Study of Instructional Support in Lawrence Public Schools

SEPTEMBER 2014

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# Executive Summary

In May 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) released the Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) turnaround plan (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012), which outlined ESE’s approach to improve the conditions in LPS and the performance of students, schools, and the district as a whole. In 2012‒13, researchers from American Institutes for Research (AIR) studied the conditions that existed in LPS *prior to the Receivership*.

Research activities included focus groups with students, teachers, and school administrators, and interviews with district staff members; classroom observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool; and analyses of relevant findings from the spring 2012 administration of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning in Massachusetts (TELL Mass) survey. Taken as a whole, the findings from these reports indicated a need for more targeted and effective instructional support for teachers in LPS. These findings also provided the rationale for further investigation to understand more clearly the instructional support available to teachers and how various activities might be developed, provided, supplemented, revised, expanded, or discontinued.

## Research Questions

To examine the instructional support in LPS, the research study set out to answer the following questions:

| Research Questions |
| --- |
| **Defining and Delivering Instructional Support.** How do LPS teachers, coaches, school administrators, and district officials define “instructional support”? What are the key features of current strategies to support instructional improvement provided by individual schools in LPS? By the LPS district central office? Do teachers access other sources of instructional support? |
| **District Coherence.** Is there a clear vision for instruction in LPS? If so, are current instructional supports aligned with that vision? Is there a shared set of expectations between schools and the district of what the LPS district central office should provide and what individual schools should provide? |
| **Meeting the Needs of Teachers.** How does the LPS district central office identify the needs of teachers in the schools? How does the LPS district central office identify needs across the district and target groups or individual schools? |
| **Targeting Support to Specific Teachers.** Are instructional supports targeted for specific groups of teachers? For teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)? If so, who provides these supports and how effective are they? |
| **Benefits and Challenges.** What current instructional supports are most beneficial? What improvements are needed to provide more effective instructional support? |
| **Best Practices in Other Districts.** What are the key features of strategies that districts use to provide effective instructional support to schools and teachers? In particular, what are the features that districts use in providing these supports to a large number of schools as part of a turnaround effort? |

The breadth of topics addressed by these questions was intended to gather a comprehensive view of instructional support in LPS, focusing primarily on the instructional support provided during the 2011–12 (prior to the Level 5 turnaround) and 2012–13 (first full year under Receivership) school years.

## Methodology

From October 2013 through January 2014, AIR researchers conducted focus groups with teachers and coaches in LPS as well as interviews with school administrators and district staff members to gather information on instructional support, primarily focused on support provided in the 2011‒12 and 2012‒13 school years. The sample of six schools included two schools serving elementary grades, three schools serving middle school grades, and one high school.

In addition to the information collected in the focus groups and interviews, AIR researchers received from ESE *Best Practices in Turnaround Instructional Support*, created by Hanover Research. This annotated bibliography presents information on best practices in instructional support for struggling schools in turnaround conditions. Researchers used the information in this annotated bibliography to inform the recommendations section, which addresses the research questions related to best practices in other districts.

## Findings

Analyses of the qualitative data revealed several main findings, organized according to the four core topic areas under study.

### Defining and Delivering Instructional Support

* Teachers in every school mentioned coaches as their primary source of instructional support. Other commonly mentioned sources of support included colleagues, school administrators, professional development, external providers, and materials.
* Study participants generally perceived coaches as effective. However, some stakeholders expressed concerns about coaches’ additional responsibilities and duties, many of which were not related directly to coaching.
* Teachers reported school-level professional development to be more effective and targeted to their needs than districtwide professional development. Nonetheless, some teachers did report improvement in districtwide professional development in recent years. Coaches also perceived improvements in the professional development that coaches received, especially support they received in the 2013–14 school year.
* Overall, respondents reported generally positive perspectives on the support provided through The Achievement Network (ANet). Supports available through the Teaching and Learning Alliance (TLA) were viewed positively, although there was concern that support from TLA was of limited value once the program was established in a school.

### District Coherence

* District staff members seemed to agree on an overall district vision for achievement and instruction, although school staff members, including principals and teachers, did not consistently perceive a common district vision.

### School-based staff members perceived a lack of a unified districtwide vision of instructional support, and frequently cited an increase in the level and variety of school autonomy as a contributing factor. Respondents noted that school autonomy resulted in an increased focus on school-specific instructional practices and support. Teachers and administrators agreed that there were uniform instructional goals within their own schools.

### Identifying Teachers’ Needs

* Teachers communicated directly with school administrators and coaches about the instructional supports they needed. Principals and coaches reported that formal learning walks and assessment data also helped them identify the types of instructional supports teachers needed.
* Despite past and present efforts by the LPS district central office to identify teachers’ needs, teachers reported concerns about how well their needs were understood by district staff members.

### Targeting Support to Specific Teachers

* Staff members at most schools indicated that English language arts (ELA) and mathematics teachers received the majority of instructional supports from the school and district. Principals, teachers, and coaches felt that few instructional supports were provided to teachers of other subject areas such as science.
* Principals and district staff perceived instructional support provided for teaching English Language Learners (ELLs) to be adequate. However, coaches and teachers had mixed perceptions about whether supports provided for teaching ELLs were sufficient.
* School staff perceived targeted instructional support for teaching students with disabilities to be limited. Although respondents noted that collaborative planning between special education and general education teachers had been beneficial, some teachers and principals reported that paraprofessionals in inclusion classrooms did not receive specific training to support special education students, making them a less effective support to the general education teachers.

**Recommendations**

Taking into account the findings from the focus groups and interviews in this study, the findings from the baseline data collection, and the best practices identified in the literature review from Hanover Research, we recommend the following strategies for consideration:

* Articulate and communicate a districtwide vision for instruction and align district-level instructional support to this vision.
* Limit administrative and other noninstructional roles and responsibilities of coaches so that they may maximize time and effort spent providing instructional support.
* Continue supporting coaches through targeted professional development.
* Build relationships between the district central office and teachers.
* Reconsider district professional development offerings.
* Provide opportunities for teachers, coaches, and school administrators to engage in collaborative activities around instruction.
* Provide more targeted support for teaching ELLs and students with disabilities to teachers and paraprofessionals.
* Expand coaching services or other instructional support to teachers of subject areas other than ELA and mathematics.
* Evaluate process of assigning coaches or other providers of instructional support to schools.

# Introduction

In May 2012, the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) released the Lawrence Public Schools (LPS) turnaround plan (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012), which outlined ESE’s approach to improve the conditions in LPS and the performance of students, schools, and the district as a whole. A central theme in the turnaround plan is improving the instructional delivery in LPS classrooms by building the capacity of teachers to provide high-quality instruction. This theme is apparent in the four core strategies that drive the turnaround efforts in LPS: time, data, and expectations; people and partners; support and engagement; and autonomy and accountability.

LPS Theory of Action

“When we hire and cultivate the best talent, provide more time for learning, use data to tailor instruction, and establish a culture of high expectations…

* … and when we provide an engaging experience, encourage parent involvement, and articulate a strategy to meet the needs of our English language learners and students with disabilities…
* …and when we provide autonomy to principals and create a robust system of support and accountability…
* … and when we build district systems and structures that support, align and reinforce execution…
* …and when we deploy district resources in a manner that promotes, supports, and rewards effective instruction…

…then student achievement will increase dramatically and a permanent system of accountable, empowered, excellent education will be established and sustained.”

(Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, pp. 9‒10).

In addition to the core strategies, the turnaround plan includes the LPS theory of action (see “LPS Theory of Action” at right), which makes repeated mention of key facets of instructional support, including recruitment and development of staff, meeting the needs of English language learners (ELLs) and students with disabilities, providing principals with autonomy, and deploying district resources.

The turnaround plan also includes findings and challenges in LPS, some of which were articulated in ESE’s 2011 district review (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2011). The turnaround plan notes, “At its core, the achievement gaps and lack of growth stem from a lack of effective instruction in many classrooms across the district. The Receiver’s observations confirmed what the ESE district review had found: the quality of teaching and school leadership varies greatly and the bar has been set too low” (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, p. 5).

In 2012‒13, researchers from American Institutes for Research (AIR) studied the conditions that existed in LPS *prior to the Receivership*. Research activities included focus groups with students, teachers, and school administrators, and interviews with district staff members (Stein, Manzella, & Duhon, 2013); classroom observations using the Classroom Assessment Scoring System (CLASS) observation tool (Manzella, Stein, & Duhon, 2013); and analyses of relevant findings from the spring 2012 administration of the Teaching, Empowering, Leading, and Learning in Massachusetts (TELL Mass) survey (Duhon, Stein, & Kistner, 2013). Findings related to instructional support prior to Receivership from the baseline reports follow:

### Focus Groups and Interviews

* Participants observed that the quality of instruction varied widely among teachers within and across schools in LPS.
* Participants reported that time for collaboration contributed to improved quality of instruction. However, teachers and school administrators indicated there were limited opportunities for meaningful collaboration within and across schools, thus hindering improvements to teaching and learning.
* Although teachers and school administrators said they valued the support that coaches provided in terms of improving instruction, they believed there was a shortage of high-quality coaches in LPS and a lack of clarity regarding their roles.
* Participants believed LPS offered many opportunities for professional development. However, participants noted that professional development opportunities were rarely tailored to individual school or teacher needs and were seldom sustained or strategic.
* Teachers noted that services for ELLs and students with disabilities did not meet the specific needs of those students. They also perceived a lack of sufficient staff to provide these supports.

### Classroom Observations (Using the CLASS Observation Tool[[1]](#footnote-1))

* Across all three levels (Grades 2 and 3, Grades 6 and 7, and high schools), Classroom Organization was the highest rated domain, Emotional Support was the second highest, and Instructional Support was the lowest.
* Across all 60 observed classrooms, behaviors and interactions for Instructional Support were never or rarely evident in 14 classrooms (23 percent), observed inconsistently or with limited effectiveness in 45 classrooms (75 percent), and observed consistently and effectively in one classroom (2 percent).

**TELL Mass Survey (Spring 2012)**

* Teachers cited instructional practices and support as an important factor affecting their willingness to continue teaching at their current school, second only to school leadership.
* Forty-one percent of teachers indicated that instructional practices and support was the most important condition in promoting student learning (followed by managing student conduct at 23 percent).
* Seventy-eight percent of teachers reported that they *agree* or *strongly agree* that school leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns in instructional practices and support.
* Ninety-three percent of teachers indicated that teachers are held to high professional standards for delivering instruction.
* Seventy-three percent of teachers responded that supports provided to teachers translate to improvements in teachers’ instructional practices.
* More than half of the respondents to the TELL Mass survey reported they needed professional development in meeting the needs of different groups of learners, with almost three out of four teachers indicating a need for support in closing the achievement gap and teaching ELL students.

Taken as a whole, these findings indicated a need for more targeted and effective instructional support for teachers in LPS. These findings also provided the rationale for further investigation to understand more clearly the instructional support available to teachers and how various activities might be developed, provided, supplemented, revised, expanded, or discontinued.

## Research Questions

To examine the instructional support in LPS, ESE contracted with AIR. The research study set out to answer the following questions grouped into six topic areas:

| Research Questions |
| --- |
| **Defining and Delivering Instructional Support.** How do LPS teachers, coaches, school administrators, and district officials define “instructional support”? What are the key features of current strategies to support instructional improvement provided by individual schools in LPS? By the LPS district central office? Do teachers access other sources of instructional support? |
| **District Coherence.** Is there a clear vision for instruction in LPS? If so, are current instructional supports aligned with that vision? Is there a shared set of expectations between schools and the district of what the LPS district central office should provide and what individual schools should provide? |
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| **Targeting Support to Specific Teachers.** Are instructional supports targeted for specific groups of teachers? For teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)? If so, who provides these supports and how effective are they? |
| **Benefits and Challenges.** What current instructional supports are most beneficial? What improvements are needed to provide more effective instructional support? |
| **Best Practices in Other Districts.** What are the key features of strategies that districts use to provide effective instructional support to schools and teachers? In particular, what are the features that districts use in providing these supports to a large number of schools as part of a turnaround effort? |

The breadth of topics addressed by these questions is intended to gather a comprehensive view of instructional support in LPS, focusing primarily on the instructional support provided during the 2011‒12 (prior to the Level 5 turnaround) and 2012‒13 (first full year under Receivership) school years. This report presents findings from qualitative analyses of data collected through focus groups with LPS teachers and coaches, and interviews with school administrators and district staff members.

## Report Structure

This report opens with a discussion of the methodology for this study, including the sample selection and data collection, followed by a section on data analysis. This discussion is followed by a section on findings, which is organized by four core topic areas addressed in the research questions[[2]](#footnote-2) mentioned earlier. The report concludes with a summary and recommendations.

# Methodology

From October 2013 through January 2014, AIR researchers conducted focus groups with teachers and coaches in LPS as well as interviews with school administrators and district staff members to gather information on instructional support, primarily focused on support provided in the 2011‒12 and 2012‒13 school years. This section describes procedures for the selection of sample schools and study participants, protocol development, data collection, and data analysis.

## Sample Selection

Of all of the schools in LPS, 25 schools were determined[[3]](#footnote-3) to provide programming that was largely reflective of typical instructional approaches throughout the district prior to the Receivership. AIR researchers created a stratified random sample in October 2013, taking into account grade levels, state accountability levels, and whether schools participated in The Achievement Network[[4]](#footnote-4) (ANet) during 2012 and 2013.[[5]](#footnote-5) Researchers chose these criteria to ensure that the responses reflected a broad range of perspectives from individuals at different types of schools in LPS. As such, the data reported in this study should be viewed as reflective of the supports provided across this sample of schools and not representative of LPS as a whole.

The sample of six schools included two schools serving elementary grades, three schools serving middle school grades,[[6]](#footnote-6) and one high school. The sample also included schools at varying state accountability levels. Two schools in the sample participated in ANet during the 2012‒13 school year. Two other schools in the sample participated in ANet for the first time in the 2013‒14 school year. The remaining two schools have not and currently do not participate in ANet.

In October 2013, an LPS district staff member e-mailed all LPS principals informing them of the study and that their school may be selected to participate in the study. Following that e-mail, an AIR researcher contacted the principals of selected schools,[[7]](#footnote-7) informing them that their school was chosen to participate in the study and that AIR researchers intended to conduct focus groups with their schools’ teachers and coaches. The initial e-mail also mentioned that AIR researchers would contact principals to schedule interviews with school administrators.

