

Supporting early career principals in transforming urban high schools:

Investigating the transfer of intensive principal preparation to leadership practice

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Abstract

Around the United States today, many public high schools and their home districts are learning lessons about closing the persistent achievement gaps that stand between millions of American adolescents and productive, fulfilling lives (Education Trust, 2005). But translating insights from these islands of excellence into a scaleable agenda for high school transformation has proven exceptionally difficult, especially in America's cities. In this study we explore the experiences of early career principals as they grapple with the challenges of high school transformation in some of Chicago's most distressed communities and underperforming high schools. The research draws upon extensive interviews with 10 UIC-trained principals and members of their staffs, along with analysis of critical documents and artifacts, observation of focal school improvement practices, and compilation of recent school performance and achievement data. Two primary questions are addressed: First, do UIC-trained principals approach their new positions by deploying strategies characteristic of integrated leadership aims and priorities, as reflected in the UIC ten Factor Framework? The findings indicate that UIC-trained principals do attend to the program's Ten Factor model of school change, and in particular its focus on building teacher leadership committed to continuous improvement from the base of a strong instructional leadership team. Second, does early principal leadership based on the Ten Factor Framework contribute to measurable improvements in the conditions for longer-term student learning? While not all UIC principals were equally successful, trends in aggregate percentages of student attendance, drop out, and "freshman on-track" were associated in many schools with leadership strategies targeted to those student outcomes.

Introduction

Around the United States today, many public high schools and their home districts are learning lessons about closing the persistent achievement gaps that stand between millions of American adolescents and productive, fulfilling lives (Education Trust, 2005). But translating insights from these islands of excellence into a scaleable agenda for high school transformation has proven exceptionally difficult, especially in America's cities. Among the lessons of current research is the critical role played by principals and other school leaders in building the necessary professional and technical capacities to catalyze sustainable reform. Given the rates of retirement and turnover among principals in today's urban systems, these roles will be filled increasingly by ambitious educators who are early in their professional careers (Stoelinga, Hart, & Schalliol, 2008).

In this study we explore the experiences of early career principals as they grapple with the challenges of high school transformation in some of Chicago's most distressed communities and underperforming high schools. The research draws upon extensive interviews with 10 UIC-trained principals and members of their staffs, along with analysis of critical documents and artifacts, observation of focal school improvement practices, and compilation of recent school performance and achievement data. The study's primary goal is to explore how new high school principals learn to communicate ambitious strategic goals and build the professional will and capacity to achieve them, based on a research-based framework for action.

“Deep Principal Leadership” and High School Transformation

Over the last decade most research points toward slow but substantive progress among urban elementary schools, both in student learning and the capacity of schools to improve, with Chicago a prominent example (Wong, 2009). At the high school level, however, “crisis” remains

the watchword when it comes to student outcomes (Center for Labor Market Studies, 2009; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Perhaps most troubling is a widening gap between those who benefit from secondary education in America, and those who fall through the cracks. Despite the fact that poor and minority students now enroll in high school at historically high levels, White and Asian students remain significantly more likely than African-American or Latino students to persist in school, graduate, and go on to college. Drop out rates are particularly severe among African-American and Latino males, while roughly half of students with learning disabilities manage to graduate (National High School Center, 2009). The same minority groups also evidence a subjective “engagement gap,” reporting higher levels of boredom and disengagement from classes than do Whites and Asians, according to Indiana University’s High School Survey of Student Engagement (Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). The costs of poor outcomes for a growing sector of America’s population are likely to be severe both in economic and social terms in the next decade (Sum, Khatiwada, McLaughlin, & Palma, 2009).

To be sure, today’s high school educators confront a complex web of social and cultural challenges as they address the needs of urban adolescents. Operating within constrained budgets, high school teachers must negotiate often conflicting instructional mandates from within their local districts, while feeling pressure to narrow curricula to target performance on high stakes proficiency exams. Families and parents often are stretched too thin to support student success, while those students who come to school regularly bring with them a wide range of social and cognitive difficulties (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 1996).

Additionally, significant obstacles to better student outcomes also arise from the remarkable resistance of high schools as institutions to programs of research-based continuous improvement (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2006). Multiple factors converge to reinforce patterns of

secondary education such as lecture-style instruction, punitive grading and discipline, and fragmented and departmentalized curricula, even when high school educators begin concerted school improvement efforts. To overcome these factors, the message of an early but promising body of research is clear – *leadership is critical to high school transformation* (National Association of Secondary School Principals, 2004). In particular, “deep principal leadership” is required to challenge dysfunctional views of who students are and what they can learn, establish a vision of and goals for improvement, identify teacher leaders to organize their peers in collective improvement efforts, and build capacity for professional inquiry (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005; W. D. Stevens, Spote, Stoeling, & Bolz, 2008). As a recent study of Chicago’s small high schools puts it, “...principals were crucial catalysts in helping teacher communities engage in structured and sustained collective work on instructional improvement. Without principal leadership in this area, teachers were unlikely to organize their efforts on their own” (W. D. Stevens, 2008).

The UIC Doctoral Program and High School Transformation

The UIC Doctoral Program in Urban School Leadership is committed to developing just such “deep principal leadership” among early career high school principals through training that combines academic rigor with clinical experience. The program aims to use the dual architectures of doctoral study and on-the-job clinical training to cultivate the analytic habits of mind characteristic of highly effective school leaders. This has demanded the creation of a faculty that brings together academic professionals with a seasoned clinical coaching faculty of highly regarded former public school principals. The doctoral framework also creates the necessary time and opportunity – roughly 4 ½ years - for the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to mature, based on UIC’s reading of general and school-specific leadership

research (Lauder, 2000; Schon, 1987). Exhibit 1 provides an overview of the UIC program “inputs” – pre-service and in-service curriculum and learning experiences – and the projected growth in early school leadership skills from entry to the principalship (novice level) through the end of the third year of UIC-supported practice (maturing level).

Through a rigorous selection process, the program annually recruits cohorts of doctoral candidates into a 54 month professional development cycle. As of January 2009, 7 cohorts of candidates have begun the program. Candidates begin with 6 months of intensive academic course work and training, followed by a one year paid school internship under the dual supervision of an on-site UIC faculty coach and the host principal. As interns they lead school faculty teams in high priority school improvement projects, applying data analysis and “soft” leadership skills. They continue to take courses at UIC, and prepare to take the rigorous CPS Principal Eligibility examination, the new high stakes “gateway” to consideration for principal openings in the next year.¹ UIC also assesses its interns to determine whether their progress warrants continuing in the program.

