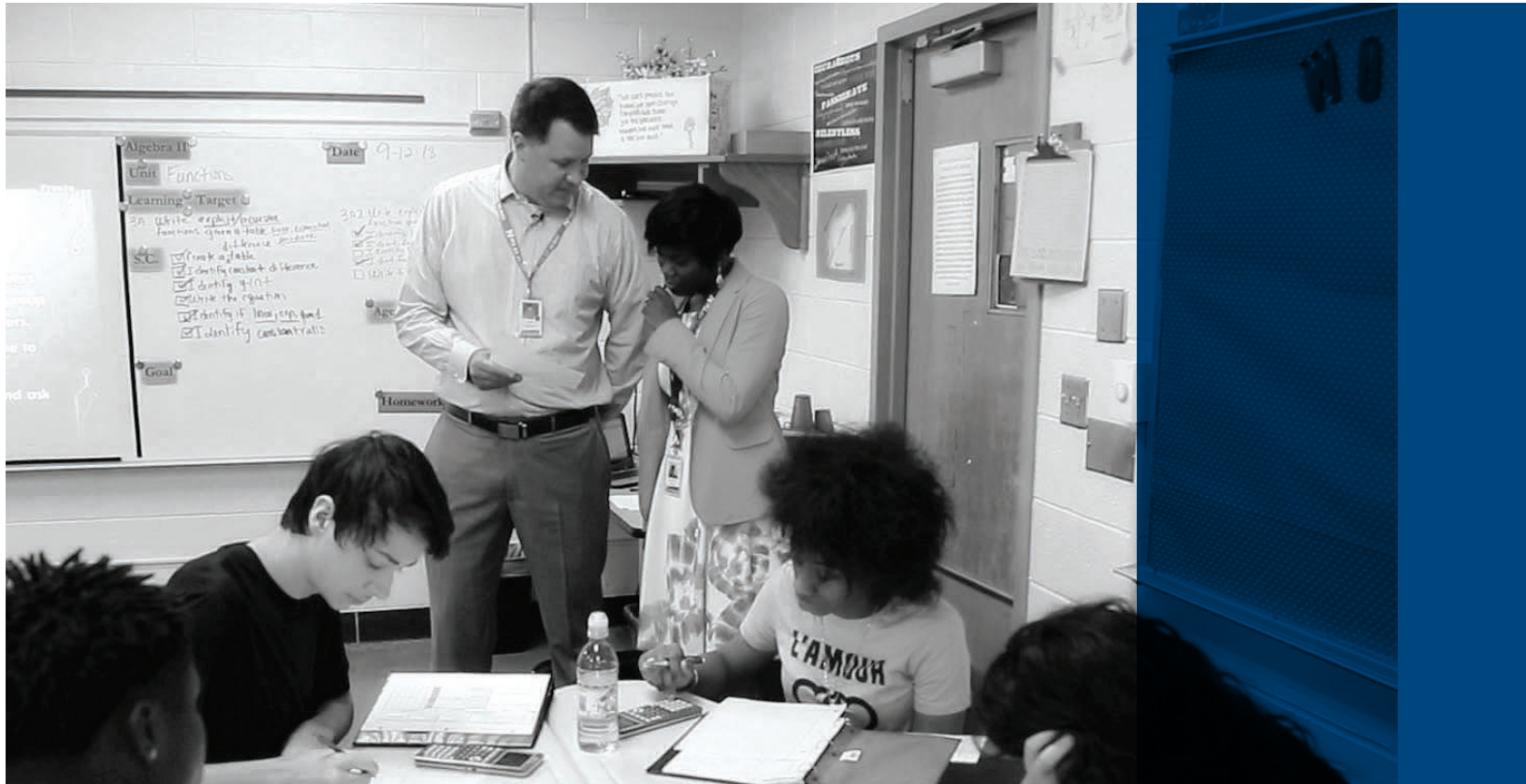


EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

THE JOURNEY

This white paper outlines the journey of Des Moines Public Schools (DMPS) after receiving Wallace Foundation funds through its Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI). The Wallace Foundation invested nearly \$3 million in a significant multi-year effort to help DMPS improve the effectiveness of its principals through the development of a principal supervisor who would provide instructional support. Research has shown that having this supervisor role for principals increases student learning and achievement of students.