### Selection of Focus Group and Interview Participants

**Teacher and Coach Focus Groups**

All teachers at the sample of selected schools were eligible to participate in the data collection activities. An AIR researcher sent an e-mail to all teachers at selected schools, informing them of the study and asking them to complete a short online survey asking if they were interested in participating in a focus group. The survey, which was open for approximately two weeks, also asked for demographic information, including the number of years teaching, the number of years teaching in LPS, and experience teaching various groups of students. In some cases, several e-mails were sent to teachers at a given school to reach the preferred number of four to eight participants in a focus group. All teachers who completed the survey were contacted to participate in the focus groups. One school had enough participants to warrant two focus groups; at another school, although two teachers informed researchers they intended to participate, no one showed up at the scheduled focus group. Coaches at each of these schools also were eligible to participate in separate focus groups and received a similar e-mail and survey. In all, six teacher focus groups and two coach focus groups were conducted. See Table 1 for details. Participants were informed in the survey and at the focus groups (and interviews for school administrators and district staff members) that their responses would be anonymous and that they could withdraw at any time.

**School Administrator Interviews**

All principals at the sample of selected schools were eligible to participate in the data collection activities. An AIR researcher sent an e-mail to principals at selected schools, informing them of the study and asking to arrange a date and time when they could conduct an interview. The interviews could take place either in-person, coinciding with the day that researchers would be at the school for the teacher focus group, or by phone. Of the selected schools, AIR researchers interviewed all but one principal, who declined to participate. Although principals had the option to select another school administrator to participate in the interviews, no principal selected this option. Prior to the interview, researchers provided interviewees with a list of the types of questions they would be asked.

**District Staff Member Interviews**

AIR researchers had preliminary conversations with an LPS district staff member and an ESE staff member to discuss which individuals at the LPS district central office would be best suited to participate in interviews about instructional supports. The LPS district staff member met with some members of her team to discuss the appropriate people given their roles and responsibilities in the district. The six district staff members who participated in the interviews received a description of the study and the data collection activities. Prior to the interview, researchers provided interviewees with a list of the types of questions they would be asked.

## Protocol Development

To collect information on a wide range of topics from various stakeholders, researchers at AIR developed separate focus group and interview protocols for each group of respondents. These protocols were designed to gather information to answer the research questions posed earlier and focused on stakeholders’ interactions with instructional support within LPS. Drafts of the protocols were shared with several ESE staff members for review before AIR researchers finalized the protocols.

The teacher focus group protocols were designed to gather information on teacher perspectives on topics such as the instructional support they have received during the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years, the benefits and challenges of those supports, and the supports that teachers would like to receive. The coach focus group protocols aimed to gather perspectives of coaches on, among other things, the roles of coaches, the district’s vision for providing instructional support, and whether the supports were tailored to individual or collective teacher needs. The protocols also were designed to gather information about coaches’ insights on the district’s expectations of instructional supports and how that support was implemented at the school level. (See Appendices A and B for the focus group protocols.)

In addition to focus group protocols, researchers designed separate protocols for use in interviews with school administrators and district staff members. Interviews allowed AIR researchers to delve deeper into specific topics and to gather information particular to an individual’s position and responsibilities. For the school administrator interviews, researchers were interested in gathering perspectives on the instructional support the teachers at their school received over the past two years, the supports they made available to staff members at their schools, and the supports provided by the district. The protocols also included questions about the benefits and challenges of existing instructional support and areas school administrators identified as needing improvement. In addition, researchers developed questions on the district vision for instruction and expectations for student learning and on support services designed to meet the needs of groups of students requiring additional support, such as ELLs and students with disabilities. Researchers asked similar questions to district staff members, although in some cases the follow-up questions varied depending on a district staff member’s roles and responsibilities. (See Appendices C and D for the interview protocols.)

## Data Collection

### Primary Data Sources

Researchers conducted eight focus groups—six with teachers and two with coaches—during a two-week period in October and November 2013 (see Table 2). The six teacher focus groups were conducted on-site at five schools in LPS (one school had 12 interested respondents who were split into two focus groups). Forty-two teachers participated in the focus groups in all; each focus group consisted of four to seven participants. Seven coaches participated in the two focus groups—five coaches in one focus group and two coaches in another. One coach focus group was held at a school, and the other focus group was held at the LPS district central office. All focus groups were conducted in person by two AIR researchers and lasted up to one hour each. Focus-group sessions were audio-recorded and transcribed by an external provider for analysis purposes.

In the same two-week period, researchers conducted five interviews with principals. Three of the principal interviews were conducted in-person at the administrator’s school, and two interviews were conducted by telephone. In January 2014, researchers conducted interviews with six district staff members. All but one of the interviews was conducted in-person at the LPS district central office. Because of a scheduling conflict, researchers conducted one of the district staff member interviews by telephone. Each principal and district staff member interview lasted up to one hour and also was audio-recorded and transcribed.

Table 2. Detail of Focus Groups and Interviews

| Type of Discussion | Composition of Discussion |
| --- | --- |
| ***Teacher Focus Groups***   * Six focus groups * Five schools * 42 total teachers * October–November 2013 | * School 1: Five teachers * School 2: Six teachers * School 3: Two focus groups of 12 teachers total (one focus group of five teachers and one focus group of seven teachers) * School 4: Four teachers * School 5: Five teachers |
| ***Coach Focus Groups***   * Two focus groups * Seven total coaches * October–November 2013 | * Five coaches * Two coaches |
| ***School Administrator Interviews***   * Five school administrators * Five schools * October–November 2013 | * One administrator per school |
| ***District Staff Member Interview***s   * Six district staff members * January 2014 | * Six district staff members |

### Secondary Data Source

In addition to the information collected in the focus groups and interviews, AIR researchers received a document from ESE created by Hanover Research: *Best Practices in Turnaround Instructional Support*. This annotated bibliography presents information on best practices in instructional support for struggling schools in turnaround conditions. Researchers used the information in this annotated bibliography to inform the recommendations section, which addresses the research questions related to best practices in other districts.

## Data Analysis

Most of the analyses focused on the qualitative data that were used to answer, at least in part, all of the research questions for this study. Researchers also used the annotated bibliography from Hanover Research to answer research questions on staffing and best practices.

Two AIR researchers analyzed the data collected through the previously discussed focus groups and interviews to better understand how people in different roles at the school and district levels perceived the instructional support in LPS. The transcripts for each focus group and interview were entered into NVivo, a computer program used for data analysis. AIR researchers then developed a set of codes using the research questions and interview protocols. Researchers reviewed each transcript and sorted the text into one or more of these codes.

To ensure that codes were assigned consistently by both researchers, three of the transcripts   
(15 percent) were double-coded. The interrater reliability (IRR) on these double-coded transcripts was 96.8 percent (weighted by source size; unweighted IRR was 97.1 percent), with a kappa of 0.58 (0.62 unweighted). In addition, researchers frequently discussed their coding of the data from all focus groups and interviews to ensure consistent interpretation.

Researchers then used the data to identify central themes in the instructional support provided in LPS, areas of agreement according to perceptions of different groups of respondents, and areas where responses were not necessarily aligned or were in contrast. Researchers also used the data to identify the most significant strengths and challenges perceived by the various groups of respondents. Focusing on the research questions, researchers used the data to identify perspectives on the following:

* Definition of instructional support
* Strategies for providing instructional support to teachers in LPS
* Districtwide vision for instruction
* How teachers’ needs were determined
* How support was targeted to specific teachers
* Most beneficial instructional support
* Challenging areas for providing instructional support
* Personnel in LPS who provide instructional support

# Findings

Analyses of the qualitative data revealed several main findings, organized according to the four core topic areas under study. The sections that follow offer detail on the evidence supporting these findings.

### Defining and Delivering Instructional Support

* Teachers in every school mentioned coaches as their primary source of instructional support. Other commonly mentioned sources of support included colleagues, school administrators, professional development, external providers, and materials.
* Study participants generally perceived coaches as effective. However, some stakeholders expressed concerns about coaches’ additional responsibilities and duties, many of which were not related directly to coaching.
* Teachers reported school-level professional development to be more effective and targeted to their needs than districtwide professional development. Nonetheless, some teachers did report improvement in districtwide professional development in recent years. Coaches also perceived improvements in the professional development that coaches received in the 2013–14 school year.
* Overall, respondents reported generally positive perspectives on the support provided through ANet. Supports available through the Teaching and Learning Alliance (TLA) were viewed positively, although there was concern that support from TLA was of limited value once the program was established in a school.

### District Coherence

* District staff members seemed to agree on an overall district vision for achievement and instruction, although school staff members, including principals and teachers, did not consistently perceive a common district vision.

### School-based staff members perceived a lack of a unified districtwide vision of instructional support, and frequently cited an increase in the level and variety of school autonomy as a contributing factor. Respondents noted that school autonomy resulted in an increased focus on school-specific instructional practices and support. Teachers and administrators agreed that there were uniform instructional goals within their own schools.

### Identifying Teachers’ Needs

* Teachers communicated directly with school administrators and coaches about the instructional supports they needed. Principals and coaches reported that formal learning walks and assessment data also helped them identify the types of instructional supports teachers needed.
* Despite past and present efforts by the LPS district central office to identify teachers’ needs, teachers reported concerns about how well their needs were understood by district staff members.

### Targeting Support to Specific Teachers

* Staff members at most schools indicated that English language arts (ELA) and mathematics teachers received the majority of instructional supports from the school and district. Principals, teachers, and coaches felt that few instructional supports were provided to teachers of other subject areas such as science.
* Principals and district staff perceived instructional support provided for teaching ELLs to be adequate. However, coaches and teachers had mixed perceptions about whether supports provided for teaching ELLs were sufficient.
* School staff perceived targeted instructional support for teaching students with disabilities to be limited. Although respondents noted that collaborative planning between special education and general education teachers had been beneficial, some teachers and principals reported that paraprofessionals in inclusion classrooms did not receive specific training to support special education students, making them a less effective support to the general education teachers.

The main focus of the study was the instructional support provided in the 2011–12 and 2012–13 school years. In cases where respondents commented on current instructional support, we indicate the time period in the finding. AIR researchers used extreme caution in reporting our findings to ensure that we protected the anonymity of respondents as necessary. As such, names or individual schools are not identified in this report. In some cases, potentially identifiable information has been removed. In addition, some direct quotes were revised for clarity.

## Defining and Delivering Instructional Support

The main findings in this section describe how teachers, coaches, school administrators, and district officials defined instructional support and how they described their perspectives on the strategies for how that support is delivered. Following the main findings are additional details on the evidence supporting these findings.

**Finding 1: Teachers in every school mentioned coaches as their primary sources of instructional support. Other commonly mentioned sources of support included colleagues, school administrators, professional development, external providers, and materials.**

Respondents in every school described instructional coaches as the main source of instructional support and nearly universally praised them as being good sources of support for struggling teachers. One principal said, “Our coaching does a good job of sitting down with teachers that really, really need it, [and are] able to walk them through certain kind of lessons.” As one elementary teacher commented, “The coaches, we can go right to them, they’re very approachable.”Teachers from each school reported on the curriculum and instruction support they receive from the coaches that includes assisting in aligning the curriculum with the Common Core State Standards, putting together learning trajectories, helping with classroom management, meeting with teachers to coplan lessons and create modifications for special needs students, conducting classroom observations and receiving feedback, analyzing student data, and modeling lessons.

One teacher, describing the ideal balance of responsibilities for a coach, said:

In a perfect world, a coach might have a lab class and then maybe an intervention class in our new extended learning time. But, [during] every other class during the day, [the coach] should be coaching physically in classrooms, modeling, watching, co-teaching, planning, suggesting, resourcing.

Support From Coaches

According to the teachers, coaches go beyond assisting with curriculum and instruction and also provide logistical supports. One focus group of middle school teachers discussed how coaches help to gather materials teachers need for their lessons. A teacher noted, “I gave [the literacy coach] the profiles of my kids, and my goal and what I was going to be working on, and [the literacy coach] helped me pick books.”Coaches also provide data-driven feedback to teachers to help them improve instruction. One middle school teacher noted:

[The coach] does a lot of data, like at the beginning of the year [the coach will]…crunch our numbers and let us know how our kids did last year on the MCAS [Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System], which standards they were not successful with, and help us go down the path of how can I teach that better. So it’s very data-driven*.*

Teachers praised coaches for helping them breathe new life into standard curricula. A teacher said:

Obviously there’s the information curriculum-wise that we need to cover based on the standards set by the state and district, but I think our coaches have allowed us to help design additional curriculum that can kind of sit around that and I think it brings some excitement to some of the standard things we always have to cover.

Discussing modeling, one elementary teacher stated, “I think that’s helpful to see somebody [the coach] actually in action teaching [your] students…so that you have a model to follow.” At another school, teachers spoke about how the support from coaches aligns to the LPS goal of implementing the Common Core State Standards in all schools. “English language arts coaches and math coaches help us with making sense aligning the curriculum [to] the Common Core and putting together trajectories and helping us with some of the planning.”

One principal said that teachers receive different levels of attention from coaches, stating, “They don’t require the same amount of attention. All teachers…in this building receive what they need.”The principal further elaborated that the level of assistance that individual teachers need is sometimes determined by the administrators, but most of the time it is the teachers who request it.

I think [the teachers] feel comfortable saying, you know I’ve got this unit and I’m just not getting anywhere with it and I need some help…, but there are rare occasions when I would walk into a classroom and see that [a teacher] needs some help.

In these situations, the principal reported the need to ensure the coach models practices to get the teacher “up to speed.”

At another school, two teachers described very different experiences interacting with the same coach. One teacher said he had to seek out the content coach for help and lay out what his lesson plan was, but once he did so, the coach helped him figure out how to make it more interactive.   
A colleague of his said that she approached the same content coach, showed the coach the test she had created that had not gone well in her class and asked for advice, but said the coach did not offer her any useful information and actually pointed her toward a curriculum that was not made for her content area. The second teacher no longer counts the content coach among the instructional supports she uses and instead chooses to ask her fellow teachers for help.

Although the specific experiences of working with coaches can vary from teacher to teacher, many indicated that instructional coaches were one of their main sources of support. They were not, however, the only instructional support available to teachers.

#### Support From Other Sources Besides Coaches

Teachers from four schools reported their fellow grade-level or subject-area teachers as a form of instructional support. One elementary school teacher mentioned, “I would go to another coteacher first [before a coach] because there are so many teachers that have had so much experience in this building that are just such a wealth of resources.” Teachers reported that support from colleagues occurred in a variety of ways, including pairing up with other teachers, having veteran teachers available to support and mentor new teachers, giving teachers opportunities to observe their peers, going into another teacher’s classroom to help conduct a lesson, and brainstorming together on how to improve a lesson or better explain a concept. One middle school teacher reported:

It’s a veteran group, so teams have had years to develop as a team and as new people come in, they have the veterans’ support, but they also bring in some new energy. And if I’m floundering in…math, I can go to the [next grade] math teacher for some suggestions or to the [same grade] math teacher…. So there is a great deal of collaboration and that’s encouraged and fostered. And it’s critical to our success.

