

Supporting the Professional Growth of Central Office Leaders

By Marci Shepard

Building on Lessons Learned from Teacher and Principal Growth and Evaluation Systems

Last fall my son and I went to see *The Wizard of Oz* in 3-D at the movie theater. The movie started off in black-and-white, with Dorothy at her aunt and uncle's farm in Kansas. When the cyclone swept up Dorothy, movie patrons were instructed to put on 3-D glasses. Alas, Dorothy was deposited in the Land of Oz, which was vibrant with color and 3-dimensional.

It was in that moment sitting in the theater when I realized that before we had instructional and leadership frameworks, my instructional leadership was like Dorothy's Kansas. I *thought* I was seeing the whole spectrum of teaching and leading, but I was actually living in a black-and-white, 2-dimensional world. Once I looked through the lens of our instructional and leadership frameworks, classroom instruction and leadership came to life! I saw the fine-grained details of student learning, and I saw nuances of teacher and leader moves that I had missed before.

When asked how having an instructional framework for teachers and a leadership framework for principals impacts school systems, Washington administrators said it:

- Fosters development of a common vision
- Provides common language to talk about instruction and leadership

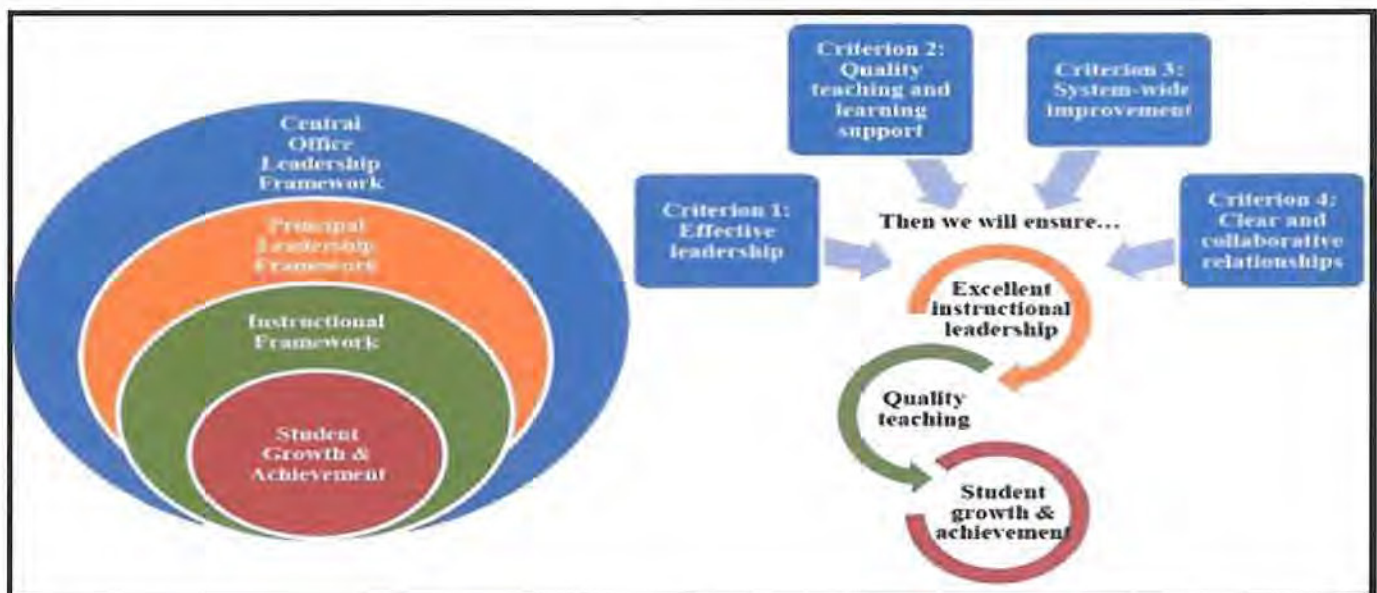
- Focuses on growth and informs professional learning
- Provides evidence for deeper, richer conversations
- Involves teachers and principals as collaborators
- Aligns student, teacher and principal goals

Central office administrators should engage in and support this kind of vibrant professional learning. The core of central office functions is ensuring student learning. Washington Association of School Administrators (WASA) Central Office Leadership Framework identifies the primary responsibilities of central office staff as pivotal partners with schools in the work to continually improve student learning through central office professional growth.

Alignment and Theory of Action

WASA's Central Office Leadership Framework is designed to support a common vision for instructional leadership and professional growth. The framework is intentionally aligned to teacher and leadership frameworks with student growth and achievement as the common goal for all of the frameworks.

To realize student growth and achievement, we believe we must have quality instruction in every classroom, every day, for every student. This is supported through our instructional framework. To realize quality instruction, we believe we must develop excellent instructional leaders. This is supported through our principal leadership framework.



To realize excellent instructional leadership, we believe we must develop: 1) effective leadership, 2) quality teaching and learning, 3) system-wide improvement, and 4) clear and collaborative relationships. These are supported through the Central Office Leadership Framework.