This document highlights the principal supervisor role and how the restructuring of the central office around this initiative has made DMPS more responsive to inequities and learning gaps. This document also lays out challenges that face education today and how the PSI and DMPS are working to overcome those obstacles. DMPS has been at the forefront of developing a support system for principals. Their demographics and forward thinking put them in a position to be a national model for urban education.



“This work has absolutely opened our eyes and created opportunities for us to be intentional around our classroom visits and observations to have in the moment conversations with teachers around closing the daily (learning) gap for students.”

Matt Smith
DMPS Associate Superintendent

Ben Graeber, Principal of North High School provides on the spot coaching to teacher Samantha Brown.

URBAN EDUCATION LANDSCAPE

02

CHALLENGES THAT FACE URBAN EDUCATION TODAY

Urban school districts across the nation are faced with a myriad of challenges — decreased funding, increased student poverty, ethnic inequities, language barriers and students experiencing trauma. Another challenge is transforming the learning environment away from a traditional and industrial model of schooling. Schools today are highly regimented and deeply entrenched into past practice. Innovation is not commonly associated with public education. Districts across the nation are beginning to reimagine their current structure to put a hyper-focus on each pupil instead of the objectives laid out in the old system of learning.

With that, districts have a professional and moral obligation to examine cultural proficiencies. Urban schools are struggling with identifying and eliminating the inequities that exist, not only through student outcomes but also through student, family and staff experiences. Educators believe that equity is the greatest civil rights issue of the current era, and the battle is to recognize processes and delivery practices that will create global opportunities and outcomes for student success.

Edmunds Elementary Principal Jaynette Rittman welcomes student to school and helps him with his coat. Edmunds intentional engages students before classes begin in the morning as part of their "5 positive touches before school" strategy.



BACKGROUND OF DES MOINES PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Des Moines Public Schools is the largest provider of public education in Iowa. The District has more than 34,000 students and nearly 5,000 teachers and staff. There are more than 60 schools in the district. DMPS has been operating in Iowa's capital for more than 100 years. The next largest school district in Iowa is half the size of DMPS. It has a responsibility to the state to provide valuable insight to the legislature, state universities and community colleges to inform and shape their educational programs.

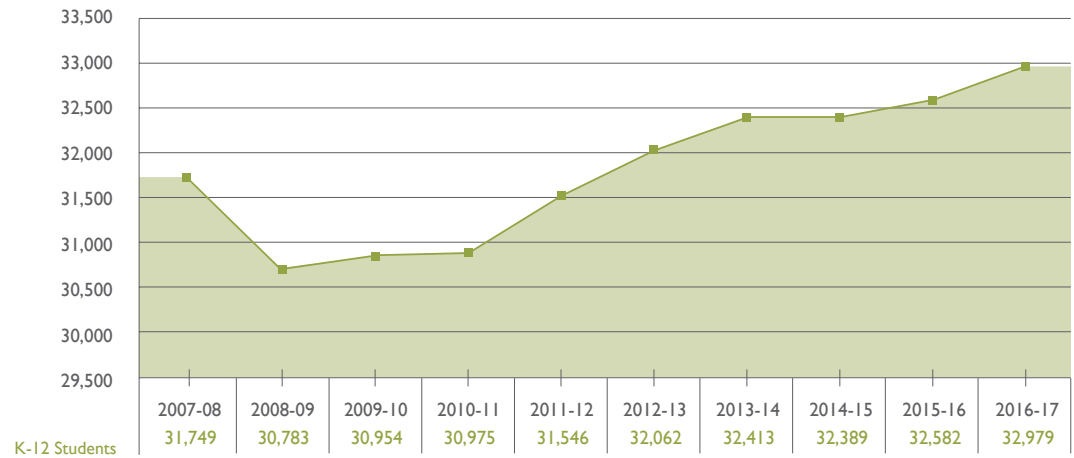
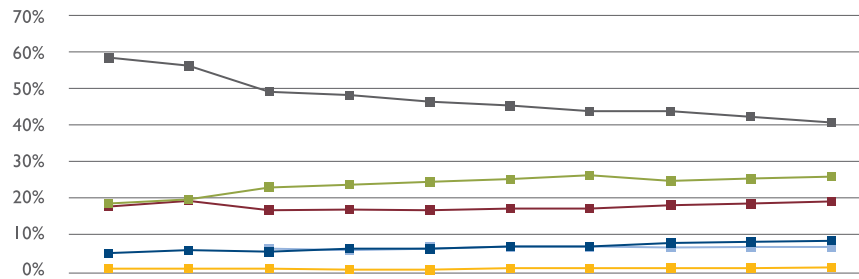