As the internship concludes, qualifying interns receive placement support from UIC staff in pursuing principal positions. Once the position is secured, these early career principals receive three to four hours of on-site coaching per week from a UIC school leadership coach. Clinical coaches meet bi-weekly at UIC to exchange ideas and build clinical knowledge within the program. Principals receive coaching for three years, in most cases sustaining a working relationship with the same coach. At the same time principals complete doctoral course work, and begin the process of qualifying for and writing a doctoral thesis. Of the first five cohorts to complete the program, 100% have attained administrative positions within CPS, while 80% are

¹ For an overview of the CPS Eligibility Process, see: <http://www.oppdcps.com/downloads/Overview.pdf>.
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line principals or system-level administrators. The remaining candidates have remained in or obtained assistant principal or equivalent positions.

Most candidates come to the UIC program with strong preferences for eventual placement in either elementary or high school settings. However, students begin their academic work as one cohort, gaining exposure to issues facing principals at all levels of public schooling, and assuring that candidates are prepared to seek positions where they are available. At the point of internship, however, every effort is made to match candidates to experiences at their preferred level of employment. As of June 2009, a total of 24 candidates (or roughly 28%) are working as interns, assistant principals, or principals in high school settings. This reflects the relatively small proportion of high school vs. elementary positions available within CPS as a whole. Of the total high school cohort, 12 UIC candidates currently hold principalships, including 2 who are planning high schools slated to open in August 2009.² These high schools represent most major high school categories within the Chicago Public Schools (e.g. large comprehensive; contract; performance; and small high schools) as well as two operating Charter high schools. The current study focused on 10 early career principals assigned to schools with active enrollment as of August 2008. Exhibits 2 and 3 provide general background information on these UIC-affiliated high schools and the UIC-trained principals who are leading them.³

² This count focuses on UIC-affiliated CPS high schools and their principals. An additional UIC student currently is principal of Thornton Factional North High School in suburban Calumet City, IL (District 215).

³ The count of current CPS principals includes one anomaly. Janice Jackson was principal of Al Raby High School until July 2008, when she became the designated principal of the new Westinghouse High School, slated to open in August 2009. Exhibits 2 and 3 include both high schools since interviews with Ms. Jackson as Raby's principal are included in our dataset. The current principal of Al Raby High School (starting July 2008) is not affiliated with UIC.

Exhibit 1. UIC Program Components and Emerging UIC Principal Leadership Capacity

<p>UIC Program Features</p>	<p>First Year of UIC-Coached & -Supported Principalship</p>	<p>Third Year of UIC-Coached & -Supported Principalship</p>
<p><i>UIC Candidate Selectivity</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Local and National Recruitment · Stringent Application Criteria · Stringent Admissions Processes · Performance-Based Evaluation · Counseling-Out Processes <p><i>Pre-Service Learning Opportunities (Months 1-18)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Case-based course work in strategic planning and change leadership · Site-based training in information systems, data analysis and performance management for continuous improvement · Full-time school leadership internship supported by a qualified mentor principal and weekly on-site coaching from a UIC leadership coach · Intensive support for CPS principal eligibility and employment <p><i>In-Service Learning Opportunities (Months 19-54)</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Weekly on-site leadership coaching · UIC staff support for data analysis and strategic problem-solving · Advanced coursework addressing school leadership challenges · Network learning in specialty areas (e.g., early childhood education; high school transformation) · Doctoral capstone activities that mature analytic & reflective leadership capacities 	<p><i>Novice School Leaders with “Transformative” Potential</i></p>	<p><i>Maturing School Leaders with “Transformative” Credentials</i></p>
	<p>> Skilled diagnosticians able to use data to size up assets and deficits, raise urgency, & model, monitor & celebrate early improvement efforts.</p>	<p>> Diagnostic leaders who drive the development of information management capacity to support teacher-led cycles of continuous improvement and evaluation.</p>
	<p>> Instructional coaches who recognize typical classroom problems, respond effectively & tether professional learning to instructional issues.</p>	<p>> Instructional leaders who challenge faculty teams to adopt effective instructional practices, & manage resistance to change through deft but assertive engagement.</p>
	<p>> Coachable managers who understand CPS management systems & the importance of institutional relationships.</p>	<p>> Proactive managers noted for political acumen in building community and system-level constituencies for school improvement.</p>
	<p>> Strategic planners able to identify priority starting points & effect “early wins” that build a constituency for continuous improvement.</p>	<p>> Strategic thinkers who are “ahead of the curve” on systems, leadership development and other capacity requirements.</p>
	<p>> Confident team-builders able to identify, recruit and retain leadership talent, collaborate on “early wins,” & develop a data-informed improvement agenda.</p>	<p>> “Leaders of leaders” who develop and support capable teacher leaders to carry through improvement efforts at the classroom, grade, and departmental levels.</p>
	<p>> Accessible relationship-builders who engage stakeholders in ways that model trust and transparency within daily school culture.</p>	<p>> Intentional relationship builders who know students by name, welcome and facilitate parent involvement in school life, & engage in strategic community outreach.</p>
	<p>> Competent communicators who can lay out a vision for continuous school improvement & build compelling conversations among students, parents, & teachers about student potential and success.</p>	<p>> Strong professional communicators who seek opportunities to convey a vision for school success and tell the stories (positive & negative) necessary to sustain collective urgency and buy-in.</p>

Exhibit 2. Ten UIC Affiliated High Schools with Selected School and Demographic Characteristics (Academic Year 2008)

School	Type	Size	%Black	%Hispanic	%ELL	%SWD	%FRL
Al Raby HS	Performance	519	98.0	0.9	0.2	13.4	86.0
Aspira Charter Early College HS	Charter	1,012	45.4	39.7	12.0	14.0	93.0
Foreman High School	Neighborhood	1739	17.2	71.9	18.3	16.9	79.0
Global Visions HS	Small HS	274	88.2	10.3	0.9	23.9	78.8
Kennedy HS	Neighborhood	1516	11.4	49.8	5.7	17.5	61.0
New Millennium Health HS	Small HS	330	90.2	7.9	1.6	19.9	88.3
TEAM Englewood HS	Performance	138	99.3	0.0	0.0	15.1	97.1
UNO Charter HS	Charter	140	7.2	90.9	10.3	12.0	3.4
Wells HS	Neighborhood	780	46.6	48.6	4.5	23.6	64.4
World Language HS	Small HS	238	17.1	81.2	9.8	14.7	96.7

^ Designates principals who were interviewed for the Ten Factor study.