Teachers also identified special education teachers and paraprofessionals as instructional supports. The availability of special education teachers and paraprofessionals to provide targeted support to specific students is a benefit not only to the students, but to the general education teachers as well. This additional assistance to differentiate for one or two students allows the classroom teacher to provide the instruction for the rest of the class. One middle school teacher reported:

And we’ve been fortunate this year that every grade level has a special-ed teacher and special-ed paraprofessional, so our special-ed kids have consistent support in class, there is always someone there. And the feedback from general-ed people has been very positive; it’s really made a difference being able to differentiate without doing a pull-out…. It’s nice to talk about, we want to produce this, but how is that going to look for this person, and this kid and this kid. So to have that one on one right there with that special education person is helpful.

This sentiment was echoed by another teacher who added “[the special-ed teacher] is not afraid to throw an idea out there…, rephrase something for those students in a way they understand…. I think their role is valued.”

Some teachers also cited the school administrators as a form of instructional support. Teachers primarily described school administrator support as being available to have a conversation, listen to problems and concerns, and offer real, concrete solutions without being made to feel as though they are putting themselves at risk for being fired. As one high school teacher noted:

Last year was my first year teaching. It was terrifying, a horrible experience. And there were many days I went home crying and many of those days before I went home I stopped in our principal’s office to do that. And asked, “I need help…. I need you to come in; I need you to tell me what I’m doing wrong.” And I felt completely comfortable with doing it…; [the principal] responded with complete understanding and nothing but warmth and wanting to help me and has totally put me at ease…. [The principal] would give me concrete strategies to use. [The principal] would come in and see my classroom. [The principal] would talk to the kids…. [The principal] would suggest colleagues to go watch.

Another high school teacher added:

I could go into the administrators and say this is what I’m doing…, and [the administrator] would say flat out it isn’t going to work…. You need to try this, try that, talk to this person, talk to this colleague…; if it’s not working, come back.

Yet another important component of instructional support identified by teachers, principals, and coaches was professional development sessions. Overall, nine professional development half-days are built into the LPS school calendar; four of these days are districtwide and bring together teachers of like content and grade levels from across schools. The other five days are school-based professional development.

In addition to the sources within the district and schools, respondents described instructional support from external sources, such as a data consultant, a writing consultant, and community partners. Some teachers perceived the support from external providers, including ANet and TLA, to be beneficial (see Finding 4 in this section for additional information).

Teachers in every school mentioned having the necessary materials and technology as being part of instructional support. Specifically, teachers mentioned having computers, programs, textbooks, instructional materials, curriculum content, scope and sequence, and supplies. One middle school discussed a new mathematics system, Countdown, which allows teachers within LPS to share their lesson plans for other teachers, both within and outside their school, to view and use. The teacher stated, “[Countdown allows us to] share, we can allow other people to see my lessons.... A lot of lessons from teachers last year were collected and put up [online]…so that if we like them we could use them.” Teachers also felt that other technology in their rooms, such as interactive white boards, and the associated trainings on how to use these tools, supported their classroom instruction.

In addition to coaches, participants in the teacher focus groups identified other useful sources of instructional support, including fellow teachers, specialists, administrators, professional development sessions, external consultants and programs, and technology. Additional findings explore the specifics of these various forms of instructional support.

**Finding 2: Study participants generally perceived coaches as effective. However, some stakeholders expressed concerns about coaches’ additional responsibilities and duties, many of which were not related directly to coaching.**

Roles of Coaches

According to focus group respondents, the specific roles and duties of coaches varied across schools. Coaches themselves described their roles in a few different ways. One coach said, “There’s a sort of balance between developing and overseeing curriculum…and then hands-on or very specific classroom-oriented assistance.” Another coach said they are tasked with “helping everything from lesson planning to classroom management to utilizing the curriculum and curriculum materials.” A third coach noted that providing instructional support to teachers means “modeling best practices, being a support for content area teachers, being up to date on research, [and] knowing best practices to be able to share and troubleshoot with them.”

Teachers mentioned many of these duties when describing the supports instructional coaches provide, although teachers in focus groups at a few schools mentioned uncertainty of the specific types of support coaches were supposed to offer. One teacher said, “I would say both coaches, throughout the school day can be found in the office doing data analysis.” Teachers at this school felt that the coaches were less available to teachers as a resource for instructional support and were instead more a part of the school administration staff. Teachers also expressed a concern about coaches serving in roles as evaluators, discussed later on page 17.

District staff members acknowledged that the role of the coaches changed in recent years. One district staff member, recalling the role of coaches in previous years, said, “The majority of the time [they were] being used as kind of glorified secretaries running errands, copying, [and] printing things, maybe discipline, but very little of their time was spent on academics or coaching and developing teachers.” Another district staff member agreed that changing how principals view the coaches was important for them to be considered a true instructional support for teachers. The district staff member explained:

We really sort of have to build awareness with the principals because this role evolved over many years. When we started in the district to have these sort of assigned roles, they weren’t called coaches, they were called curriculum facilitators, and then back in the day they were the people who ran off resources and gave teachers sort of handouts or counted test booklets and those kind of roles. I think we moved far away from that, [but] maybe in some cases not far enough.

Support Provided by Coaches

Teachers received varying amounts of coaching, and coaching for new teachers often took priority over coaching for other staff members. Participants in one focus group of coaches reported that the supports they provided truly depended on teacher needs as determined primarily through classroom observations. Participants in another focus group of coaches reported that school administrators selected the teachers that each coach would support; once those teachers had received the appropriate amount of support, the coaches had flexibility to determine which other teachers received support. According to one principal, “If there’s a need, I’m going to ask [my coaches] that it be met.” Another principal, describing the distribution of coaching, explained, “Everyone gets the base, and then [the coaches] probably meet with their most advanced and most struggling teachers frequently. Most advanced is to make sure that they’re still inspired and pushing them. And then the struggling ones…obviously we want them to be successful.”

According to participants from one focus group of coaches, although coaches support both new and veteran teachers, “new teachers may get more support” than veteran teachers. In one school, the principal indicated that coaches specifically mentor new teachers, and in another school, the principal said, “I’ve asked [the coach] to make sure [the coach] works with the new teachers heavily.” According to coaches, although some teachers seek out coaching support, others “run the other direction,” and as a result the amount of coaching each teacher receives often varies. One coach explained, “The kind of work that we have to do with a very young and new faculty is different than you would do with a veteran faculty and the needs are greater.”

Availability of Coaches

Some teachers expressed concern about the amount of responsibilities coaches have. Although responsibilities varied by school, participants frequently identified instructional coaches as teaching full classes, teaching small lessons of pullout students, serving as data coaches, conducting professional development, and working on the school’s leadership team and other school committees. As one middle school principal commented:

Oh my god, [the coaches’] responsibilities are everything. So they monitor the curriculum flow in accordance with the Common Core standards of course. They educate the teachers about things like Common Core, which was new to them, last year and the year before, but we started talking about it even the year before. They bring in a lot of resources for [the teachers]. They answer all of [the teachers’] questions and concerns about resources that they need. They serve kind of as a conduit between them and the rest of the world…. I mean, they do everything, they really are seen by the staff as a major part of the leadership team, the decision making team in the building…. So they are a very, very integral part of the leadership team in this school, not just the academic leadership team, but the decision making team at this school too.

A middle school teacher at a different school emphasized their literacy coach’s focus on data, rather than on helping teachers develop their teaching skills. “I think they’re utilized in kind of [a] different capacity by the office more. We can tell you what they give us, but I feel like [the coach] is more of a data coach [in] how the office views them.” This was echoed by one of the coaches who indicated working with data as one of her primary responsibilities, who stated, “There’s a lot of data analyzing for trends, weaknesses, gaps, and then trying to identify how to fill in gaps to close them.”

According to focus group participants, the various responsibilities coaches hold can result in delays in receiving materials from coaches or difficulty in scheduling time to meet with the coaches. As one middle school teacher noted, “If I need to go to [the coach], [the coach] is an outlet. But I would also have to say…that I don’t always get everything I need quickly, when I reach out.”

Coaches and Evaluation

Teachers across many schools agreed that the coaches were very approachable and willing to help if teachers came to them asking for advice or help on teaching certain concepts or skills. To facilitate this relationship, teachers saw the need to keep the evaluation role and coaching role separate as very important. In schools where coaches also served as evaluators, some teachers perceived it was more difficult to approach them to ask for help.In one school, a coach who also holds an administrative role has resulted in some concern among staff, specifically in regards to evaluations. As one teacher noted:

[We’ll] meet and we’ll talk about what I need to work on and things like that, in terms of a coaching lens, but then [he/she will] be in my room the next week with the [administrator] hat on and evaluating me, which is hard, it is really hard. I wish I had more [of] just [a] person that I could go to—and I would go to [the staff member] with questions that I have, I totally feel comfortable about that—but [I] also have the evaluation piece in the back of my head.

Quality of Coaches

The level of knowledge about classroom instruction that the coaches have was important to the teachers, although opinions varied on whether all coaches had the expertise and background that teachers desired. Discussing the backgrounds of the coaches, a teacher at another school said, “The people that have held the coaching positions [at our school] have been classroom teachers, have a certain degree of expertise, and are people that generally teachers seek out for supports.”

Others worried, however, about the expertise of the coach and were concerned that although the coach may have been well-versed in the subject matter, the coach may not have known best practices for teaching his or her specific population of students. This is particularly a concern of teachers of ELLs and special education teachers. One teacher of ELL students noted, “Our content coach is not a specialized ESL teacher…. I think it’s an important fact to point out that this person can put in reports on Teach Point about strategies and instructional support in the classroom, but in fact [the coach’s] background is not ESL.”

As reported earlier, teachers identified coaches as their main sources of instructional support and were generally positive about the services coaches provided. However, it appears the effectiveness of coaches may be limited by the various responsibilities coaches have in addition to their roles in providing instructional support. In other words, it may be that coaches are asked to do too much that removes them from instructionally-focused work.

**Finding 3: Teachers reported school-level professional development to be more effective and targeted to their needs than districtwide professional development. Nonetheless, some teachers did report improvement in districtwide professional development in recent years. Coaches also perceived improvements in the professional development that coaches received, especially support they received in the 2013–14 school year.**

School-Level Professional Development

Generally, focus group participants perceived that professional development at the school level was often more targeted and relevant to their specific students than professional development provided by the district. Teachers indicated that the professional development sessions that were most helpful in improving their classroom instruction were those that gave them practical strategies and did not focus on theory or abstract concepts. The more beneficial sessions included higher order thinking, differentiating instruction, and Common Core State Standards training.

A middle school principal discussing school-level-based professional development said:

It is always, always around looking at assessments and informing instruction. So we break up again within the building between the math team, science team, and ELA/humanities team. And we work with what we have in front of us, to determine where we’re going.

One teacher felt the professional development at the school level was more responsive and that “the principal really listens to us and a lot of times tries to differentiate.” One principal echoed the idea that school-based professional development was more valuable, particularly when run by other teachers. “[One] reason why it’s helpful to not do it through the district is that…I think there’s just far more buy-in when [teachers] see their peers standing up there and say, ‘Well, this works for me.’” Although the utility of individual professional development trainings varied according to teachers, having input was important to them.

Although much of the professional development is offered by staff members within LPS, some principals also have made an effort to bring in outside experts to provide trainings on specific topics. An elementary teacher described how the school principal was bringing in an outside resource to discuss student behavior, as there was a need in the school. The teacher noted:

Our principal has tried to do some behavioral stuff…but [the principal has] done it on [his/her] own; it’s not a district thing…. [The principal has] gone out and sought out these people and brought them in on days when the district didn’t assign us professional development; [the principal] had to provide it, so [the principal] has done that.

In addition to principals’ pursuits of support from external sources, district staff members reported that additional instructional supports were provided to schools by district staff members and external partners.Two district staff members reported working directly with principals and department heads to design and deliver professional development. One district staff member explained:

We all work together to really create whatever the topics are that need to be addressed. And then once we come to consensus about what needs to be done, I work with the department heads to create the professional development that’s going to be delivered. And sometimes I have to deliver it…; other times, I’m kind of circulating around the school observing the department heads as they deliver the professional development.

Another district staff member reported that the district often brings in external partners to provide professional development. According to this staff member, “There’s probably 15 to 20 folks that we consider to be academic partners and that they’re school-facing, so they’re actually in our schools providing professional development or coaching the teachers or leaders.” These supports differed from those provided more broadly across the district.

District-Level Professional Development

Teachers perceived that district-level professional development often was not targeted to individual teacher needs, citing that district-provided activities before the school year began were not relevant. Speaking about districtwide professional development more globally, one teacher commented, “[The professional development] had absolutely nothing to do with what I do in the classroom…. I teach ESL 1 for [newcomers who] just stepped onto the country with us. So teaching them how to annotate Shakespeare really is not happening.” Another teacher recalled:

For about two years for math PD, we had to literally take this scope and sequence and rewrite it in a different order…. I really want to be sitting with the math Common Core and get down and dirty with it, I really do, I don’t want to be doing something I don’t need that’s never going to benefit me.

Coaches also sawthe effects of ineffective districtwide professional development on teachers and the lack of connection to individual classrooms.

Although teachers felt districtwide professional development sessions need to be more targeted, they perceived the district has been more receptive and responsive to feedback since the Receivership. A middle school teacher noted:

What historically happened on districtwide [professional development]…was a pity party and very little professional development…. Once the Receiver came in…he was able to hear us say, “Look, we don’t need this, this is what we need.” And if you said, “We’ll do it,” central office would run with it. And filling out evaluations at the end of the event…people actually wrote responses, which was atypical, and they took the time to read them, so that is becoming more the model now for the district—that it’s teacher-generated and often teacher-led.

A coach also noted an increase in the district’s interest to improve professional development opportunities. The coach said, *“*The new people in [the district] have really been open to feedback…; they want teacher feedback and you can see adjustments and enhancements being made based on teacher feedback, which I know my staff is very appreciative of.”

Professional Development for Coaches

Coaches and administrators highly praised the mandatory professional development sessions for coaches that occur twice a month, which were added in the 2013‒14 school year. One coach explained:

This is the first year we’re actually getting coached, so coached to be coaches…. I have never felt better knowing that at least every other week I’m going to receive some [professional development] myself, because I can always use improvements myself, I always look for ways to make myself better and the only way I do that is seeking it myself, [so] it’s nice to get that kind of [professional development].

According to district staff members, the professional development generally is around conducting observations, giving feedback, running effective planning meetings, and providing effective professional development. Some coaches, however, felt that sometimes these trainings resulted in competing expectations. One coach noted:

We left our coaches meeting last week [with] very clear expectations for the next time you have a coaches meeting, very clear expectations about how you are going to maximize your time; [of course,] your admin might have a different vision of how you’re using your time.