Figure 1: DMPS Certified Grade K-12 Enrollment



	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Asian	5.1%	5.6%	5.3%	5.5%	6.3%	6.3%	6.5%	7.3%	7.7%	7.8%
African American	17.8%	18.8%	16.6%	16.7%	16.6%	16.7%	17.0%	17.9%	18.3%	18.8%
Hispanic	18.7%	19.3%	22.6%	23.4%	24.2%	25.2%	26.0%	24.3%	25.0%	25.7%
White	57.8%	55.8%	48.8%	47.8%	46.0%	45.0%	43.5%	43.4%	42.0%	40.4%
Multi-Racial			6.2%	6.2%	6.4%	6.4%	6.6%	6.5%	6.4%	6.5%
Other	0.6%	0.5%	0.5%	0.4%	0.4%	0.5%	0.5%	0.6%	0.6%	0.8%

Figure 2: DMPS Grade K-12 Percent Enrollment by Race/Ethnicity

DEMOGRAPHICS

Over the past ten years, DMPS has experienced a net increase in K-12 enrollment of about 3.9 percent, or 1,230 students. The demographic makeup of the student body has shifted as enrollment increases. DMPS has a rapidly growing refugee population as the enrollment of English-language learners (ELL) has increased by more than 60 percent over the last decade. Currently, ELL students represent 21 percent of DMPS students. The diversity of the DMPS student population is among the highest in the country.

MISCONCEPTIONS OF IOWA

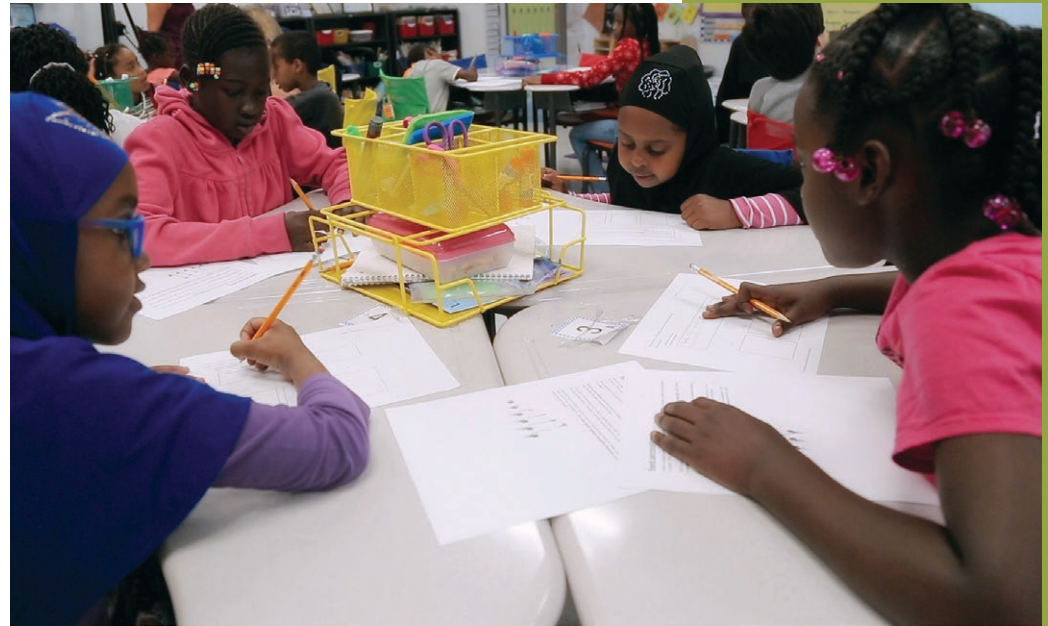
Because Iowa is a national leader in eggs, corn and pork, the state is often solely portrayed with an agricultural focus. However, it is often forgotten that Des Moines is an epicenter for the advanced manufacturing sector and finance and insurance sectors. Des Moines has a robust economy that is rapidly attracting young business professionals.

Iowa is also a national leader in education. According to the United States Department of Education, Iowa is among the top nationally in high school graduation rates and Iowa students have one of the highest average ACT scores in the country.