% ELL: Percent Students Categorized as English Language Learners (Bi-Lingual Services)

% SWD: Percent Students Categorized as “Students with Disabilities” (Special Education Services)

% FRL: Percent Students Qualifying for Federal Free or Reduced Cost Lunch Program

Exhibit 3. Ten UIC Affiliated High Schools with Selected Principal Characteristics (Academic year 2009)

School	School Status AY 2009	Years as Principal (as of June 2009)	AYP Status (as of June 2008)
Al Raby HS*	5 th Year	4 (until 6/2008)	No
Aspira Charter Early College HS	2 nd Year	1	Pending
Foreman High School	Over 10 Years	2	No
Global Visions HS	4 th Year	2	No
Kennedy HS	Over 10 Years	1	No
New Millennium Health HS	4 th Year	2	No
TEAM Englewood HS	2 nd Year	2	Pending
UNO Charter HS	1 st Year	1	Pending
Wells HS	Over 10 Years	1	No
World Language HS	4 th Year	3	No

* UIC principal left the principalship of Raby in July 2008, when she became the new principal of the new Westinghouse HS.

Exhibit 4. UIC’s Ten Factor Model for Urban School Transformation

<p>UIC’s theory of action states: <i>The principal is most effective as the leader of improvement – specifically improving student learning – when s/he develops a climate of trust through strong relationships, creates a sustainable culture with high aspirations and expectations, engages key individuals in leadership roles, and builds professional communities focused on improving both adult and student learning. UIC views the process of transformational school leadership in terms of ten closely related factors:</i></p>	
<p>To build a culture of shared responsibility for achieving high aspirations, the school must:</p>	<p>1. Attract, enlist and develop a leadership team of highly qualified teachers who see it in their self-interest to co-lead, with the principal, the building of a highly effective learning community capable of doing all of the following items.</p>
	<p>2. Establish among students, parents and teachers a detailed, pro-active set of expectations for the behavior, interpersonal conduct and academic performance of all parties that shape the school-wide and classroom culture of the school. This culture should make the correlation between academic success, effective habits and a productive and fulfilling life evident on a daily basis.</p>
	<p>3. Establish grade level and content specific teams that develop goals, strategies, classroom assessments and tracking tools that are used on a daily or weekly basis by the team to track progress and modify practice for the purpose of measurably increasing the learning of all of the children in each grade level.</p>
<p>To establish structures and systems to realize those aspirations, the school must:</p>	<p>4. Develop written course outlines, or curriculum maps, for each grade level and content area that are based on state standards, test score analysis and teacher knowledge of student work. Literacy, numeracy and higher order thinking curriculum and instructional strategy receive heavy emphasis in these course outlines, especially at the elementary level.</p>
	<p>5. Develop structures, tools and procedures to ensure that every teacher in the school is in the process of mastering a wide and deep range of instructional practices and classroom management strategies that ensure the high achievement of every child.</p>
	<p>6. Establish a highly transparent, school-wide data tracking system to which everyone has the access and ability to analyze the implementation and results of all goals and strategies.</p>
<p>To support school structures with the necessary technological and human supports, the school must:</p>	<p>7. Develop the social and emotional supports needed by everyone to engage in the above efforts and achieve at the level defined. The school leadership team recognizes that human relationships are at the heart of sustainable school change, and that social and emotional learning [for students, staff, and administration] are important to achieving transformative school goals.</p>
	<p>8. Integrate technology into the management and execution of instructional practice through strong learning communities.</p>
	<p>9. Develop very specific strategies for engaging parents in the daily support of their children’s learning development and achievement.</p>
	<p>10. Be able to manage <i>up</i> and <i>out</i> as well as manage down. That is, not only must school leadership have the organizational and management skills to implement and sustain complex change at the building level, but it must also have the political and interpersonal skills to work productively with system level officers and community stakeholders to achieve school goals.</p>

We organized the present inquiry around UIC's "Ten Critical Factors for School Transformation," the same model of change we use to teach integrated school leadership. This framework sees the principal as a strong "leader of leaders," and a builder of school capacity, expressed as ten critical spheres of activity ("factors") that are prominent in schools where fundamental transformation is underway. Each factor emerged from a UIC interview study with accomplished CPS principals in 2003, combined with a review of best practice in the school transformation literature (Fullan, 2001; Leithwood, Jantzi, & Steinbach, 1999; Marzano et al., 2005) Exhibit 4 provides a summary of the UIC Ten Factor Framework.

Over eight years these "Ten Factors" have become increasingly central to instruction and coaching within the UIC program, representing the program's evolving action theory of integrated leadership as a capacity-building enterprise. The present study inaugurates a longer term research agenda to understand the training and education of early career school leaders, based on this action theory. As such, our initial research questions are concerned with the validity of the Ten Factor framework as a guide both to practice and coaching. We focus particularly on our high school principals because the need for insight into high school leadership is so pressing, and because the internal obstacles to high school improvement can help throw the challenges of integrated leadership into greater relief. We address two questions: First, do UIC-trained principals approach their new positions by deploying strategies characteristic of integrated leadership aims and priorities, as reflected in the UIC Ten Factor Framework? Second, does early transformational leadership in UIC schools contribute to measurable improvements in the conditions for longer-term student learning?

Methodology and Data Sources

We used the Ten Factors Framework to structure a conversation with each of the 8 principals who currently are leading UIC affiliated high schools. These interviews usually required about two hours to complete, and occurred between November 2008 and April 2009, most often at the high school site. Attachment A presents the protocol that we designed to focus the interviews. At the start of each interview we asked the principal to use the Ten Factor protocol to reflect on three questions pertaining to each factor: 1) how strong was the evidence for progress in that factor; 2) how serious were the challenges entailed by that factor; and 3) how high a priority was that factor for the principal at this point of his or her principalship? We made it clear that the rating scheme was *purposefully subjective*, in that it asked the principal to gauge progress or challenge against personal standards of performance rather than against external criteria. This approach was meant to encourage a frank appraisal of progress on each factor without fear of evaluative impact. Exhibit 5 provides the three-point rating scheme that principal-interviewees used to assess the status of implementation of each of the UIC Ten Factors in their school.