Taken as a whole, there seem to be improvements in the professional development available in LPS. According to respondents, the school-level professional development was more effective than in previous years, and the coach-specific professional development was perceived as a welcome new instructional support. Respondents perceived that the district-level professional development was not as targeted or as connected to the classroom as the school-level professional development, although they did note improvements in the district’s receptivity to feedback.

**Finding 4: Overall, respondents reported generally positive perspectives on the support provided through ANet. Supports available through TLA were viewed positively, although there was concern that support from TLA was of limited value once the program was established in a school.**

Several of the schools selected to participate in the focus groups and interviews were implementing programs that provided additional instructional support to teachers, including ANet and TLA.

ANet provides schools with quarterly interim assessments that allow schools to track their students’ performance and growth. These assessments are aligned to state summative assessments and give teachers information about specific topics with which individual students are struggling. When a school first adopts ANet, teachers are trained on how to use their assessments and analyze their students’ data. In addition, ANet explains the data cycle on which the assessments are based, letting teachers know when each skill will be tested so they can prepare their syllabus accordingly.

ANet was present in four of the six schools selected to participate in the focus groups and interviews. In two of these schools, ANet was already in place. The other two schools were implementing ANet for the first time in the 2013‒14 school year. Of the two schools without ANet, one has chosen not to adopt the program and the other is a high school, a grade-level for which ANet is not available.

TLA provides teachers with in-school coaching and professional development trainings related to ELA topics including literacy, writing, and phonics. TLA provided these services in two of the six schools selected to participate in the study. Both schools have worked with TLA for multiple years.

### The Achievement Network

All teachers, coaches, and principals in schools using ANet had positive impressions, specifically related to the emphasis on data and using data to support continuous improvement. One principal commented on the process:

The ANet program is excellent. ANet has the ability [to] give other teachers the ability to …, understand the standards, [and] through the standards the teachers have a better understanding …. They can go take model lessons…actually get to see what the kid is doing, what the student understands. What part of the standards that the student doesn’t know, you know? ANet has everything.

In preparation for the implementation of ANet, school instructional coaches received training on the program so they could then support their teachers. One coach noted:

The coaching around ANet we received was fantastic. The data cycle was modeled for us, how to really push ourselves as a data leadership team, we were pushed beyond our levels,…but this year, we’re that much better at it, and…I feel I’ve become a better coach because of the coaching I received from that.

Teachers and coaches also appreciated the data ANet provides.Formative assessments in ELA and mathematics given throughout the year deliver individualized, student-level data to teachers**.** One coach said that ANet has facilitated a shift toward more teacher-generated use of data. The coach explained, “ANet now breaks [data] down per standard so it makes it a little bit more user-friendly for teachers.” Teachers agreed, with one saying:

I enjoy the ANet because it does allow me to reflect as a teacher, look at what they got wrong and why they were getting certain questions wrong, and then realize about my own teaching and my own self, oh, I didn’t cover that so well, and myself reteach it, which is the whole idea behind ANet.

A principal called ANet “a really supportive network” and said that the assigned ANet coach “has really been instrumental in facilitating our understanding around data cycles and how to effectively run a good data meeting.”

Beyond supporting teachers in extending their use of data, principals also attributed changes in instruction to ANet. One principal said:

Where it really impacts us instructionally is really walking us through unpacking the Common Core standards and really understanding within each very large standard, what are the objectives within these standards that kids need to be able to do in order to meet the big standard.

Another principal agreed:

Before ANet came, I felt that my teachers struggled understanding the standards and how to teach certain standards. As ANet has come into play, I’ve seen our teachers grow…[to] have a really good grasp of what’s in [each standard], what’s available, what to do to get the best out of that students, reaching that student.

Although many teachers, principals, and coaches perceived that ANet was a valuable resource, respondents also noted challenges associated with its implementation.For example, in one school it was mentioned that new teachers in schools that started using ANet prior to their arrival were not consistently offered training. In addition, in the first year of ANet implementation, some teachers described being thrown into the ANet cycle without ample time to prepare students with the skills expected for the first assessment, perhaps indicating an issue in the clarity of communication and fidelity of implementation of ANet in some schools. One teacher noted:

When we started [ANet] last year, we didn’t realize there were X, Y, and Z standards we were supposed to be addressing, and then in 6‒8 weeks we were going to test the kids on those. We kind of found out on week 5 that in just a few weeks they’re going to be tested on [these standards that we haven’t yet begun to address].

In addition, respondents raised concerns about the utility of ANet for students with disabilities, including the inability to provide the necessary modifications for students with disabilities to participate in ANet. One coach recalled, “[It’s] still hard in terms of resources because you don’t have laptops, you don’t have all the technology needed for all of those modifications.” Taking these challenges into consideration, overall, principals, teachers, and coaches praised ANet as a valuable instructional support.

### Teaching and Learning Alliance

Instructional supports from TLA include conducting classroom observations, attending planning meetings, evaluating where students currently are, and reading on current topics in literacy. One elementary principal described it as:

[TLA will] come in during the day and they’ll do demonstration lessons where teachers will observe and then we’ll debrief and talk about it. They’ll work in grade level teams during collaborative planning time and we’ll plan units of study. They do a lot, so it’s not just after school and it’s not all workshop based either…. We’ll go into a classroom and maybe two or three teachers will join, and they’ll do some on the spot coaching, so it involves a lot.

Respondents noted that during their first years working with a school, TLA coaches helped teachers and principals implement the Balanced Literacy approach. One teacher said:

[They helped us out with how to] set up that model in our classroom; what it looks like, timing, running records, how to take them, how to use them to guide your instruction, walk us through the Balanced Literacy guided reading lesson [and what it] would look like from focus lesson to small group*.*

According to respondents in one focus group of teachers, the TLA coach visits a school one to two times per month. A teacher at another school outlined what a visit typically looks like, explaining:

When they come [our principal] will have asked us first what we need…. They’ll do a lesson in someone’s classroom at that grade-level so we can watch, then we’ll debrief after, and then that afternoon [is spent] planning the next unit.

Some teachers, however, reported growing tired of the focus solely on ELA that comes from the TLA partnership and the limitations they see emerging as the years progress. Although TLA supports only schools in ELA, one coach reported using the ELA curriculum units as a model in convening a small team to pull together mathematics units. One teacher who said TLA had been helpful in the beginning said:

I think that we’ve gotten over the hump where they helped us, and now we’re in stride with them where they’re learning a new reading program that we’re learning at the same time, so it seems like that money could go elsewhere.

This discussion and concern about the limitations of TLA was related both to its narrow focus on literacy and the changing face of curriculum with the introduction of the Common Core State Standards. Respondents reported feeling as though TLA’s supports were not up to pace with current challenges in districts and schools. Another teacher lamented a different limitation of the TLA support, saying, “There’s no [special education-specific support],…[no going] over accommodations and modifications you could do with this.”

Despite these apprehensions about TLA because of the limited scope of their supports, an instructional coach said, “I think the TLA in my building really has been strong and powerful.” Teachers also felt that the support provided by TLA was useful and supportive to their instruction.

## District Coherence

The findings in this section describe the perspectives of stakeholders on the districtwide vision for instruction, the impact of school autonomy on this vision, and school-specific vision. Following the main findings are additional details on these perspectives on the vision for instruction.

**Finding 5: District staff members seemed to agree on an overall district vision for achievement and instruction, although school staff members, including principals and teachers, did not consistently perceive a common district vision.**

Perspectives of District Staff Members

Although there was general agreement among district staff members on a common district vision for defining achievement, there was some variation in the responses among teachers, coaches, and school administrators about the district’s vision on how to achieve those goals through effective instruction.

District staff members shared a perspective on standards and assessments as the core of the instructional vision. One commented, “I definitely think the Common Core [State] Standards has been [and] is a major focus in all of our schools.” Another district staff member stated:

One of the things that definitely drives us is student achievement first and foremost, so putting these assessments in place allows us at the district to really monitor, at the end of the day, “Are more students ready for high school and college?”

According to district staff members, there are currently three or four priorities in LPS, including supporting ELLs through World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment, ensuring curriculum and instruction is aligned to the Common Core State Standards, using data to drive instruction and decisions, and providing educators with meaningful feedback and evaluations to further improve instruction. As one district member commented, “Embracing the Common Core [State] Standards has been number one, and using data to drive our instruction [and] provide supports for our English language learners.”

Although there was general agreement among district staff members on a common district vision for defining achievement, there was some variation in the responses among teachers, coaches, and school administrators for the district’s vision on how to achieve those goals through effective instruction.

Perspectives of School Staff Members

Teachers and coaches frequently reported that the district vision involved using data to help students master the Common Core State Standards, raise achievement scores on the MCAS, and be on grade level. This vision sometimes was related more to achievement than instruction specifically. A coach described the broader perspective, stating:

I feel that there has been a clear vision. Definitely there is a push for all students to be on grade level, to be mastering Common Core [State] Standards, that’s where I think the big push has been for the differentiation [for instruction], it’s always been there but I think there’s much more of an internal belief within the district that we can achieve this.

Other respondents shared perspectives on tighter district vision focused on achievement but not necessarily on how instruction leads to higher achievement. One middle school teacher commented, “Global vision for the district? Yes, we’re focused on Common Core.” An elementary school teacher who thought the vision was bit more limited commented, “It’s just raise scores.” Another noted, “Student achievement, MCAS.”

Still, other respondents perceived that there is no districtwide vision for instruction.As one elementary teacher commented, “Districtwide? No. I think at our school here, yes, it is very clear.” Similarly, a high school coach noted, “No, I don’t think there’s a clear vision for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level and ultimately when they graduate. I don’t think there is such a vision.” Another coach added, “I mean, if the question is do we know districtwide what a student who successfully completes seventh grade or eighth grade…should know…, I don’t think we have that.”

School administrators frequently identified the district vision as emphasizing effective teaching practices to help all students succeed. An elementary school principal noted, “I think [the district’s] vision is very student centered…it’s about the students.” A middle school principal shared a similar comment, noting, “I think that there’s just the idea that effective instruction produces strong results which I very much buy into, and I really appreciate that that’s what we’re hearing. But there’s also this idea that effective instruction has to be engaging and reach students. And I think I’ve definitely heard that message from Superintendent Riley.”

These differing perspectives may be a result of a shift in LPS beginning the 2013–14 academic year. As one district staff member explained:

This is the first year where we’ve seen a shift to be more academic focused so there’s still a lot of…operational [needs such as] how to administer Access, how to create your schedule instead of a real focus on differentiated instruction, how to embed…standards into your [curriculum] plan, and I think that’s just going to need to take [more time as it is] more gradual; we couldn’t do it all in one year.

Another district staff member made a similar comment:

We’re committed to meeting together [with schools and their Academic Advisors] so that we can continue these conversations forward to see how we can standardize at least what those expectations are so that we’re not delivering different messages…; we’re trying to take the philosophical vision of you know this sort of open architecture and this autonomy for schools and we’re trying to make it practical from a district perspective so that schools first of all aren’t confused and so that there is some continuity regarding what it is that we’re doing and have it make sense to everybody.

Although district staff members perceived a fairly consistent understanding of a unified vision, it appears that this vision has not taken hold at the school level—especially for teachers—at the time of the focus groups in fall 2013.

**Finding 6: School-based staff members perceived a lack of a unified districtwide vision of instructional support, and frequently cited an increase in the level and variety of school autonomy as a contributing factor. Respondents noted that school autonomy resulted in an increased focus on school-specific instructional practices and support. Teachers and administrators agreed that there were uniform instructional goals within their own schools.**

School Autonomy

Teachers and principals from four schools commented on the increase in the level of school autonomy since the Receivership began. School autonomy was an integral component of the LPS turnaround plan (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2012, p. 6), which stated that schools demonstrating success will be granted autonomy

over key functions, including resource allocation, staffing, scheduling, and services. Moving towards greater autonomy in schools will enable principals and teachers—those who know what is best for their students—to determine how to allocate time, resources, and people towards increasing student achievement.

According to study participants from LPS schools, this increased autonomy resulted in school staff members focusing more on the instructional vision and the necessary support for that in their own schools and less on a districtwide vision for instructional support. Teachers viewed school autonomy as an opportunity to turn their attention to what was happening in their own classrooms and schools, noting that schools had been given the freedom to determine and address their own individual needs. This renewed attention to individual building needs by school staff members may help explain teachers’ perceptions that there was no districtwide vision for instruction. One middle school teacher, discussing the diverse needs of the schools across the district, commented, “I think it’s kind of hard to talk about that unified vision when there are so many schools that have so many different levels and have a different place to go.” Another teacher talking about the variation in supports at LPS schools added, “Each school is really becoming its own island.” One teacher, commenting on a particular school, noted, “We’re sort of like our own ship.” A high school coach made a similar comment, stating, “I couldn’t tell you anything about anything outside the high school. I have no idea K‒8.”

An elementary teacher reflecting on the district vision since the Receivership began noted:

Especially not right now…since the Receiver came in, it seems as though each different school has been given their own autonomy to make a lot of their own decisions. So I don’t think there is a districtwide vision…. I don’t know maybe there is some big vision and we’re not seeing it, but…from my point of view…, it looks like there are a lot of different things going on and they’re trying to figure out what is going to work and what isn’t.

Other respondents commented that although each school has increased autonomy, the results should look the same for all schools across the district. One teacher noted, “The vehicle is the Common Core and the angle is for all the kids to make student growth…and I think how every school decided to do it is up to the principal.” A principal made a similar comment: “So the idea [is] that it may look different in every building, but ultimately help to produce the same result. And so I think the results [Superintendent Riley] is looking for are the test scores, but also, [in] every meeting we’ve had he sort of talked about, like ‘When I walk in your building, I want the kids to be engaged in learning.’” One district staff member explained how common goals can be used across schools with autonomy, using houses as an analogy for schools:

We’re building houses and there may be different shapes and [different] designs of houses, however, every house has a foundation that we’re building, so those are going to be some of the things that are similar…so the idea of open architecture it that [there are] some things that are definitely decided and other things that are going to be [up to] the school to define.

Many teachers felt there were common instructional goals within their school. An elementary teacher commented on the role of the principal in establishing the instructional goals, saying, “Our principal really breaks [the expectations] down by grade by class, and I think does a great job of letting us, especially this year, letting us teach what we need to teach.”

A high school principal described the process of teachers developing their instructional goals:

We looked at the MCAS results…as a school we decided we need to look at literacy. So we provided each [content area] team with the data analysis…so as a team they developed their own team goals…. All the team goals were around the results of the MCAS; so we’re looking at writing, reading, vocabulary and such. And I was not part of that…. Its ownership; again, it’s all about [school] autonomy.