DES MOINES: A NATIONAL MODEL FOR URBAN EDUCATION

With all of these factors considered, Des Moines should be regarded as a national model for urban education. Although a smaller urban city, the challenges and successes Des Moines and its public schools experience match that of any larger metropolitan city. The district also believes its unique size and demographics allow Des Moines to be a place where bigger communities can model certain practices to scale.

Unlike many school districts in the country, DMPS is taking a proactive approach in tackling equity work by having a hyper-focus on instructional leadership. Des Moines is one of the few districts that has taken a systematic method to break down internal departmental silos that a lot of other larger districts struggle with to create better communication and a more unified approach to student achievement.



Des Moines Public Schools has been implementing student teams to release autonomy and engage students in their learning.

THE WALLACE FOUNDATION

Named after DeWitt and Lila Acheson Wallace, founders of The Reader's Digest, the philanthropic organization's mission is to foster improvement in learning and enrichment for disadvantaged children.



OVERVIEW OF PSI

In 2014, the Wallace Foundation started the Principal Supervisor Initiative (PSI), a four-year, \$24 million-dollar effort to redefine principal supervision in six urban school districts. The initiative sought to help districts transform a position traditionally focused on administration, operations and compliance to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to improve instruction in schools.

Numerous studies have pointed to the importance of effective leaders for teacher satisfaction, teacher retention, school climate, parent engagement and student achievement. Principal supervisors are a potential point of leverage for supporting and developing principals, but relatively few districts in the United States have invested in such efforts.

Staff from Prince George's County Public Schools join with DMPS to learn from each other. The Wallace Foundation encourages partner districts to visit and learn from each other. Prince George's County Public Schools (PGCPS) has become a critical thought partner of DMPS through the Wallace network.



THE FOUR GOALS OF THE PSI

1. Design, implement and test training and support to improve the performance of all principal supervisors in selected districts
2. Assist districts in reducing principal supervisors' "span of control" and in planning central office redesign to support and sustain these changes
3. By looking across all the districts, develop emerging lessons about the best ways to change the central office structure to support principal supervisors
4. Assess the effectiveness and the effects of these activities across participating districts

Matt Smith, Associate Superintendent, facilitates discussion of the ELLC -ESSA Leadership Learning Community made up of education colleagues representing 10 different states.

THE FIVE CORE COMPONENTS OF PSI

1. Revising the principal supervisors' job description to focus on instructional leadership
2. Reducing principal supervisors' span of control (the number of principals they oversee) and changing how supervisors are assigned to principals
3. Training supervisors and developing their capacity to support principals
4. Developing systems to identify and train new supervisors (succession planning)
5. Strengthening central office structures to support and sustain changes in the principal supervisor role





Ben Graeber, Principal of North High School joins student team while Tim Schott, Secondary Executive Director, observes.

“(Principal supervisors) are there to help you move forward.”

Erica Eganhouse
Instructional Coach

FUNDING GUIDELINES

The Wallace Foundation awards grant dollars to grantees who would use funds in a way that would impact districts beyond services. For the PSI, the foundation invited only a handful of school districts across the nation to apply. They were seeking districts who have already had processes in place that would support a principal supervisor position.

The six urban school districts who participated in the Principal Supervisor Initiative were:

- Broward County Public Schools, Florida
- Baltimore City Public Schools, Maryland
- Cleveland Metropolitan School District, Ohio
- Des Moines Public Schools, Iowa
- Long Beach Unified School District, California
- Minneapolis Public Schools, Minnesota.

Before the funds were awarded in 2014, Des Moines Public Schools and Superintendent Dr. Thomas Ahart had taken steps to develop and restructure their central office by creating a department called The Office of Schools to put a stronger focus on supporting schools.

The district recognized the benefit of having professional development but did not have the resources necessary to thoroughly flush out the approach. The district received \$3 million over a four-year period to build upon this approach.

MAKING AN IMPACT

03

THE OFFICE OF SCHOOLS

Des Moines Public Schools created The Office of Schools department in July 2013 as a part of Superintendent Ahart's vision. The Office of Schools and the principal supervisors within the department are responsible for supervision, instructional leadership growth and development, evaluation of principals and schools.

The core purpose of the department was to increase the district's collective capacity by providing support and coaching in these areas:

- Instructional leadership
- School improvement
- Culture and climate
- Human capital development

DMPS was also able to transition to “networks” rather than zones. This approach better aligns the schools to principal supervisors based on level, geographic location and achievement status.