Components of the Central Office Leadership Framework

The Central Office Leadership Framework has four criteria. Each criteria are further defined by three elements. The criteria and elements are grounded in research from

Characteristics of Improved Districts: Themes from Research (Bylsma & Shannon, 2004).

In the framework, there are considerations for each criterion with a) examples of knowledge/skills, b) examples of supports to schools, and c) examples of evidence and measures. These criterion examples were not meant as a checklist, but rather as a range of ways in which knowledge and skills, support to schools, and evidence and measures could be demonstrated. Like the teacher and principal evaluation tools, there is a four-tiered rubric for each element.

CENTRAL OFFICE LEADERSHIP FRAMEWORK FRAMEWORK CRITERIA

	CRITERION 1 EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP	CRITERION 2 QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING SUPPORT	CRITERION 3 SYSTEM-WIDE IMPROVEMENT	CRITERION 4 CLEAR AND COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS
Elements	1.1 Focus on Student Learning	2.1 Quality Classroom Instruction	3.1 Effective Use of Data	4.1 Professional Culture and Collaborative Relationships
	1.2 Dynamic and Distributive Leadership	2.2 Coordinated and Aligned Curriculum and Assessment	3.2 Strategic Allocation of Resources	4.2 Clear Understanding of School and District Roles and Responsibilities
	1.3 Sustained Improvement Efforts	2.3 Coordinated and Job-Embedded Professional Development	3.3 Policy and Program Coherence	4.3 Engaging the Community and Managing the External Environment

Tailoring for Different Districts and Positions

This framework is intended to be used as a starting point for discussion and customizing. It emphasizes instructional leadership and does not encompass all evaluation criteria for non-instructional administrators in areas such as business, food service, and operations. However, we did attempt to make the language inclusive. For instance, one example of supports to schools for criterion one (effective leadership) states, "Visits schools and departments with a focus on improving practice." For a principal supervisor this might include visiting classrooms and collaboration time to improve instruction. For a nutrition services director this might include visiting the central kitchen and cafeterias. For a transportation director it might include visiting the central bus building or riding buses. With the support of the framework, every central office administrator—

regardless of role—can see where they fit in supporting quality teaching and learning. The framework may be tailored for different districts and positions, serving as a catalyst for bringing clarity to roles.

Some districts, like the Puyallup School District, have customized the document for different positions. Other school districts, like the Orting School District, are planning to use the framework to engage central office leaders in inquiry. For example, Orting teachers and principals are using University of Washington's Center for Educational Leadership inquiry cycle. The cycle includes: 1) self-assessment, 2) determining a focus, 3) implementation and support, and 4) analyzing impact. In the same way, central office administrators in Orting will engage in an inquiry cycle around the Central Office Leadership Framework.

1. Self-assess: Central office administrators will self-assess using guiding questions and rubric elements on a Central Office Leadership Framework self-assessment tool.
2. Determine a focus: Considering the self-assessment, strengths and challenges of the department, data, school improvement plans, feedback from stakeholders, and principal goals, the central office leader will set goals and determine evidence that will demonstrate meeting the goals.
3. Implementation and support: Just as principals support learning, collaboration, and provide feedback to teachers, and principal supervisors support learning, collaboration, and provide feedback to principals, central office evaluators will support learning, collaboration, and provide feedback to district leaders around their goals.
4. Analyze impact: The central office administrator and evaluator will examine data and analyze the impact of the data using the framework. They will decide whether to continue with the same goals or identify new ones.

- What would a successful central office support model to principals look like based upon framework language, and how might that be captured to promote a shared vision amongst central office staff?

Big Shifts

The Central Office Leadership Framework supports a shift from central office departments working in silos, toward working together to develop assistance relationships with principals and schools. It allows central office leaders to engage in reciprocal accountability, collaboration, alignment of efforts with principals and teachers, and leading by example. Leadership is much more than telling people to go down the yellow brick road. It's about authentically engaging with them in the adventure. ■

NOTE: Current law for evaluating administrators does not require the use of this framework, the rubrics, or rating system. However, this document may serve as guidance as districts begin to transition to a professional growth system for all educators.

Engaging in an inquiry process will allow Orting central office leaders to align support for schools and departments, model collaboration and an inquiry stance, and hold ourselves reciprocally accountable. (Tools to support an inquiry cycle using the Central Office Leadership Framework can be found at www.marcishepard.org.)

As districts consider the use of this framework, leaders may want to address the following questions to determine how to best incorporate this framework in their system.

- Are there different or additional examples of knowledge and skills that pertain to different central office roles?
- Are there different or additional examples of support to schools that pertain to different central office roles?
- Are there different or additional examples of evidence and measures that pertain to different central office roles or that are specific to our district?
- Are there skills that are a higher or lower priority depending upon the role of the central office administrator?
- Which skills are not on this list that our district feels should be?

Dr. Marci Shepard is the Assistant Superintendent for the Orting School District, adjunct faculty for Western Washington University's Educational Leadership program, and serves as the Instructional Program Administrator Component Chair for Washington Association of School Administrators. She is passionate about teaching and leading for learning, and she is using the Central Office Leadership Framework for her own professional growth and accountability.