The high school coaches who participated in the focus group thought the vision at the school was clear. One coach perceived, “At the high school [campus, the vision has] been established over the last five years or so, there’s a very clear model for what instruction should look like regardless of [content area].” According to this respondent, movement toward instructional vision at the high school campuses was underway prior to the Receivership. Another added, “This year, I think the principals are really focused on [instruction]…we can have a conversation and we’re all on the same page. I’m feeling that this year.”

With the district granting schools more autonomy in decision making, respondents reported a less prevalent districtwide vision for instruction.

## Identifying Teachers’ Needs

This study also focused on better understanding how school and district staff members have identified the instructional supports teachers need and to what extent those identified needs were met. The findings in this section provide more detail on how teachers’ needs were identified and addressed at both the school and district levels.

**Finding 7: Teachers communicated directly with school administrators and coaches about the instructional supports they needed. Principals and coaches reported that formal learning walks and assessment data also helped them identify the types of instructional supports teachers needed.**

Communication Between Teachers and Principals

In general, the teachers who participated in focus groups at all five schools reported feeling comfortable approaching coaches and administrators within their schools about the instructional supports they needed.When asked who at the school or district they would contact to request instructional supports, including specific classroom materials or training to better meet student needs, teachers in three schools reported that they approach instructional coaches or school administrators directly. Teachers from one school specifically noted, “The principal really listens.” Principals in three schools confirmed reports that teachers contacted them directly about instructional supports needed.

Teachers also mentioned various ways in which principals proactively gather information about particular instructional needs. In one school, teachers reported that the principal sends out regular e-mails asking for feedback about teacher needs. In another school, the principal reported sending out a weekly survey in which teachers can request supports. Another principal reported participating in the lesson planning process, explaining, “As we are part of the planning, and as we are talking through what the needs are, we’re able to provide the instructional supports for that…lesson or for that unit.”

Teachers from one school said that they *would* contact the district central office for special education support, but, according to those teachers, “[Right now,] there is no special education director.” Teachers from another school reported that they *would* *not* contact the district central office staff for any instructional supports partly because they would not know who to contact.

Formal Learning Walks and Use of Data

In addition to these approaches, principals at elementary, middle, and high schools reported that learning walks, or classroom observations, were one of the primary tools used to identify teachers’ instructional support needs. District staff members sometimes accompanied principals on these learning walks, though teachers reported their principals were in classrooms and observing them teach far more often than district staff members. At one school, the principal reported conducting up to three classroom walk-throughs each week to “see what the issues are and design [professional development].” When asked how school leaders know what supports teachers need, teachers in one school confirmed principals’ reports, noting, “[Principals] are in the classrooms enough to see what we need.”

In addition to communicating directly with teachers and conducting regular classroom observations, principals from three schools described specific ways in which they used data to identify teachers’ needs. One principal noted, “When we’re building professional development, it is always, always around looking at assessments and informing instruction.” Another principal indicated that in addition to learning walks, instructional support needs were identified during regular team meetings of teachers and other school staff members.

Roles of Instructional Coaches

Some of the coaches reported that they conduct classroom observations and work with school administrators to identify instructional support needs based on student and teacher data. Other coaches reported that school administrators have primary responsibility for identifying teachers’ needs. According to these coaches, their school administrators decided which teachers ought to receive coaching support. See page 15 for more information on the roles of instructional coaches.

**Finding 8: Despite past and present efforts by the LPS district central office to identify teachers’ needs, teachers reported concerns about how well their needs were understood by district staff members.**

District staff members reported using a variety of strategies both before and immediately following the Receivership to identify teachers’ needs. For example, one district staff member met regularly with subject-specific coaches to plan districtwide professional development that was responsive to teachers’ needs. Another district staff member reported at least “some attempt” at district-led learning walks to identify teachers’ needs. A third district staff member indicated that early on in the Receivership, district staff conducted surveys and focus groups with teachers to determine “what they did or didn’t like about professional development and what tools and resources…they needed in the classroom.”

Teachers’ perceptions about the district’s efforts to identify teachers’ needs, however, differed significantly from district reports. Teachers in three schools questioned how well their needs were understood by district staff members. Although the teachers from one school noted that district professional development occasionally addressed areas of need, as suggested by test scores, the professional development was always “reactive not proactive.” Teachers from two schools expressed concerns that the Receiver’s attempts to figure out their specific needs were not genuine. Teachers from one of those schools reported that there was no formal needs assessment in the early days of Receivership, and teachers from the other school felt that not enough time was spent in the beginning of the Receivership on identifying teachers’ needs. According to one teacher, “It almost feels like they walked in and they already had their plan set and were just like, ‘We’ll pretend like we’re looking around for a while but then here’s what we’re doing.’”

According to the perceptions of teachers, coaches, and school administrators in LPS, district staff members have not played a significant role in identifying teachers’ instructional support needs in recent years. Two district staff members agreed, noting that for the most part, principals determined their own staff’s professional development needs and central office has cut back on offering much in the way of districtwide, one-size-fits-all professional development.

District staff members acknowledged the need to be more accessible and responsive to school needs. In response, all district staff members in this study reported that Academic Advisors, a new support starting in the 2013‒14 school year, were created to help the district better identify teachers’ needs. According to district staff members at the time of the study, each Academic Advisor was intended to serve as a single and consistent contact person in the district central office for each school. This initiative was too recent to be included as a focus of this study.

## Targeting Support to Specific Teachers

This section examines how well the instructional supports provided by the schools and district met teachers’ specific and individual needs. The findings focus on how instructional supports were targeted for specific groups of teachers (including those of certain content areas) and whether supports were targeted to teachers of students who needed additional assistance, including ELLs and students with disabilities.

##### Support for Teaching Content Areas

**Finding 9: Staff members at most schools indicated that ELA and mathematics teachers received the majority of instructional supports from the school and district. Principals, teachers, and coaches felt that few instructional supports were provided to teachers of other subject areas such as science.**

English Language Arts and Mathematics

Teachers in three schools indicated that ELA and mathematics were the primary focus areas for instructional supports. Teachers in one school reported that much of the coaching they received focused on how to implement the Common Core State Standards in ELA and mathematics. Teachers in four schools suggested that the supports provided for mathematics teachers, in particular, were more than adequate.

Some of the coaches concurred, noting that the district has provided a lot of professional development for mathematics that they perceived the teachers have found beneficial. According to the coaches, it helps that “the data [are] posted for math in every grade. And you have MCAS at every grade level.” Teachers in two schools indicated that their mathematics teachers meet with coaches every week. One principal reported participating in twice monthly planning sessions with ELA and mathematics teachers and cited the usefulness of i-Ready, an online diagnostic and instructional tool, for providing supports to these teachers.

Science and Other Subject Areas

Some respondents perceived that the focus on ELA and mathematics was at the expense of other content areas. For example, according to a participant in one of the coach focus groups,“Math has always been prioritized over science,” and that coaching for science teachers is limited because science teachers received explicit manuals from which to teach. Coaches and staff members from two schools reported that instructional support for science teachers primarily consisted of science kits and manuals provided by the district, although teachers in one school reported that sometimes the science kits they received were incomplete.

Regarding nontested subjects, a teacher in one school reported, “Social studies does not have an MCAS; hence, no extra professional development.” Teachers in this school reported ELA and mathematics teachers in this same school had an extra week of professional development before the school year started. A special education teacher at one school said, “I’m not actually really allowed to go into…the humanities room” because the principal would rather the teacher provided support to ELA and mathematics teachers. One science teacher reported, “[A coach] blatantly told me, ‘You’ve been teaching forever, you have a degree in science…. I don’t even know science; I’m not very comfortable with it.”

District staff members and teachers from one school identified some professional development opportunities that were provided for science teachers, including one session targeted to middle school science teachers, who often “don’t have the opportunity to collaborate with anyone.” Unlike mathematics and ELA teachers, however, who meet weekly in many schools, one principal explained that science teachers have a common planning period only once every three and a half weeks. According to that principal, “It’s challenging to find the time, because there is only one science teacher per grade, but it’s necessary and they’ve been very happy.”

Beyond support for science instruction, in some cases instructional time in science also has been cut. “There are some elementary schools that they don’t have science, they’ll get rid of it so that they have more ELA time. Then they come into fifth grade and they take the science MCAS, so you have fifth-grade teachers trying to cram five years of curriculum into that one year.” Science teachers in middle school echoed that the lack of attention to science has adversely affected MCAS scores but did not know how to fix that without additional time given to science.

The kids don’t get science very day…. I saw the scores from last year and they’re just, they’re disgusting, and it’s not necessarily their fault, it’s just that math and ELA get all of the attention and science is just kind of on the back burner. That’s the frustrating thing for me, because I have so many lessons and activities and labs, and I just have such a passion to do it and I just, I can’t. Lawrence does not; they don’t set it up that way.

In addition to wanting more time spent on science and social studies instruction, one group of teachers recalled problems with science and social studies materials that have influenced their ability to teach the courses. One teacher explained, “One of the complaints from the middle school has been that our kids don’t know science and social studies, but we don’t have the proper materials to be able to teach our kids either.” Curriculum and textbooks, especially for social studies courses, also were frequently mentioned as needed resources. One teacher, speaking about the limited support, said, “Math is getting a lot of upgrade, [but] we’re at the point where I’m at the end of my chain here with humanities materials” because support for nontested subjects is rarely prioritized.

##### Support for Teaching English Language Learners

**Finding 10: Principals and district staff perceived instructional support provided for teaching ELLs to be adequate. However, coaches and teachers had mixed perceptions about whether supports provided for teaching ELLs were sufficient.**

District and School Leaders

Principals in four schools suggested that their staff members receive adequate support for teaching ELLs. One principal said, “The staff has had ELL trainings…, we’ve had [professional development] for differentiating instruction, we’ve had tons of that support, so it’s not like if [an ELL student] comes into their classroom they don’t know what to do.”Another principal felt “very comfortable with what [the] teachers are receiving from us as professional development.”District staff members echoed these sentiments, reporting that they have long been very sensitive to the needs of ELLs and have strived to ensure that all teachers, not just ELL teachers, use best practices for supporting ELLs. According to one district staff member, teaching ELLs is “probably an area that we’ve done a good job in terms of making our teachers aware.” And by 2016, district staff members stated that all teachers will have received structured English immersion endorsement training and therefore be better equipped to target instruction to ELLs.

**ELLs in LPS**

The demographics of LPS students make it especially important for teachers to be supported and trained in teaching ELL students. As of the 2013–14 school year, 28 percent of LPS students were ELLs, and 72 percent spoke a language other than English as their first language. This is compared with 8 percent of students who are ELLs in Massachusetts as a whole and 18 percent with a first language other than English (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.a).

One district staff member reported that in the 2013–14 school year, the district-sponsored professional development for all teachers was on what Common Core State Standards implementation looks like for ELLs in particular. Despite being generally satisfied with the supports provided for teaching ELL students, one district staff member still reported that, ideally, there would be an ELL coach at each school, or at least for each level (elementary, middle, and high), which currently is not the case. In addition to coaching and professional development related to teaching ELLs for all teachers, district staff members explained that one school has a coach who also is an ELL specialist who provides targeted support to ESL teachers, and another school has a district staff person who provides support, feedback, and observation to English as a second language (ESL) teachers. There also is district-sponsored monthly professional development for ESL teachers.

Teachers and Coaches

In contrast to the generally positive reports from district and school leaders, teachers provided mixed views on the adequacy of supports provided for teaching ELLs. One teacher described participating in an extensive online course “that many of us take advantage of” that focuses on differentiation and teaching ELLs. Another teacher in the same school reported participating in an online licensure program in ELL instruction that she described as “one of the most worthwhile programs” and perceived it would have a positive impact on her instruction. A teacher at another school, however, noted that the only ELL training he ever received was a districtwide professional development session he attended during his first year in LPS. He noted:

I was sent to a districtwide professional development my first year here, [more than five years ago]. I was sent to [universal design for learning] training, and I also got a training [on] the old test given to test the ELL students. And that would be the extent of it.

Teachers in the elementary school focus groups did not report receiving any targeted support for teaching ELLs themselves; rather, they perceived that ELL specialists tended to support ELLs directly.

Some coaches reported that many of the supports they provided to teachers focused on how to work with high-need students, like ELLs and students with disabilities, and participants from one focus group of coaches indicated that some of the ANet coaches’ meetings last year focused on improving the performance of these subgroups. One coach noted that in addition to the supports they provide to teachers, there also is an ELL teacher who serves on the Teacher Leader Cabinet and works with staff members to make sure lessons are modified correctly for ELLs. Some coaches reported, however, that although they try to share best practices for teaching, they do not receive much specific training on how to coach teachers of these high-need student populations.

##### Support for Teaching Students With Disabilities

**Students With Disabilities in LPS**

Although the percentages of students with disabilities is not dramatically higher in LPS than in Massachusetts as a whole (20 percent in LPS and   
17 percent in Massachusetts), the high school graduation rate and dropout rates for students with disabilities are substantially different (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.a). The high school graduation rate for students with disabilities in Massachusetts is   
68 percent but only 41 percent in LPS. The dropout rate for students with disabilities is 3 percent in Massachusetts and 8 percent in LPS (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.b).

**Finding 11: School staff perceived targeted instructional support for teaching students with disabilities to be limited. Although respondents noted that collaborative planning between special education and general education teachers had been beneficial, some teachers and principals reported that paraprofessionals in inclusion classrooms did not receive specific training to support special education students, making them a less effective support to the general education teachers.**

Many core subject teachers reported feeling unprepared to effectively teach students receiving special education services. One teacher said, “Speaking of the special-ed [professional development], if we’re expected to educate children who have emotional and behavioral needs, I don’t know how to deal with somebody like that.” Teachers also perceived there were often not enough staff members available in the schools because of budget constraints to teach the high numbers of students receiving special education services, and they recalled classes filled with far more students receiving special education services than should be handled by a single teacher. One teacher explained:

To have 21 students in a…pull-out writing class because there’s no money to hire a second SPED [special education] teacher, when, if you read the Massachusetts bylaws of special education, it says, “For every nine students identified, there is to be a certified [special education] teacher”… that’s a districtwide problem.

One teacher speculated that students receiving special education services did not get the level of support they should in LPS “because parents don’t complain…[and] their test scores don’t really matter, so they won’t put money towards a high-need population because it doesn’t affect their face value.”

Teachers in one school also perceived that support for teachers of subjects other than mathematics and ELA, like science and social studies, was especially limited with regard to teaching students with disabilities. According to those teachers, support for teaching students with disabilities is often prioritized by subject area. “ELA and math come first in this district, so if something is happening there, then they get first priority,” remarked a teacher. One of the special education teachers in that school explained that, unfortunately, special education staff “cannot write science and humanities into the schedule because [they] don’t have any kids with it on their [individualized education program].” In terms of instructional coaching for teaching students with disabilities, teachers in another school explained that support from coaches for teaching ELA and mathematics generally took priority over support for teaching students with disabilities, no matter the subject.