Exhibit 5. Rating levels applied to Extent of Progress, Challenges, and Priority in Ten Factor Protocol.	
Factor Development	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Early/laying the groundwork 2. Evidence of real progress 3. Strong capacity emerging
Severity of Challenges	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Garden variety/normal range 2. Some serious issues to address 3. Acute roadblocks to progress
Current Leadership Priority	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Backburner for now 2. Important/second tier 3. In my/our Top Three

The interview sought to unpack both the meaning of factor ratings through reference to concrete examples, and to explore the standards used by the principal to gauge their progress or

challenges. In some cases the coaches working with the principal candidates also attended the interview and contributed to the conversation. In those instances we asked the coaches to complete the ratings from their perspective, and used the comparisons to open further the conversation about criteria for judging progress. It was common for principals to be more critical than their coaches in rendering these judgments. Post-interview conversations with coaches suggest that such differences combine some solicitousness on the part of coaches, but also a broader appreciation of the difficulty of capacity building in such high schools. What is most important for the purposes of this research is that the principals were both comfortable and discriminating in their use of the Ten Factor protocol and its rating scheme. A strong secondary aim of the interview was to pilot this protocol as a formative assessment tool in the early phases of building the partnership between coaches and their principal/coachees.

After completing the interviews, we assembled them as a single database and supplemented the interview transcripts with current records from each high school, including key documents like the School Improvement Plans (or SIPAAA), detailed notes from observations of meetings, classes, and other settings, protocols that help regulate school initiatives in areas like attendance and tracking 9th grade progress, and trends in school-level achievement and performance statistics. We coded this body of material for issues pertaining to each of the UIC Ten Factors, attempting to surface issues common to early career principals across the high schools, as well as to identify promising practices in key areas like improving attendance, keeping 9th graders on track to graduate, reducing tardiness and behavioral disruption, and of course, improving classroom instruction.

Study Results

Do UIC-trained principals approach their new positions prepared to implement the aims and strategies of integrated leadership? Exhibit 6 provides an overview of how 10 UIC-trained early career principals assessed their progress, challenges and priorities across the 10 UIC Factors, sorted in descending priority.

Exhibit 6. UIC HS Principal Ratings in Order of Highest Priority			
UIC Factor Ratings	Capacity	Challenges	Priority
Factor 3	2.1	1.9	2.9
Factor 1	2.3	1.4	2.8
Factor 2	2.1	1.3	2.8
Factor 5	1.8	2.1	2.4
Factor 4	1.9	1.6	2.3
Factor 6	1.9	1.8	2.3
Factor 7	2.0	1.9	2.1
Factor 9	1.5	2.0	2.0
Factor 10	1.9	1.6	1.9
Factor 8	1.3	1.8	1.3

As a group, the 10 UIC-trained principals in operating high schools gave their highest priority and capacity ratings to Factors 1, 2 and 3 within the UIC Ten Factor framework. That is, they were acting intentionally to distribute leadership to address key school improvement goals while also developing a range of strategies to elevate expectations for professional practice and student learning. Other factors – for example, the engagement of parents (F9) or technology integration

(F8) – emerged as important but secondary priorities for most UIC principals. In what follows we summarize what we learned in each factor area.

UIC Factor 1: To build a culture of shared responsibility for achieving high aspirations, the principal must...Attract, enlist and develop a leadership team of highly qualified teachers who seek to share in the challenge of improving school capacity.

In part because nearly all UIC principals regard **the formation of leadership teams** as among their highest priorities, we found that leadership team building was well into the implementation stage at most schools. All but one principal rated the school’s capacity development at a 2 or 3 on this factor. Various approaches to capacity development are demonstrated, including:

- hiring a leadership team facilitator;
- actively seeking administrative-certified teachers to help fill leadership roles;
- collaboratively drafting a formal “memo of understanding to codify how leadership is distributed in the school;
- emphasizing a philosophy of leadership development that puts the interests of students ahead of all else.

Within CPS the expectation that instructional leadership teams will be formed and operating has only recently been articulated by District policies. As a result almost all new principals of established high schools were introducing this concept to faculties for the first time. The larger high schools, with several veteran administrative staff, had greater difficulty integrating department chairs into these leadership teams when compared with the smaller high schools. The implementation of leadership teams in all schools seems to have created genuine “teacher voice,” with some concern among small schools about teacher “burnout” due to their broad engagement in decision making as well as full time classroom teaching.

UIC Factor 2: To build a culture of shared responsibility for achieving high aspirations, the principal must...Establish among students, parents and teachers a detailed, pro-active set of expectations for the behavior, interpersonal conduct, and academic performance of all parties who shape the school-wide and classroom culture of the school.

UIC principals assessed **building a culture of high aspirations** as among their primary priorities. While only two principals rated their schools at 3 out of 3 in terms of achieved capacity, only one principal saw their school as not having developed significant capacity on Factor 2. But our early career principals also acknowledged that the human challenges of shifting beliefs and habits of thought within their school communities were steep. Among teachers, the over-arching challenge for leadership involved replacing a professional culture of deflection of responsibility for student learning with **a developmental professional orientation**. This new culture acknowledges evidence that most students can achieve at high levels – an asset orientation - and embraces the professional responsibility to learn how to create the conditions for students to overcome obstacles and thrive as learners. Leadership strategies for enacting this transformation in professional culture included:

- Attending carefully to all aspects of teacher talk involving students and parents, in all settings, to make staff aware of negative messaging and trigger language for unnecessary conflicts with students and teachers
- Modeling positive professional discourse that communicates high expectations for students and reinforces positive behavioral expectations
- Reviewing school routines and procedures in areas such as discipline and grading to replace demotivating practices with procedures that motivate students to stay on track
- Seeking commitment to a developmental professional ethic in potential teacher leaders and new faculty hires.