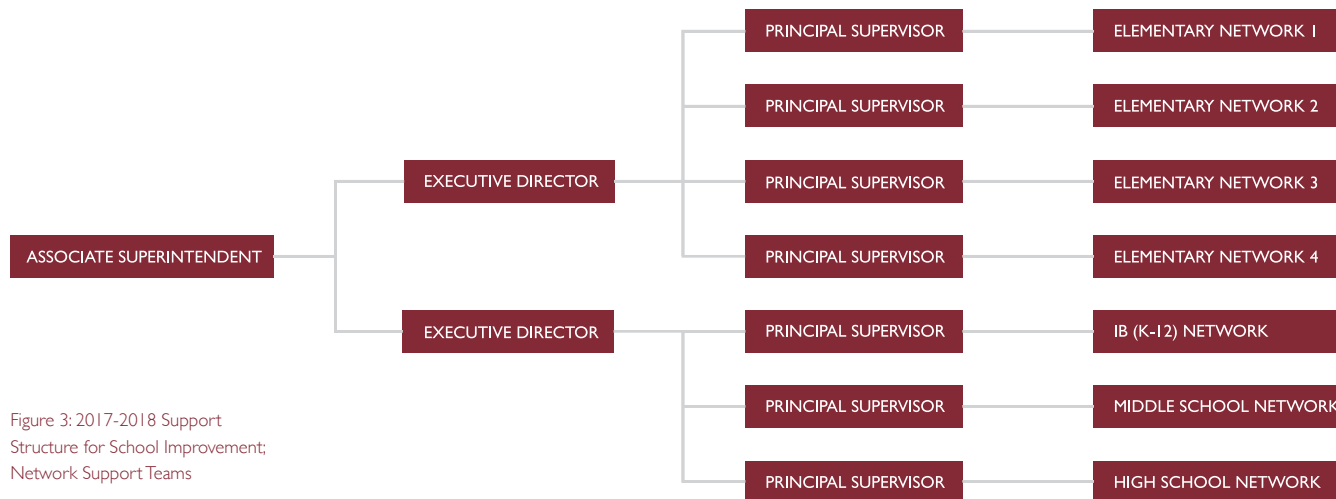


Figure 3: 2017-2018 Support Structure for School Improvement; Network Support Teams



Jill Burke, Principal of Howe Elementary, provides feedback to Erica Eganhouse after a classroom observation as Wayne Knutson, Elementary Director observes.

THE PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR POSITION

Principal supervisors evaluate, coach and support principals. The principal supervisor works side by side with principals and visits classrooms, monitoring instruction. The Wallace Grant has allowed the district to transform a position traditionally focused on administration, operations and compliance to one dedicated to developing and supporting principals to improve instruction in schools.

As a result of the work in Des Moines, principal supervisors have a templated schedule that commits about 30 percent of their time to the central office and 70 percent in the schools working directly with building leaders. Before, those percentages were flipped.

Generally, there are five critical aspects of a principal supervisor's responsibilities:

- Identify the training needs of the principals they support and provide coaching on an individualized basis
- Manage learning networks among the principals with whom they work
- Strengthen principals' accountability by setting goals and objectives, supporting them in achieving them, and holding them accountable for the results
- Strategically marshal resources and relationships in the community and serve as a buffer for principals with local groups
- Develop clear and shared visions, policies and expectations that focus on instructional improvement



While observing a classroom, Mike Lord, Elementary Director, provides coaching to Jaynette Rittman, Principal of Edmunds Elementary as Susan Tallman, Elementary Executive Director observes.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR SPAN OF CONTROL

In the schools chosen for the initiative, principal supervisors supported about 18 buildings. With the vision of the principal supervisor in mind, Des Moines dropped that number to about ten buildings, allowing the district to drastically decrease the span of control.

As a result of this change, principals reported they had developed stronger and more trusting relationships with their supervisors than in the past. With this reduced span of control, principals and supervisors were able to put more focus on instructional leadership.

PRINCIPAL POSITION BEFORE AND AFTER

Prior to Dr. Ahart's leadership, principals often felt isolated having to both manage the building and oversee instruction. There was also very little coaching or professional leadership instituted to support and develop the principals.

With the help of the PSI, there was a shift for the principals to be hyper-focused on the instructional leadership of their building. With the professional leadership that was provided, principals said they were able to build capacity and better lead their buildings. Principals also felt they had a support system to turn to as they developed a strong relationship with their principal supervisor. A network of principals was also created as a result of this transformation that created a community where principals could learn and share information. It was once a position that felt isolated and now it's a role principals feel has support and coaching.