Although some district staff members perceived that LPS has done a good job regarding inclusive practices, other district respondents acknowledged that there is room for improvement for special education. According to district staff members, the special education director position has had a lot of turnover in recent years—and was vacant at the time of data collection—and the feedback they have received from educators is that the district “[hasn’t] provided that type of support or professional development for [special education] students.” Teachers and coaches at multiple schools agreed, citing the lack of a special education director as a significant problem in terms of the district’s ability to meet their instructional support needs in this area.

Common Planning Time

Respondents cited collaborative planning between special education and general education teachers as a promising mechanism for better meeting the needs of students with disabilities. At some schools, respondents reported that special education teachers attend content-area planning meetings to help teachers plan how to differentiate upcoming lesson for their special education students. One teacher remarked, “The special education teacher attends, so in our meeting…we’ve talked about modifications and upcoming lessons right then and there. ‘We’re going to launch this project, so how are we going to [modify it for students receiving special education?]’”

Principals from two schools reported that teachers received supports for teaching students with disabilities at least once a week through common planning time with special education staff. Teachers in one of the schools that used common planning time responded positively, with one of the teachers noting that they’ve had “really good special-ed instructors that for the most part want to get involved in what the curriculum is in the general-ed classrooms.”

In response to more schools using a coteaching model in inclusive classrooms, district staff members have encouraged schools to incorporate collaborative planning time between regular education teachers and special education teachers and have encouraged special education staff to participate in professional development sessions traditionally geared toward general education teachers. Staff members from two schools each cited one specific professional development opportunity that special education staff members have participated in: one an in-person session on writing behavior plans and another an online course about coteaching in an inclusive classroom.

Support From Paraprofessionals to Teachers and Students

Paraprofessionals were mentioned at half of the schools as being one source of potentially valuable in-classroom support to general education teachers if they were trained on teaching high-need students. Teachers perceived that the role of the paraprofessional has changed over the years, with them now much more involved instructionally and helping students with the material. Teachers from two schools reported that paraprofessionals primarily provide supports for them in teaching students with disabilities. Teachers in one school indicated that paraprofessionals “push in at least during part of reading time every day.” A teacher from another school explained, “This year every grade level has a special-ed teacher and special-ed paraprofessional, so our special-ed kids have consistent support in class—there is always someone there,” which, as one of the teachers at the school noted, “has really made a difference. Being able to differentiate without doing a pullout.” One teacher, describing the expanded role, said, “The paraprofessional is not just an extra body in the room anymore; it’s someone who can dig in and help the students.”

According to teachers and principals from these schools, however, the paraprofessionals who are providing support for teaching students with disabilities have not received any targeted training for doing so. A teacher said, “It’s such a valuable asset to us to have them trained.” Another teacher noted:

I have a lovely person in my room this year, but she has no idea how to teach children. She doesn’t know how to, she tries her best, she sits with the students that I tell or ask her to sit with, but she’ll give them answers because that’s all she knows how to do…. They don’t know how to deliver the information.

The teacher went on to say, “I feel badly for them because they’re thrown into these classrooms with high expectations of what they do, but then not told how to do it.”

## Summary and Recommendations

Taken as a whole, the findings in this study reveal the complexities of providing effective instructional support to teachers in LPS. In some cases, all groups of respondents—teachers, coaches, principals, and district staff members—shared similar perspectives on certain aspects of instructional support, but far more common were differences in points of view among the various groups. Following we lay out some of the more seminal findings, followed by information on best practices and recommendations based on the findings in this report.

**Summary of Current Findings and Relationship to Baseline Findings**

Defining and Delivering Instructional Support

Consistent with the findings from the baseline study, teachers continued to indicate that coaches were their primary source of instructional support and generally were effective. Teacher and coach focus group participants seemed to have a consistent understanding of the role of a coach, but teachers and coaches both mentioned the other roles and responsibilities for coaches that interfered with their instructional coaching time. Teachers were most concerned when coaches also would serve as evaluators. Concerns remained about the availability of coaches and their abilities to address the range of needs within a school.

Feedback on professional development continues to be mixed, although there appears to have been some improvement in school-based professional development since the baseline data collection. Some of the sessions participants mentioned as most beneficial were those on higher order thinking, differentiating instruction, and Common Core State Standards training. Teachers continued to express a desire to have more targeted and differentiated professional development, which appeared to be more feasible and effective at the school level than at the district level. Although teachers generally perceived district-level professional development opportunities as limited in value, coaches praised the separate professional development that coaches received in the 2013‒14 school year.

District Coherence

From the perceptions of teachers, either the district does not have an overall cohesive vision for instruction or that vision has not been effectively communicated throughout the district. Although there was some agreement across respondents in the focus groups and interviews about the goals of the district being related to raising student performance as evidenced through MCAS scores, their understanding of the depth and breadth of the district’s vision for how to attain these goals varied. Of the perceptions within groups, district staff members were the closest in terms of sharing a common perspective.

Many respondents pointed to the autonomies granted to schools in LPS, particularly since beginning the Receivership, as a reason for why there may not be, and perhaps should not necessarily be, a clear districtwide vision for instruction. At the school level, however, teachers noted feeling that a schoolwide vision for instruction was largely in place.

Identifying Teachers’ Needs

Teachers reported feeling comfortable approaching administrators and coaches with requests for instructional support. When compared with findings from the baseline study, it appears these open lines of communication have resulted in better identification of teachers’ needs by school leaders and have informed the coaching support and professional development opportunities at the school level.

As reported in the baseline findings, teachers still perceive that staff members in the district central office do not clearly understand the needs of the schools. The teacher’s responses indicated that there was a need for better ways to communicate teachers’ needs to the district central office. In addition to a general skepticism about how much district staff members understand teachers’ issues, respondents reported not knowing who to contact at the district central office to address specific concerns.

Targeting Support to Specific Teachers

Teachers of subject areas outside of ELA and mathematics noted that they do not receive the supports they need and that much of the coaching is narrowly directed only toward teaching ELA and mathematics. Respondents pointed to the implementation of the Common Core State Standards and the results of the MCAS as the main drivers of this narrow focus. Consistent with the baseline findings, some teachers also reported lacking proper materials, including textbooks.

One of the most significant findings from the baseline reports was teachers’ perceptions of inconsistent support for teachers of ELLs and students with disabilities. This perception remained in this current study—teachers did not feel adequately supported to be able to provide services to these students and perceived that these students were not always receiving the services they needed. In several cases, teachers’ perceptions did not align with those of principals and district staff members who perceived that the district and schools generally provide adequate support in these areas.

Reports on positive interactions between general education and special education teachers were encouraging and appeared to be beneficial for general education teachers. However, respondents did not share evidence on whether these interactions resulted in student needs being better served. In addition, although teachers identified the roles of paraprofessionals as expanding to providing instructional support, respondents recognized that paraprofessionals needed additional support and training to ensure they were equipped to provide effective, personalized support, particularly for paraprofessionals assisting teachers in serving students with disabilities.

**Best Practices in Providing Instructional Support**

A literature review conducted by Hanover Research (p. 4, 2013) identified the following factors of instructional support that facilitate turning around low performing schools and districts:

* By providing **strategic support to schools in key areas**, districts can make a significant impact on the quality of instruction while still reaping the benefits of school autonomy.
* Instead of adopting a “one-size-fits-all” approach, successful districts reorganize and reimagine their functions to **tailor their services to individual schools**.
* **Principal support and instructional leadership training** are crucial for building a strong system of autonomous schools.
* **Professional development for teachers** is a shared component of all successful turnaround strategies.
* Districts can help ensure curricular rigor and grade-level alignment across schools through **curriculum development, mapping, and pacing and sequencing guides**.
* Many reform districts take advantage of **walk-throughs** to better understand schools’ teaching and learning needs, build principals’ instructional leadership capacity, and monitor the effectiveness of district supports.

The literature review also includes profiles of school districts in Cincinnati, Denver, and Charlotte-Mecklenburg—districts identified by Hanover Research as having successfully improved student achievement for struggling students. These profiles include information on the specific strategies related to instructional support.

Many of the instructional support best practices identified earlier and the strategies employed in the three districts profiled in the report relate to findings from the LPS baseline data collection and instructional support studies. For example, the literature review notes that professional development “can serve as a critical tool in changing a school’s culture and instructional capacity” (Hanover Research, 2013, p. 17) and identifies the need to provide teachers with the appropriate supports and professional development to increase the likelihood of a positive change on teachers’ instructional practices. Responses from participants in the LPS studies indicated that effective professional development does have a positive impact on teachers’ approaches.

Other connections between the literature review and the LPS studies include principal support and autonomy, instructional coaches, and instructional guidance. The literature review points out the importance of principal support and autonomy, noting that greater principal autonomy is correlated with improved school performance (p. 16). As noted earlier, granting schools greater autonomy is central to the LPS turnaround plan. The literature review also identifies instructional coaches as important contributors to professional development and improving teacher practices (pp. 19–21). All groups of participants in the studies identified coaches as critical sources of instructional support. Finally, the literature review describes the role that districts can play in providing curriculum and instructional guidance (pp. 21–24), and includes information on practices such as learning walk-throughs, which are implemented in LPS.

**Recommendations**

Taking into account the findings from the focus groups and interviews in this study, the findings from the baseline data collection, and the best practices identified in the literature review from Hanover Research, we recommend the following strategies for consideration:

* **Articulate and communicate a districtwide vision for instruction and align district-level instructional support to this vision.** As noted in the findings in this study, there was no consensus on a districtwide vision for instruction, and some respondents indicated that they were not sure what the focus would be for such a vision. School staff members reported feeling connected to their individual schools, but not necessarily to the district as a whole. Articulating an overall vision for instruction in LPS—taking into account the school-level differences and autonomies—may be necessary to create a shared understanding of this vision and could help inform decisions about how to allocate resources for instructional support.
* **Limit administrative and other noninstructional roles and responsibilities of coaches so that they may maximize time and effort spent providing instructional support.** Study participants identified coaches as the main sources of instructional support in LPS and largely identified their support as valuable. However, it was noted that some coaches have other duties that can limit their availability and effectiveness. For example, respondents noted that LPS is shifting toward using high school coaches as official evaluators, which could hinder coaches’ usefulness as providers of instructional support as teachers reported being unlikely to tell a coach in an evaluation role when they were in need of help. Coaches in other schools were often given data analysis duties that greatly reduced the amount of time they had available to provide in-classroom modeling or coaching to teachers. To the extent possible, coaches’ roles should focus on providing direct instructional support to teachers.
* **Continue supporting coaches through targeted professional development.** Coaches shared favorable perspectives of the professional development they received in the 2013‒14 school year. This study did not focus on these professional development opportunities given their relative newness. Initial reactions from coaches suggest that LPS consider continuing and expanding these activities.
* **Build relationships between the district central office and teachers.** Teachers continued to report a perceived disconnect between school staff members and the district central office. As a result, some teachers indicated the district central office did not provide the necessary support or that the teachers did not know who to contact for support. District staff members pointed to the Academic Advisors as individuals who, moving forward, will help better connect the district central office to schools. However, the initiative was too recent to be considered for this study.
* **Reconsider district professional development offerings.** Teachers were clear in their preference for school-based professional development sessions over district-based offerings, perceiving that the former was more targeted to their needs and therefore more useful in developing their classroom instruction. LPS should consider opportunities to increase school-based professional development programming. Considerations may include releasing to schools the days typically reserved for district-run professional development days, targeting district-provided professional development to meet the stated needs of teachers, and offering sessions at different levels on similar topics to meet the needs of both new and veteran teachers.
* **Provide opportunities for teachers, coaches, and school administrators to engage in collaborative activities around instruction.** Study participants reported that regular collaboration with their colleagues resulted in improvements in school-level instructional supports, such as targeted professional development opportunities. Expanding the use of common planning time in schools across the district and providing structures for coaches and principals to collect information from teachers regarding their needs could lead to continued improvements in providing coordinated and targeted instructional supports at the school level.
* **Provide more targeted support for teaching ELLs and students with disabilities to teachers and paraprofessionals.** Although teachers reported more targeted supports at the school level when compared to responses from the baseline data collection, some teachers still expressed dissatisfaction with the limited utility of professional development opportunities related to teaching ELLs and students with disabilities. There were some indications that the activities have improved over time, but overall perceptions of support for ELLs and students with disabilities continued to be negative. Teachers also identified a need for targeted professional development for paraprofessionals, who regularly work with students with disabilities.
* **Expand coaching services or other instructional support to teachers of subject areas other than ELA and mathematics.** Teachers of subjects other than ELA and mathematics expressed concern and frustration about what they perceived to be an uneven distribution of instructional support. There were some comments about the fact that teachers in these other subjects still teach concepts that would be relevant to ELA and mathematics and that teachers would welcome support if it were available. In addition, many teachers of other subjects also reported being required to participate in professional development sessions about ELA or mathematics that were not related to their personal instructional strategies and felt that this time could have been better used. If this instructional support cannot be achieved through existing coaches, LPS may want to consider other ways of providing this support.
* **Evaluate process of assigning coaches or other providers of instructional support to schools.** Given changes in recent years to how staff members are categorized in the Education Personnel Information Management System, it is difficult to ascertain which staff members provide instructional support and for what amount of time to which schools.[[8]](#footnote-8) This is further complicated because some schools in LPS are led by education management organizations that may provide instructional support in different ways. Taking this fact into account, there is still a need to reconsider the practice of how coaches and staff members who provide instructional support are assigned to schools. Considerations may include assigning levels of instructional support based on the number of teachers at a given school, school accountability levels, or other indicators of support.

Overall, it appears recent actions in LPS have started to address some of the concerns voiced by stakeholders during the baseline data collection. However, several concerns and challenges remain in providing teachers in LPS with effective instructional support. Implementing some or all of these recommendations, and taking the best practices into consideration, may address some of these challenges.

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# Appendix A. Teacher Focus Group Protocol

**Evaluation of Instructional Support in Lawrence Public Schools**

**Protocol: Teacher Focus Group**

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am with an independent nonprofit research organization, American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we start, I’d like to provide a little background on our work and answer any questions you might have for me.

On May 30, 2012, Superintendent Riley released the plan for improving Lawrence Public Schools (LPS). Last year, researchers from AIR conducted focus groups to gather information on the conditions in LPS that existed prior to and at the beginning of the receivership to help the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the plan.

This year, we are collecting information from teachers, coaches, and school leaders, as well as key district stakeholders, about the instructional supports in LPS. Our conversation will focus on to what extent that you as a teacher were provided with assistance that enhanced your classroom instruction and routines to optimally improve student academic achievement, what did you receive that made that easier, what do you wish you received more of, what supports should be extended, what’s missing, and what has the district tried that you think should probably be discontinued—and why. We are conducting several teacher focus groups, like this one, to discuss topics related to the instructional supports you have received in the past two years. I anticipate that this focus group will take about 60 minutes.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name and will not attribute any quotes to individuals. Our study may identify the types of schools that we visit and will summarize findings across those schools, but it will not disclose the names of the staff we met within these schools.