Among students, the pressing leadership challenge was to replace student cultures of apathy and resistance with a future orientation focused on post-secondary success. In addition to shifting the quality of staff interactions with students, our early career principals quickly realized that students play a powerful role in perpetuating low expectations for future success. To help build a shared future-orientation among students, faculty and parents, key leadership strategies included:

- Inducting 9th graders and their parents with a school year kick-off event at a local university that reinforced the goal of the high school to place every graduate in college or its equivalent

- Creating engaging curricula and instruction that explicitly reinforces links between daily engagement and post-secondary opportunity
- Establishing positive discipline frameworks (e.g. Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports, PBIS) that link post-secondary success to creating a school climate of calm, respect, and consistent attendance
- Closely tracking data on attendance, behavior etc to identify high risk youth early and connect them with drop-out prevention supports
- Creating positive incentive structures for behavioral compliance, and using frequent surveys and other media to solicit and act on student perceptions and suggestions.

Among parents, the leadership challenge focused on replacing default expectations of disengagement from high school with an invitation to engagement and partnership in preparing for post-secondary success. We pursue this further in our discussion of Factor 9 (below).

UIC Factor 3: To build a culture of shared responsibility for achieving high aspirations, the principal must...Establish grade-level and content-specific teams that develop goals, strategies, classroom assessments and tracking tools used on a regular and frequent basis by the team to track progress and modify instructional practice.

Principals rated the **establishment of grade level and content area teams** as even higher in their priorities than Factors 1 and 2. However, principals also rated their implementation of this factor as slightly below their ratings for the first two factors. This was not unexpected as they began the work of developing tools, implementing strategies, and assessing outcomes. The schools have developed some team capacity at both the grade level and content level, and cross-team work is also evident. Principals have elevated and facilitated the content and grade-level teams in a variety of ways such as:

- Demonstrating confidence in staff ability to improve instruction collaboratively
- Structuring time to do the work
- Dividing teams into issue-specific subgroups
- According the teams' input comparable status with leadership team input.

As a whole:

- Department level teams were focused on curriculum mapping based on Illinois Learning Standards and college readiness standards
- Grade level team structures were emerging with more instructional importance primarily due to the CPS required EPAS testing system

- Some principals were also nurturing small learning communities within the school, with particular attention to supporting the early success of 9th graders.

Positive outcomes include:

- The beginnings of de-privatization of instruction due to team and cross-team collaboration
- A nascent if unevenly distributed sense of empowerment and responsibility for instructional results by team members
- Greater faculty openness to the idea of promoting a common learning experience for students as a result of collaboration on multiple levels.

UIC Factor 4: To establish structures and systems to realize those aspirations, the principal must...Develop written course outlines, or curriculum maps, for each grade level and content area, based on state standards, test score analysis, teacher knowledge of student work, and commitment to higher order thinking skills.

All but one principal rated the **development of standards-based curriculum and written curriculum maps** as a middle or high priority, and that one exception had built considerable capacity in that area already. Nearly all principals see capacity in this area developing but not yet a strength. Sources of resistance to the re-evaluation of curricula based on Illinois State

Standards and the College Readiness standards included:

- It is perceived by some line teachers as allied with a program of standardized testing
- It is time consuming and difficult to do well
- Shared understandings among staff are difficult to develop regarding the value of the activity, the goals of the activity, a common vocabulary, and clear processes for accomplishing goals of curriculum plans.

Nonetheless, our principals felt that progress was being made in 2009 in standards-based curriculum mapping and design in nearly all schools, supported by a wide range of resources from inside and outside the system, including:

- The AVID student development system
- The CPS Instructional Development System (IDS)
- U of C's Urban School Improvement Network
- The Gates-funded Chicago High School Redesign Initiative (CHRSI)

UIC Factor 5: To establish structures and systems to realize those aspirations, the principal must...Develop structures, tools and procedures to ensure that every teacher in the school is in the process of mastering a wide and deep range of instructional practices and classroom management strategies that ensure the high achievement of every child.

Principals rated development of teacher instructional capacity middle to high in their immediate priorities. While one principal saw real capacity emerging, three principals reported that they were in the early stages of development. Some of the activities in evidence include:

- All schools were attempting to improve quality of instruction through strategic personnel management, including removal of problem teachers and strategic hiring
- All schools were seeking to establish coherent, reflective, professional development communities
- The six CHSRI schools have designed a structured professional development plan
- All schools were engaged in some form of peer observation and coaching
- Several schools were using professional development partners such as The College Board, U of C Urban Schools Network, and UNO Charter Schools Network
- Classroom management issues were being addressed through one-on-one coaching, mentoring, and modeling as well as school-wide PD

Some of the challenges to building teacher capacity include:

- Hiring large numbers of new teachers annually in the early years of new startups
- New teachers in general have classroom management difficulties
- Teacher expertise in differentiated instruction is weak and takes time to build
- All principals were encountering teacher resistance to change
- The “initiative fatigue” of too many new programs at once can interfere with optimal teacher development.

Despite the challenges, a sampling of promising developments includes:

- implementing a comprehensive instructional approach next year.
- using sobering data on student performance to stimulate teacher buy-in to the need for change
- devoting weekly professional development time to pressing issues identified by teachers
- developing internal school capacity for peer observation and instructional coaching based on modifications of protocols associated with, among others, the Danielson Framework for Instructional Evaluation.

UIC Factor 6: To establish structures and systems to realize those aspirations, the Principal must....Establish a highly transparent, school-wide data tracking system to which everyone has the access and ability to analyze the implementation and results of all strategies.

Principals rated **establishing a transparent, school-wide data tracking system** as a middle to high priority but rate their capacity to do so lower, with three principals rating their schools at the beginning stages. Two principals saw real capacity emerging in their schools, in both cases reflecting good teacher buy-in to data analysis by teacher teams. Strategies in evidence include:

- use of data leadership teams that meet frequently to assess school culture data and student performance data
- supporting “early adopters” such as specific departments in moving forward with their uses of data
- cycling attendance data back to teachers in team settings that allow rapid response to the data
- principals’ presentations to teachers on comparative school data (our school vs. comparable schools) on various measures
- use of internal surveys to gather data about faculty viewpoints
- participation in the Wallace Foundation’s SAMS time-management system
- early establishment of professional development to build staff/teacher capacity to use data effectively

Implementing such strategies met with a variety of challenges, including:

- Low teacher familiarity with data value and use; and even teacher resistance to data tracking systems and the responsibilities of personnel to make those systems work
- Insufficient clarity of communication from principals about the most effective selection and analysis of data, and for what purposes
- Difficulty in sustaining enthusiasm and diligence in data tracking after the start-up period of new high schools, as energy and excitement wane.