Andy Cole, Wallace Consultant, provides his observations while participating in a site visit from Prince George's County Public Schools.



■ CHALLENGES: A BALANCING ACT

Each day, urban school districts face new challenges. As enrollment increases and demographics change, teaching practices need to constantly adapt while still providing the same high-quality instruction.

Des Moines found throughout this process, that their largest challenge was balancing the time between providing leaders with off-site training and having them in the buildings. It was also difficult to find time for the director or supervisor to follow up on how the training was being implemented into instruction. As with any urban district, they were faced with student mobility within the district.

When the PSI began, principal supervisors also found a challenge balancing between being a supervisor and a coach. The key to success was the reduced span of control so that principal supervisors had more time with each principal. Time allows for the relationship to develop and a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the building. The principal supervisor can then vacillate as needed between coaching and supervising.

SUCCESSES: THE CHANGE IN CULTURE

The culture of the district has gone through a transformation as the span of control was reduced. The PSI served as the conduit by which Superintendent Ahart implemented his vision of schools being at the center of the district's work. Dr. Ahart set the expectation that central office departments must realign their work to have a hyper-focus on supporting schools.

The work had a cascading impact that was pleasantly unexpected that unified the district. The vision of the district could be more easily executed by the principal supervisors to the principals to teachers and ultimately positively impact the students. It allowed the entire district to be calibrated to the same frequency. When students transfer from one school to another within the district, there are not as many learning gaps and the student is able to continue with the education they had previously.

Another success was the ability to develop a principal pipeline to establish leadership consistency. Span of control influences the entire leadership team in a building. Principal supervisors were now able to not only invest time with principals but engage with other administrators and teacher leaders in the building. This transfer of knowledge and leadership was the beginning of their leadership pipeline development.

HOW WAS IT RECEIVED IN THE CLASSROOM

As in any classroom across the country, there's inevitable hesitation from teachers and students when any supervisor visits a classroom. Throughout time, however, the teachers established a level of comfort with their support team. Teachers started to believe and understand the common goal of the principal supervisor initiative and encourage their support team to give critiques and criticisms. As capacity of the supervisors was built, they were able to more effectively deliver feedback to the teachers. In fact, once a teacher had the experience of getting this constructive feedback, they often were found asking their support team to provide more.

"This relationship is so trusting. I feel like I can be open and I can share my fears. I can share my vulnerability. I won't receive judgment but support and hope teachers feel the same."

Barb Adams
Principal at Findley
Elementary School





Susan Tallman, Elementary Executive Director, coaches Mike Lord, Elementary Director, during a classroom observation.

■ SUSTAINABILITY

From the start, Superintendent Ahart had budgeted and prepared for the principal supervisor framework with sustainability in mind. Prior to receiving Wallace funds the district reallocated general funds to add principal supervisors. Therefore when the funds were granted, the district allocated a majority for capacity building by subcontracting with external partners to provide high-quality professional development to expand the instructional leadership capacity of the principal supervisors.

Ensuring that the principal supervisor positions were funded through hard funds set the course for sustainability of the initiative from the start.



“We are excited about where we are at and the opportunity that exists before us this year and the years to come.”

Matt Smith
DMPS Associate Superintendent

MOVING FORWARD

■ CONCLUSION

Des Moines Public Schools aspires to maintain the existing momentum created by the initiative to ensure that progress continues on the same trajectory. The PSI has allowed there to be a hyper-focus on instructional leadership. Core instruction is the first and most critical step to make equitable experiences for each student. Although there is work yet to be accomplished, this new principal supervisor role puts student success at the heart of the district’s work.

This full transformation has had a cascading influence to all levels of the district from the superintendent’s office to the students. DMPS can also now more effectively develop teachers, principals and the central office around the changing needs of the students because there is an understood common language and instructional framework.

Their approach to building capacity and talents of their staff puts them in the most favorable position to continue this success both fundamentally and financially. Most importantly, the district learned that with any initiative, if you can’t lead it, support it and progress monitor it, the work is going to be wasted. With this reduced span of control across the district, DMPS is on the right track to be the model for urban education.

04

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OUR VISION:

BECOMING THE

MODEL

FOR

URBAN

EDUCATION

IN THE

UNITED

STATES