This document outlines the scope of the study and some of the issues I’ve mentioned with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. Please take a minute to read the description of the study and let me know if you have any questions.

If you don’t mind, I would like to record this group for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for transcribers of the material; it would be just for the research team’s reference and would not be shared with LPS or ESE. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Do I have your permission to record our conversation? Do you have any questions before we start?

**Introductions (Five Minutes)**

Before we go much further, I’d like to start by having each person introduce themselves. Please tell us how long you’ve been a teacher, how long you’ve worked at this school, and what your role(s) is at this school. We can start with anyone.

Now, I’d like to get started. There are several main areas that we will discuss today. First, I’d like to find out what the term “instructional support” means to you and talk about what types of instructional support you generally receive. Then we will spend some time talking about the specific instructional supports you have received as an educator in LPS. We would like this conversation to focus specifically on services you have received prior to this school year. Please share perspectives about services you have received before this current school year. If you are speaking of new activities, it would be helpful if you state that as part of your answer. Also, if you are speaking about support you received through a particular program such as The Achievement Network (ANet) or some other initiative, please indicate that. There will be time at the end to discuss challenges related to the instructional support currently provided and your suggestions for how instructional support in LPS can be improved.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How would you define “instructional support”?

For the purposes of this focus group, instructional supports can be defined as those practices that provide guidance regarding and direct support for instruction that addresses identified areas in which student achievement needs improvement. This support may include guidance regarding standards for student learning or strategies for meeting instructional goals, data-driven professional development opportunities that specifically address gaps in student learning or support for implementing that professional development, or the feedback loops to monitor student outcomes and make informed decisions about instructional supports needed.

I’m interested to know types of support you have received from your school, LPS, and other sources prior to this school year.

1. What types of support have you received in the past two years, again not including this academic year, from your school to assist you in providing instruction in terms of teaching and content?
   * Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
2. What types of support have you received in the past two years from the district to assist you in your teaching?
   * Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
3. Did you access any other sources of instructional support, beyond what your school or the district provides?
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + College courses?
     + Online communities of practice? Other online sources or materials?
4. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support provided by school]** (e.g., content, frequency, format [i.e., embedded in the school day]).
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + Who provided the support? In what way? For example, in-class coaching, mentoring, and so on. How frequently? Was there adequate follow-up?
     + Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
     + Was the support targeted for specific groups of teachers, by grade level, or by subject area? What was the process by which these teachers were selected? Was it targeted for teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)? In what ways was the support tailored to meet the needs of teachers working with these populations?
     + Did the services you received make you feel prepared to make changes? If not, will you be getting additional support to make changes in the classroom?
     + What kind of support, if any, did you receive to apply what you learn in the classroom?
     + As a result of the support, can you describe any changes you have made in the classroom?
     + Are the supports you received last year different than the supports you have received prior to the receivership? If so, explain.
5. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support provided by district]** (e.g., content, frequency, format [i.e., embedded in the school day])**.**
   * *Probes mentioned earlier, plus:*
     + How does the LPS district central office identify the needs of teachers in your school?
       - Has this procedure changed since the receivership began?
     + How well do you think leaders at the district level understand your school’s needs?
       - Has this awareness changed since the receivership began?
6. Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of the ANet program?
   * + Who provided the support? In what way?
     + What kind of support, if any, did you receive to apply what you learned in the classroom?
     + As a result of the support, can you describe any changes you made in the classroom?
7. Did any of you participate in the Acceleration Academies? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + Who provided the support? In what way?
     + What kind of support, if any, did you receive to apply what you learned in the Acceleration Academies? In the classroom following the Academies?
     + As a result of the support, can you describe any changes you made in the classroom?
8. Are you familiar with the Teaching and Learning Alliance? If yes, can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
9. How much and what kind of guidance and support did you receive related to working with high-need students (e.g., referrals to available resources), including English language learners? Students with disabilities? Students with behavioral issues?
   * *Probe, if necessary:*
   * How relevant was this support to your needs and the needs of your students?
   * What kind of support, if any, did you receive to assist you in applying what you learned in the classroom?
   * What other types of support for working with high-need students would you like to receive?
10. Which district and school staff members—by position, not name—are responsible for designing or providing instructional supports to teachers?
11. Does your school have academic coaches or other specialized support staff? If yes, describe how they provided teachers with instructional support.
12. Do you believe that the coaches area good fit for your school in terms of the following:
    * Instructional expertise and experience of support providers?
    * Intensity of support (days or hours on site)?
13. Overall, do you believe there is a clear vision for instruction in LPS? Is this vision shared with all teachers in your school? All teachers in the district? How do you know?
    * *Probe, if necessary:*
      + How would you describe the overall district instructional goals? What are the different ways in which these goals are communicated to teachers? What percentage of teachers do you believe receive the message regarding the vision? What safeguards are taken to ensure all teachers receive the district vision regarding instructional goals? Who communicates these goals? And how?
      + How would you describe the overall expectations or standards for student learning in LPS? Who communicates these expectations, and are they easily understood? How, if at all, do they function to guide instruction?
14. We talked earlier about both district- and school-level instructional supports—are the instructional supports you described earlier aligned with that vision? With the receiver’s turnaround plan?
15. Which of the current instructional supports that you receive are the most beneficial to you in meeting the instructional needs of your students? What kind of support, if any, do you receive to assist you in applying these in the classroom?
    * *Probe, if necessary:*
      + Who provided these supports?
      + Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
16. Are there other specific instructional supports you believe would be beneficial for you specifically? For teachers in your school (or the district?) in general?
17. What specific changes would need to be made to provide you with more improved instructional support?
    * *Probe, if necessary:*
      + Vision?
      + Communication?
      + Coherence/alignment?
      + Availability of support? Mode of support?
18. What could the district provide you with, professional development, coaches, or anything else, that would help you as a teacher improve student’s academic achievement?

Is there anything I haven’t asked you about the instructional supports in your school or at the district level that you’d like to comment on? I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group. Thank you very much for your time.

# Appendix B. Coach Focus Group Protocol

**Evaluation of Instructional Support in Lawrence Public Schools**

**Protocol: Coach Focus Group**

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am with an independent nonprofit research organization, American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we start, I’d like to provide a little background on our work and answer any questions you might have for me.

On May 30, 2012, Superintendent Riley released the plan for improving Lawrence Public Schools (LPS). Last year, researchers from AIR conducted focus groups to gather information on the conditions in LPS that existed prior to and at the beginning of the receivership to help the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the plan.

This year, we are collecting information from teachers, coaches, and school leaders, as well as key district stakeholders, about the instructional supports in LPS. Our conversation will focus on to what extent you as an instructional coach provide assistance to help teachers optimally improve student academic achievement, what supports for teachers should be extended, what’s missing, and what the district has tried that you think should probably be discontinued—and why. We’ll also ask about the supports you receive and your perspectives about those supports. We are conducting several coach focus groups, like this one, to discuss topics related to the instructional supports teachers receive. I anticipate that the focus group will take about 60 minutes.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name and will not attribute any quotes to individuals. Our study may identify the types of schools that we visit and will summarize findings across those schools, but it will not disclose the names of the schools or the names of any staff we met with in these schools.

This document outlines the scope of this study and some of the issues I’ve mentioned with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. Please take a minute to read the description of the study and let me know if you have any questions.

If you don’t mind, I would like to record this group for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for the transcribers of the material; it would be just for the research team’s reference and would not be shared with LPS or ESE. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Do I have your permission to record our conversation? Do you have any questions before we start?

**Introductions (Five Minutes)**

Before we go much further, I’d like to start by having each person introduce themselves. Please tell us how long you’ve been a coach, how long you’ve worked at this school, how long you’ve worked in LPS, and what, if any, other roles you have at this school or in the district. We can start with anyone.

Now, I’d like to get started. There are several main areas that we will discuss today. First, I’d like to find out what the term “instructional support” means to you and talk about what types of instructional support you generally provide. Then we will spend some time talking about the *specific* instructional supports you provide to teachers at your school. And there will be time at the end to discuss challenges related to the instructional support currently provided and your suggestions for how instructional support in LPS can be improved. Where possible, please share perspectives about services you have provided prior to this year. If you are speaking of new activities, it would be helpful if you state that as part of your answer. Also, if you are speaking about support teachers received—or support you received directly—through a particular program such as The Achievement Network (ANet) or some other initiative, please indicate that. There will be time at the end to discuss challenges related to the instructional support currently provided and your suggestions for how instructional support in LPS can be improved.

Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How would you define “instructional support”?

For the purposes of this focus group, instructional supports can be defined as those practices that provide guidance regarding and direct support for instruction that addresses identified areas in which student achievement needs improvement. This definition may include guidance regarding standards for student learning or strategies for meeting instructional goals, data-driven professional development opportunities that specifically address gaps in student learning or support for implementing that professional development, or the feedback loops to monitor student outcomes and make informed decisions about instructional supports needed.

1. Can you briefly describe your overall role at the school? For example, how do you spend your day? How is your time spread across these activities? How much of your time is spent on instructional support to teachers?
   * In a typical day, what percentage of your time do you spend coaching, as opposed to planning for coaching, or administrative (or other) duties?
2. What type of coaching interactions have you had with teachers (i.e., meetings with teachers to coplan lessons, conducting classroom observations, providing feedback following observations, analyzing student data, coteaching, modeling lessons)?
   * Which of these did you use most often?
   * How long did each of these individual interactions usually last (i.e., observing full class periods or 15-minute walk-throughs)? *Probe: Ask about the various interactions.*
   * Which teachers did you work with—all teachers in the school or selected subjects? Did you spend an equal amount of time with all teachers that you worked with? If not, how did you determine which teachers received more time? How was this differentiation determined? Who made this determination?
   * How were teachers selected to work with coaches? Could teachers volunteer to work with coaches? Were teachers assigned to work with coaches? If so, what was the process (i.e., on what basis/information were the assignments made and who made the assignments)? Were teachers who are assigned to work with coaches able to opt out? Were any teachers resistant to coaching? If so, what did you do? What did the administration do?
   * How did you as a coach work with the school administration? Was the support you provided aligned with how teachers were evaluated?
3. What types of support has your school offered in the past two years to assist teachers in classroom instruction?
   * What was your role as a coach, if any, in offering these supports?
   * Who provided these supports? Were these supports a part of a particular program (such as ANet)?
   * *Probe if not already mentioned:*
     + Did you receive other forms of professional development?
4. What types of support have teachers at your school received from the district in the past two years to assist in classroom instruction?
   * What was your role as a coach, if any, in offering these supports?
   * Who provided these supports? Were these supports a part of a particular program (such as ANet)?
   * *Probe if not already mentioned:*
     + Did you receive other forms of professional development?
5. To the best of your knowledge, do teachers access any other sources of instructional support, beyond what your school or the district provides?
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + College courses?
     + Online communities of practice? Other online sources or materials?
6. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support provided by school]** (e.g., content, frequency, format).
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + Who provided the support? In what way (e.g., in-class coaching, mentoring)? How frequently? Was there adequate follow-up?
     + Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
     + Was the support targeted for specific groups of teachers, by grade level, or by subject area? What was the process by which these teachers were selected? Was it targeted for teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)? In what ways was the support tailored to meet the needs of teachers working with these populations?
     + What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned in the classroom?
     + As a result of the support, can you describe any changes teachers made in the classroom?
     + Are the supports teachers received last year different than the supports they received prior to the receivership? If so, explain.
7. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support provided by district]** (e.g., content, frequency, format).
   * *Probes mentioned earlier, plus:*
     + How does the LPS district central office identify the needs of teachers in your school? How well do you think leaders at the district level understand your school’s needs specifically? Has this changed since the receivership began?
     + Has the role the principal plays in identifying the needs of teachers in your school changed since the receivership began?
     + How well do you think school leaders understand your school’s needs? To the best of your knowledge, how does the principal make the district aware of the school’s needs and advocate to get those needs met? (R6) Has this procedure changed since the receivership began?

1. Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of the ANet program?
   * + Who provided the support? In what way?
     + What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned in the classroom?
     + As a result of the support, can you describe any changes teachers have made in the classroom?
     + Have you seen changes in student achievement data that you would attribute to ANet?
2. Are you familiar with the Acceleration Academies? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + How were the identified teachers chosen? Who chose them? Were teachers able to volunteer?
     + Who provided the instructional support in advance of the Acceleration Academies? In what way?
     + What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned from the Acceleration Academies? In their classrooms following the Acceleration Academies?
     + As a result of the support from Acceleration Academies, can you describe any changes teachers have made in the classroom?
3. Are you familiar with the Teaching and Learning Alliance? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
4. In the past two years, how much and what kind of guidance and support did teachers receive related to working with high-need students (e.g., referrals to available resources), including English language learners? Students with disabilities? Students with behavioral issues? Did these supports come from the district or the school?
   * *Probe, if necessary:*
   * How relevant was this support to teachers’ needs and the needs of their students?
   * What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned in the classroom? Who provided this support?
   * What other types of support would you like teachers to receive to help them work with high-need students?
5. Which district and school staff members—by position, not name—were responsible for designing or providing instructional supports to teachers?
6. What kind of supervision and management from school leadership—and particularly the principal—have you received in your work as a coach at this school?
   * *Probe, if necessary:*
     + In what ways, if at all, does the school leadership provide you with the information and support you need to provide coaching that best advances the vision and goals of the school?
7. Overall, do you believe the principal has had a clear vision for instruction in your school for the past two years? You also can describe this as prior to and after the receivership. Is this vision shared with all teachers in your school? How do you know? Do you feel there is a clear vision for instruction in the district?
   * + - Has this vision changed since the receivership began?
   * *Probe, if necessary:*
     + How would you describe the overall instructional goals for the school or district? What are the different ways in which these goals are communicated to teachers? What percentage of teachers do you believe receive the message regarding the vision? What steps are taken to ensure all teachers receive the vision regarding instructional goals? Who communicates these goals? And how?
     + How would you describe the overall expectations or standards for student learning in your school? In LPS? Who communicates these expectations, and are they easily understood? How, if at all, do they function to guide instruction?
8. We talked earlier about both district- and school-level instructional supports—are these instructional supports you described earlier aligned with your school’s vision? The district’s?
9. Which of the current instructional supports are most beneficial to helping teachers meet the instructional needs of their students? What kind of support, if any, do they receive to assist them in applying these supports in the classroom? What is your role as an instructional coach, if any, in providing these supports?
   * *Probe, if necessary:*
     + Who provided these supports?
     + Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
10. Are there other specific instructional supports you believe would be beneficial for your school specifically? For the district? In general?
11. What specific changes at the school level would need to be made to provide your school with improved instructional support for teachers? These changes could include actions that need to be taken by school leadership.
    * *Probe, if necessary:*
      + Vision?
      + Communication?
      + Coherence/alignment?
      + Availability of support? Mode of support?
      + What could the school leadership provide you with that would help your school improve students’ academic achievement?
      + What specific changes at the school level would need to be made to provide teachers with improved instructional support?
12. What could the district provide you with, professional development or anything else, that would help your school improve students’ academic achievement?
13. What specific changes at the district level would need to be made to provide teachers with improved instructional support?