UIC Factor 7: To support school structures with the necessary technological and human supports, the principal must...Develop the social and emotional supports needed by everyone to engage in the above efforts and achieve at the level defined. Transformative school leaders must recognize that human relationships are at the heart of sustainable school change, and that social and emotional learning are important to achieving transformative school goals.

UIC high school principals are evenly split regarding the capacity they feel they have built in the area of **social-emotional supports** for all members of the school community. Compared with

other factors, most principals viewed Factor 7 as an important, mid-tier priority with at least some serious obstacles remaining to be overcome. A notable outlier from this pattern is the first-year principal at Wells Community High School. Despite substantial evidence of progress on many fronts, he continues to rate challenges as acute and school capacity as only beginning to emerge.

In general, our principals report that the most significant challenge of Factor 7 involves re-culturing the professional community toward norms of active caring and direct personal engagement with students. This challenge is particularly prominent in UIC's three large neighborhood high schools.

Among the wide range of systems and practices that UIC principals are using to lead the re-culturing process, the following are especially widespread:

- Creating and modeling a common language of civility and respect; high personal presence in hallways and other common areas before, during and after school
- Re-framing the concept of discipline from punitive response to self-regulatory learning; making more room for student voice and focusing attention on choices, consequences and alternative courses of action
- Raising the status of counseling functions
- Developing systems and raising accountability for adults to notice, care and follow through on day-to-day attendance, tardiness, academic progress and student behavior issues
- Raising the status of field trips, college visitation and extra-curricular activities.

UIC Factor 8. To support school structures with the necessary technological and human supports, the school must... Integrate technology into the management and execution of instructional practice through strong learning communities.

In comparison with Factors focused on leadership or school culture, UIC principals tended to assign low priority to Factor 8 in their Ten Factor ratings. No principals reported “real capacity emerging,” and only 2 of 8 principals felt they were making real progress in that direction. These ratings contrasted with our interviews, in which UIC principals voiced strong enthusiasm for technology and regularly exploit available technologies to manage school improvement

initiatives. A common priority for all has been building and refining systems support day-to-day operations by collecting, organizing, and reporting data in timely, user-friendly ways. Examples include:

- Extending and adapting existing CPS information systems like IMPACT and GRADEBOOK that are not yet up to the job they were designed to do
- Exploiting on-line technologies like *Google Groups* to support new levels of professional collaboration
- Utilizing commercial technology like the Remark OMR scanning system to support deep changes in departmental planning and instructional practice.

Perceived challenges were less technical than cultural. Principals at all UIC high schools have identified a number of faculty members who are invested in project-based learning and instructional activities that involve complex problem solving. In different ways and with different levels of intensity, these teachers are bringing interactive technologies to their classrooms on their own volition. Project-based learning is a central element of the UNO Charter High School vision, for example. The principal and faculty there have a stronger sense of urgency and clarity about the technological supports they will need to succeed in their work.

UIC Factor 9. To support school structures with the necessary technological and human supports, the school must... Develop very specific strategies for engaging parents in the daily support of their children’s learning development and achievement.

UIC affiliated high school principals varied considerably in their ratings of progress, challenge, and priority in the area of parent engagement. The majority saw their schools at the “groundwork” stage, with an emphasis on creating a generally more welcoming and facilitating climate for parents in the building. The three schools that reported more progress genuinely were engaged in more ambitious engagement and outreach initiatives. Most principals reported serious or acute obstacles to progress, ranging from faculty resistance to home and community realities that suppress parent attendance at school functions. Only two principals characterized parent

engagement as a “backburner” priority, while most called it at least a 2nd tier focus of their work. In interviews, however, the majority of our early career principals admitted that parent engagement was not as central to their concerns in the first phases of school capacity building as issues like leadership development or overhauling curricula.

Three of eight principals gave clear evidence of leading from a more integrated, strategic vision for parent engagement. Common themes among these principals were:

- High outreach and *accessibility* to parents and their concerns; parent events and opportunities to interact had priority
- Active alliance-building with local political, cultural, and youth development organizations
- Conscious attention to infrastructure, routines, and professional practices that attract parent interest, elicit trust, and solicit real input.

UIC Factor 10: To support school systems and procedures with necessary communications technology and human relationships, the principal must...Be able to manage *up* and *out* as well as manage *down*, with organizational, political, and management skills to implement and sustain complex change at the building level, as well as with system level officers and community stakeholders to achieve school goals.

The principals rated their capacity to **manage up and out as well as down** conservatively, compared with other factors, and none of them made it a top priority, though nearly all rated it as important. Two schools claimed strong capacity emerging, with three schools just getting off the ground. This may have something to do with the comprehensive nature of this factor, which requires sustaining and managing change within the school, with CPS structures, and with the surrounding community: a tall order even for the most experienced principals. Managing change within their schools, principals are experiencing varying levels of success with attendance initiatives, budget, and the delegation of authority. Managing change in concert with CPS has brought some expectable frustration in working with a large bureaucracy, but such system supports as AIOs, the Office of Principal Preparation and Development, and improving

CPS data systems have been positive. Finally, high schools demonstrate various strategies for collaborating with their local communities, including:

- Participation in monthly Chicago Alternative Policing Strategy meetings
- Providing computer classes for parents on Saturday mornings
- Sharing space (e.g., auditorium) with neighboring schools and churches
- Taking students and families on tours of local colleges
- Principal attendance at local community events
- Participation in the CPS Community Schools Initiative.

Were UIC-Led High Schools Improving Against Key Metrics of Success?

UIC early career principals acknowledged many roadblocks and challenges to improvement, but they also could point toward data and evidence in key metrics that linked growing leadership and instructional capacity to forward progress in student engagement and success. Exhibits 7, 8 & 9 present six-year trends for nine of the UIC-led high schools affiliated with the Chicago Public Schools: Freshman-on-track, attendance, and one-year drop out rates. (Two Charters, ASPIRA and UNO, do not calculate the Freshman on Track statistic consistent with CPS practice).

“P_Tenure” indicates the UIC principal’s years as school leader (as of June 2009). The final line in each table records the same trends for 107 non-selective enrollment CPS high schools.

Exhibit 7 summarizes six-year trends in single year drop out rates (or DO1), representing the percentage of students who leave a high school before the end of the school year and do not transfer to another CPS high school. Seven of nine (7/9) UIC-led high schools posted DO1 rates below the non-selective comparable average, while 5/8 UIC-led schools posted a one-year decline in DO1 (2008-2009). Three UIC small high schools (UNO, TEAM and World Language) posted among the lowest DO1 rates in the city, despite adding classes as part of ramping up start-up schools. Two large UIC-led schools (Foreman and Wells) evidenced single year up-ticks in DO1.

Exhibit 7. Six Year Trends in Single-Year Drop Out Rates for 9 UIC-Led High Schools

School Name	P_Tenure	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
ASPIRA EC HS	1					0	7
Foreman HS	2	12.3	11.5	18		11	11.5
Global Visions HS	2	14.8	16.3	1.7	4.2	19	14.9
Kennedy HS	1	4.9	6.7	13.5	16.4	12	11.7
New Millnm HS	2		3.3	1.3	0.3	11	10.2
TEAM Englewood HS	3					2	1.2
UNO Charter HS	1						2.7
Wells HS	1	7.8	10.1	7	9.6	14	17.3
World Language HS	3			1	0.6	5	4
<i>Non-UIC HS Comps</i>		11.6	11.6	9	9.8	12	11.8

Exhibit 8. Six Year Trends in “Freshmen On Track” Rates for 9 UIC-Led High Schools

School Name	P_Tenure	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
ASPIRA EC HS	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Foreman HS	2	50.8	53	49	50.8	45.4	56.7
Global Visions HS	2	47.2	39.3	42.6	47.4	33.3	51.5
Kennedy HS	1	56.7	59.3	54.3	46.8	56.9	56.2
New Millnm HS	2		69.5	70.8	64.9	51.4	79.7
TEAM Englewood HS	3					59.6	85.9
UNO Charter HS	1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
Wells HS	1	55.5	64	52.2	58.2	49.3	66.7
World Language HS	3			77.6	79.3	50	56.5
<i>Non-UIC HS Comps</i>		46.2	54.2	55.2	50.7	52.9	58.1

Exhibit 9. Six Year Trends in Aggregate Attendance Rates for 9 UIC-Led High Schools

	P_Tenure	2004	2005	2006	2007	2008	2009
ASPIRA EC HS	1					91.5	89.7
Foreman HS	2	80.2	77.6	77.9	75.2	76.5	74.4
Global Visions HS	2	85.1	85.4	85.1	76.4	75	80.9
Kennedy HS	1	87.8	87.1	85	85.7	82.2	81.2
New Millnm HS	2		86.6	85.4	79.5	78.4	81
TEAM Englewood HS	3					87.6	88
UNO Charter HS	1						96.7
Wells HS	1	82.3	80.3	77	74	70.2	69.7
World Language HS	3			92.1	92.7	91.6	90.6
<i>Non-UIC HS Comps</i>		84.86	84.6	85	84.2	79.4	80.66

Exhibit 8 summarizes six-years trends in the CPS “Freshman on Track” (FOT) statistic, representing the percentage of 9th graders accruing no more than one semester “F” while accumulating five full course credits over the freshman year (CCSR, 2007). Three of seven (3/7) UIC-led high schools exceeded the non-selective CPS average in 2009. Six of seven UIC-led high schools posted significant one year gains in FOT from 2008, all exceeding the percentage of improvement of non-selective CPS high schools (+5.2% from 2008). We note also that all three large high schools (Foreman, Kennedy & Wells) exceeded the FOT levels for comparable large non-selective CPS high schools (52.5% in 2009).

Exhibit 9 summarizes six-year trends in the CPS one-year average attendance rate. Seven of nine (7/9) UIC-led schools exceeded the 2009 attendance percentage for non-selective CPS high schools. Four UIC-led high schools posted attendance rates approaching or exceeding 90% - well within the top 10% for CPS schools. On the other hand, 5 UIC-led schools evidenced small declines in attendance from 2008-2009. It is notable that TEAM Englewood High School maintained high attendance in 2009 while doubling its size (adding a 10th grade).

In summary, while UIC-led schools were not uniformly superior on any of these 3 metrics, most evidenced strength and/or significant improvement in at least one. UIC start-up high schools like TEAM Englewood and UNO Charter High School were enjoying particularly promising early outcomes, where principals enjoyed a “fresh start” with faculties who shared the principal’s vision for school culture and instruction. We see slower progress and greater challenges in large, non-selective comprehensive high schools like Kennedy, Foreman and Wells, where UIC principals are engaging large, very traditional and often demoralized teaching staffs around fundamental shifts in professional culture (Payne, 2008). Even here, though, these large UIC-led high schools are moving ahead of comparable large CPS high schools, if slowly.

Discussion

The research reported here is part of a pilot investigation into the possibilities for equipping early career principals to lead programs of concerted improvement in under-performing urban high schools. The thesis of the UIC Doctoral Program in Urban School Leadership is that 54 months (4 ½ years) is sufficient (and probably necessary) to prepare promising educators to acquire and deploy the knowledge, skills, and dispositions associated with transformational and integrated styles of school leadership. While UIC course work exposes students to all current frameworks of transformational school leadership, the Program's Ten Factor Framework has become the primary theory of change linking class work to coaching activities in the field. Our research methods are still largely documentary and descriptive. But our interviews so far have underscored three features of the Ten Factor Framework (and our principal candidate's utilization of it) that will guide further development of our research agenda in the immediate future.

First, the interviews provide some validating evidence for the current language of the Ten Factor Framework as a reflection of the challenges faced by new career principals in under-performing Chicago Public Schools. In particular, our interviews throw into stark relief the tenacity of several norms of traditional professional practice in high schools that hinder the development of collective accountability for continuous improvement and student outcomes (Donaldson, 2001; Supovitz & Weinbaum, 2008). These include strong attachment to privatized understandings of teacher practice and expertise; deflection of responsibility for poor student outcomes to students and parents; predominance of negative suppositions about the capacity and proclivity of poor and minority students to learn; low efficacy regarding the collective capacity

of teachers to improve instruction; and low peer-to-peer trust and regard among faculty members (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Stoelinga et al., 2008).

These patterns were especially evident to the new principals of large and chronically low-performing schools like Foreman and Kennedy, where teachers were as inclined to keep their doors closed to one another as they were to resist the overtures and ideas of a fresh leader. But we encountered parallel if less acute issues in UIC-led small, charter and start-up high schools, in which our new principals enjoyed control over hiring and the development of enthusiastic leadership teams. While these new (and often young) faculties were more enthused about collaboration and data, they often clung to expectations of classroom and curricular autonomy, and resisted expectations to examine traditional prerogatives in areas like discipline and grading. Thus these principals also struggled with challenges such as high failure rates among their 9th graders, reflecting reluctance among teachers to scrutinize critically their assessment and grading practices. Significant monitoring and professional development was required at small schools such as TEAM Englewood and New Millennium Health High School to explicate and regularize grading practices school-wide, although resistance to new practices tended to evaporate more readily within the small school faculties (see discussion of “freshman on track” below).

Second, the interviews provide some validating evidence for the current language of the Ten Factor Framework as a heuristic for early career principals in mounting a concerted agenda for school improvement. The evidence indicated that our newly placed principals were particularly engaged in identifying and recruiting talent for leadership through conversations and interviews among new and veteran faculty, and strategizing to locate forward-looking faculty in department chairs and other positions to influence change. Conversations within instructional leadership teams in turn focused on the ways to shift school culture and beliefs toward higher

expectations for professional and student success, while shifting the focus of department and team meetings toward the collective examination of instruction, curriculum, assessment and student work. Both the reported priorities of our principals and their reflections on the change process suggest that the primacy of current Factors 1 through 5 is correctly aligned to the most pressing challenges faced by early career school leaders as they begin new positions, including the identification of “early wins” to build constituencies for improvement (Herman et al., 2008). By the same token, the delayed appearance within the Ten Factors of foci such as parent engagement (Factor 9) and technology integration (Factor 8), while possibly realistic in terms of the immediate demands of the transformational principalship, may also reinforce delayed attention to these issues among UIC principals. This is a serious issue for further consideration as the UIC program continues to pursue curricular redesign and improvement.

Third, the interviews revealed several emerging strategies for leveraging capacity for continuous improvement and cultural transformation that we intend to track and document as the leadership of UIC-affiliated principals matures. For example, a number of our principals are learning how to recruit teacher leaders into diagnostic analyses of student outcome data in order to confront complaisance and generate shared urgency for improvement. In one case, a first year principal faced an entrenched veteran faculty in a large, under-performing comprehensive high school with little desire for change. The principal anchored his first full faculty meeting in a data presentation that sharply contrasted the school’s ACT test performance with more successful neighboring schools with higher free-reduced lunch and minority populations. He then revealed plans at the District level to dictate curricula to schools at their performance level. His approach effectively “called out” a complaisant and uninformed faculty without personal confrontation, while making clear the negative consequences of inaction. In the principal’s view, the strategy

softened up the resistance of enough faculty members to enable early steps to inspect instruction and review curriculum to proceed productively at the department level.

In another case, the UIC-trained principal of a small start-up high school in a historically underserved African-American community spent her planning year devising a comprehensive strategy for sustaining college-bound aspirations and expectations within a community of students, parents, and teachers. With a combination of college exposure events, standards-based curricula, tutoring and other academic supports, and parent engagement, TEAM Englewood's inaugural freshman class matched high attendance rates with relatively low disciplinary and drop-out rates. Success foundered, however, around traditional teacher grading policies which assigned zeros to students for missing homework and assignments in the name of rigor and fairness, with few strategies in place to help students raise their grades above failing.

To move most students back “on-track,” the principal initiated a school-wide faculty effort to closely examine grading criteria and practices across all departments at a granular level, involving close attention to student work and the grades assigned. The analysis revealed wild variation in grading patterns across teachers and departments, reflecting a lack of consensus about what to grade, how to grade it, and how often to assess in order to provide opportunities to students to improve. More importantly, the analysis opened faculty minds to the potential misalignments between traditional summative grading concepts and the school's formative vision to genuinely equip students to graduate and attend college. Subsequently the faculty defined school-wide grading criteria and policies, committed to collective monitoring of weekly grades, and shifted to a “50 to 100” grading scale that left plenty of room for assigning an “F,” but enabled students to address the deficit within a semester timeframe. In the school's second year, grades improved and aligned to standardized test results, while the freshman “on-track”

rate jumped by over 20%. From the perspective of our emerging research agenda, the opportunity to document leadership processes like these promises both to enrich UIC's leadership preparation model, while contributing necessary granularity to current accounts of early career principals learning their craft in underperforming urban schools.

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Attachment A

UIC High School Transformation Project Principal Interview Guide Fall 2008 & Winter 2009

1. Interview begins with candidate completing the Ten Factors overview assessment. (10 minutes).
2. Please recount the career path and seminal experiences that brought you to the principalship of this high school?
3. When did you arrive as the principal of this high school? Can you identify steps or phases in your leadership of this school from arrival to the present? What were the primary issues you prioritized at each phase, and how did you approach them? How would you assess your success as a principal so far?
4. We wanted to better understand your most recent SIPAAA document. How did you approach this SIPAAA round, and did it achieve the results you envisioned? What process determined your specification of these 4 priority goals? Was your approach informed generally or specifically by your involvement in the UIC Doctoral Program or UIC coaching?
5. Let's review the current development of your school and leadership through the lens of UIC's Ten Factors for Urban School Transformation. For each factor, these questions:
 - a. *What accomplishments stand out? What areas of professional practice show promise?*
 - b. *What challenges, obstacles, or resistance do you face?*
 - c. *Where are you focusing most of your leadership and energy right now?*
 - d. *What is the next step forward in school capacity and professional practice?*
6. Have you developed diagnostic tools, processes, or artifacts to collect critical data or assess your strength in key areas of school development? Have you developed a profile of indicators that tell you where your school is now and where you want to go next? Would you share them with our project?
7. {Other key areas of high school reform: Attendance and tardiness; 9th Grade On-Track; Developing supports for student learning and personalization; classroom behavior and discipline; establishing a college orientation; teacher recruitment and counseling out
8. UIC Coaching: What have been the strengths of the UIC coaching model for you as a principal? Does the model have limitations from your point of view? Can the model be improved?