Is there anything I haven’t asked you about the instructional supports in your school or at the district level that you’d like to comment on? I appreciate your willingness to participate in this focus group. Thank you very much for your time.

# Appendix C. School Administrator Interview Protocol

**Evaluation of Instructional Support in Lawrence Public Schools**

**Protocol: School Administrator Interview**

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am with an independent nonprofit research organization, American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me this afternoon. Before we start, I’d like to provide a little background on our work and answer any questions you might have for me.

On May 30, 2012, Superintendent Riley released the plan for improving Lawrence Public Schools (LPS). Last year, researchers from AIR conducted focus groups to gather information on the conditions in LPS that existed prior to and at the beginning of the receivership to help the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the plan.

This year, we are collecting information from teachers, coaches, and school leaders, as well as key district stakeholders, about instructional supports in LPS. Our conversation will focus on to what extent you believe, during the past two years, your teachers were provided with assistance that enhanced their classroom instruction and routines to optimally improve student academic achievement, what supports should be extended, what’s missing, and what the district has tried that you think should probably be discontinued—and why. We are conducting several interviews, like this one, to discuss topics related to the instructional supports teachers receive. I anticipate that the interview will take about 60 minutes.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name and will not attribute any quotes to individuals. Our study may identify the types of schools that we visit and will summarize findings across those schools, but it will not disclose the names of the schools or the names of any staff we met with in these schools.

Prior to this interview, I sent you a document that outlines the scope of this study and some of the issues I’ve mentioned with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. Do you have any questions about that document?

If you don’t mind, I would like to record our conversation for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for the transcribers of the material; it would be just for the research team’s reference and would not be shared with LPS or ESE. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Do I have your permission to record our conversation? Do you have any questions before we start?

Now, I’d like to get started. Today we are interested in your perspective and experiences in LPS. If there are any questions to which you do not have information to provide or would prefer not to answer, just let me know that you’d like to skip the question.

1. I’d like to start by talking a bit about your background and your role in the district. Can you talk me briefly through your career?

* How did you come to be a school administrator? How long have you been at this school?
* How long have you been involved with LPS? What are the various positions you’ve held here?

In the last round of data collection, we were interested in hearing, generally, about the conditions that existed in LPS just prior to and in the beginnings of the receivership. A few important findings that emerged from that data were (1) that variation in instructional quality across teachers in LPS poses a serious challenge for the district; (2) professional development is not always tailored to staff needs; and (3) teachers like instructional coaches but feel more coaches are needed and that many coaches are given additional responsibilities that interfere with their coaching. Thus, for this round of data collection, we are specifically interested in hearing your perspective on instructional support for teachers in LPS.

1. My first question is how would you define “instructional support”?
   * Has your definition of instructional support changed at all since the receivership began?

For the purposes of this focus group, instructional supports can be defined as those practices that provide guidance regarding and direct support for instruction that addresses identified areas in which student achievement needs improvement. This support may include guidance regarding standards for student learning or strategies for meeting instructional goals, data-driven professional development opportunities that specifically address gaps in student learning or support for implementing that professional development, or the feedback loops to monitor student outcomes and make informed decisions about instructional supports needed.

1. In the past two years, how have you, or other staff at your school, identified your teachers’ needs for instructional support?
   * Who were the key players involved?
   * What was the process? Did a needs assessment take place? Did the teacher evaluation process play a role in identifying instructional support for teachers? When did the process of identifying teacher needs occur?
   * How, if at all, were instructional supports targeted to individual teacher’s unique needs?
   * *Probe if not already mentioned:*
     + Has identifying instructional needs affected professional development?
   * Has the process changed since the receivership began? If so, how?
2. How well do you think you, or other school leaders, understand what instructional support teachers need? How do you know? [Listen for monitoring or feedback tools.]
3. What types of support has your school offered in the past two years to assist teachers in classroom instruction? Please note that we’ll ask about district supports next.
   * Who provided these supports? Were these supports a part of a particular program (such as The Achievement Network [ANet])?
4. What types of support have teachers at your school received from the district in the past two years to assist in classroom instruction?
   * How are these opportunities identified and accessed?
   * Who provided these supports? Were these supports a part of a particular program (such as ANet), or were they a separate opportunity?
5. As far as you know, do teachers from your school access any other sources of instructional support, beyond what your school or the district provides?
   * *Probe as necessary:*
     + College courses?
     + Online communities of practice? Other online sources or materials?
6. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support]** (e.g., content, frequency, format, process for selecting schools/grades)**.**
   * *Probe as necessary:*

* Who provided the support? In what way? For example, in-class coaching, mentoring, and so on. How frequently? Was there adequate follow-up?
* Were these supports a part of ANet or any other program?
* Was the support targeted for specific groups of teachers, by grade level, or by subject area? What was the process by which these teachers were selected? Was it targeted for teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)? In what ways was the support tailored to meet the needs of teachers working with these populations?
* What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned in the classroom?
* As a result of this support, can you describe any changes you observed in the classroom? *Probe for what leads them to believe the changes they see are a result of this specific support and not another.*
* Are the supports teachers received last year different than supports they received prior to LPS entering into receivership? If so, explain.

1. Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of the ANet program?
   * Who provided the support? In what way?
   * What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned in the classroom?
   * As a result of the support, can you describe any changes you observed in the classroom?
2. Are you familiar with the Acceleration Academies? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided to teachers as part of that program?
   * How were the identified teachers chosen?
   * Who provided the instructional support to train teachers to participate in the Acceleration Academies? In what way?
   * What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to apply what they learned from the Acceleration Academies? In their classrooms following the Acceleration Academies?
   * As a result of the support from Acceleration Academies, can you describe any changes you observed in the classroom?
3. Are you familiar with the Teaching and Learning Alliance? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
4. Has your school had academic coaches or other specialized support staff in the past two years? If yes, please list these and describe the scope of their roles generally. Then, please specifically describe how, if at all, they provided teachers with instructional support. Please provide details on how they spent their time and if they worked with specific teachers.
5. Do you believe that the coaches have beena good fit for your school in terms of the following:
   * Instructional expertise and experience of support providers?
   * Intensity of support (days or hours on site)?
   * Number of coaches?
6. In the past two years, how much and what kind of guidance and support have teachers received related to working with high-need students (e.g., referrals to available resources), including English language learners? Students with disabilities? Students with behavioral issues?
   * What kind of support, if any, did teachers receive to assist them in applying what they learned in the classroom? Who provided this support?
   * What other types of support would you like teachers to receive to help them work with high-need students?
7. Which district or school staff members—by position, not name—were responsible for designing or providing instructional supports to teachers? What percentage of their time was devoted to providing these supports?

Before we wrap up, I’d like to ask you a few questions about the district’s overarching vision for instruction in LPS.

1. How would you describe the district’s vision for instruction in LPS? In other words, what are the overall instructional goals in LPS since the receivership began?
   * Who communicated these goals? And how?
   * What steps were taken to ensure teachers understand the district vision regarding instructional goals?
   * What percentage of teachers in your school do you believe understand and share the district’s vision? How do you know?
   * From your perspective, has the district’s vision for instruction changed since the receivership began? If so, how?
2. How would you describe the overall expectations or standards for *student learning* in LPS? Who communicates these expectations, and are they clear? How, if at all, do you believe they function to guide instruction?
   * Have these expectations changed since the receivership began? If so, how?
3. In what ways, if at all, are the instructional supports you described earlier aligned with the district’s vision for instruction in LPS?
   * Has this alignment of instructional supports and the district’s vision changed since the receivership began?

Finally, I’d like to get your perspective on some of the strengths and areas for improvement with regard to instructional support in LPS.

1. Of the instructional supports provided by either your school or the district in the past two years, which do you believe were most beneficial to teachers in meeting the instructional needs of their students and why?
2. What could the district provide you or your teachers with, additional coaches or anything else, that would help your school improve student’s academic achievement?
3. What specific changes at the district level would need to be made to provide teachers with improved instructional support? At the school level?

Is there anything I haven’t asked you about instructional supports that you’d like to comment on? I appreciate your willingness to be interviewed. Thank you very much for your time.

# Appendix D. District Staff Member Interview Protocol

**Evaluation of Instructional Support in Lawrence Public Schools**

**Protocol: District Official Interview**

**Introduction**

Hello, my name is \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, and I am with an independent nonprofit research organization, American Institutes for Research (AIR). Thanks again for taking the time to speak with me today. Before we start, I’d like to provide a little background on our work and answer any questions you might have for me.

We know that you’re familiar with the turnaround effort underway in Lawrence Public Schools (LPS), most notably the appointment of Jeffrey Riley as Superintendent for LPS. Last year, researchers from AIR conducted interviews and focus groups to gather information on the conditions in LPS that existed prior to and at the beginning of the receivership to help the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) evaluate the implementation and outcomes of the plan. This year, we are collecting information from teachers, coaches, and school leaders, as well as key district stakeholders, about the instructional supports in LPS. The purpose of this interview is to get your perspective as a leader in the district on the instructional supports teachers have received in the past two years. Today’s interview should last no more than 60 minutes.

I want to assure you that all information obtained today will be kept confidential and will be used only for the purposes of this study. We will not use your name, will not attribute any quotes to individuals, will not identify the positions of the individuals interviewed, and will not identify the exact number of individuals interviewed. In addition, we have selected a small and difficult-to-identify group of individuals; for example, we did not choose to interview the entire team who contributed to the writing of the plan or the entire district leadership team. However, our study will identify the district and given the fact that each of the individuals interviewed has a leadership role in the district, we cannot rule out the possibility that readers of the report could infer who we interviewed. That said, we will endeavor to protect your confidentiality and privacy to the greatest extent possible. We will omit any details that would identify respondents, and we can give you the opportunity to review a draft of the specific sections of the report that include findings from these interviews.

Prior to this call, I sent you a document that outlines the scope of this study and some of the issues I’ve mentioned with regard to anonymity and confidentiality. Do you have any questions about that document?

If you don’t mind, I would like to record our conversation for note-taking purposes. No one outside of our data collection team will hear or have access to the recording except for the transcribers of the material; it would just be for the research team’s reference and would not be shared with LPS or ESE. If you would like me to turn off the recorder at any point, just let me know. Do I have your permission to record our conversation? Do you have any questions before we start?

Now, I’d like to get started. Today we are interested in your perspective and experiences in LPS. If there are any questions to which you do not have information to provide or would prefer not to answer, just let me know that you’d like to skip the question.

1. I’d like to start by talking a bit about your background and your role in the district. Can you talk us through your career a bit?

* Can you briefly describe your primary responsibilities in LPS?
* How did you come to be an educational administrator at the district level?
* How long have you been involved with LPS? What are the various positions you’ve held here?

In the last round of data collection, we were interested in hearing, generally, about the conditions that existed in LPS just prior to and in the beginnings of the receivership. A few important findings that emerged from that data were (1) that variation in instructional quality across teachers in LPS poses a serious challenge for the district; (2) professional development is not always tailored to staff needs; and (3) teachers like instructional coaches but feel more coaches are needed and that many coaches are given additional responsibilities that interfere with their coaching. Thus, for this round of data collection, we are specifically interested in hearing your perspective on and better understanding instructional support for teachers in LPS.

1. My first question is how would you define “instructional support”?
   * Has this definition changed since the receivership?

For the purposes of this focus group, instructional supports can be defined as those practices that provide guidance regarding and direct support for instruction that addresses identified areas in which student achievement needs improvement. This support may include guidance regarding standards for student learning or strategies for meeting instructional goals, data-driven professional development opportunities that specifically address gaps in student learning or support for implementing that professional development, or the feedback loops to monitor student outcomes and make informed decisions about instructional supports needed.

1. In the past two years, how has the district identified teachers’ needs for instructional support?
   * Who were the key players involved?
   * What was the process? Did a needs assessment take place? Did the teacher evaluation process play a role in identifying instructional support for teachers? When did the process of identifying teacher needs occur?
   * How, if at all, were instructional supports targeted to meet unique school needs?
   * How, if at all, are instructional supports for coaches different than those for teachers?
   * *Probe if not already mentioned:*
     + How has the district’s ability to identify teacher needs affected professional development?
     + Has the district’s ability to identify teacher needs changed since the receivership began?
2. How well do you think district leaders understand what instructional support teachers need? How do you know? [Listen for systemic monitoring or feedback tools—not ad hoc, e.g., a principal calls up with a request.] How well do you think district leaders understand what instructional support different schools need? How do you know? [Listen for systemic monitoring or feedback tools.]

We know that teachers may access instructional supports at the school or district level, or even through external sources. For the purposes of this interview, I’d like to talk to you more about the instructional supports provided by the district specifically in the past two years.

1. What types of support has the district provided in the past two years to assist teachers in classroom instruction?
   * Can you explain how, if at all, these supports fit in with the district’s Level 5 turnaround plan?
   * Did the instructional support provided by the district vary from school to school? How did the district determine this variation? Did it depend on accountability level? Level of autonomy?
   * Were any of these supports a part of The Achievement Network (ANet) or another outside program or organization?
2. **Tell me more about \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ [instructional support provided by district]** (e.g., content, frequency, format [i.e., embedded in the school day, process for selecting schools/grades/etc.])**.**

* Who provided the support? In what way? For example, in-class coaching, mentoring, and so on. How frequently?
* Was the support targeted for specific groups of teachers, by grade level, or by subject area? For teachers with groups of students needing additional assistance (e.g., English language learners, low-performing students, students with disabilities)?
* Are you familiar with the instructional coaches at the schools? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports they provided?
* Are you familiar with ANet? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
* Are you familiar with the Teaching and Learning Alliance? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?
* Are you familiar with the Acceleration Academies? Can you tell me more about any instructional supports provided as part of that program?

1. How much and what kind of guidance and support did the district provide related to working with high-need students (e.g., referrals to available resources), including English language learners? Students with disabilities? Students with behavioral issues?
2. Which district staff members—by position, not name—were responsible for designing or providing instructional supports to teachers? What percentage of their time was devoted to providing these supports?
3. Generally speaking, how would you describe the quality of support provided by academic coaches or other specialized support staff, in terms of instructional expertise or experience? Intensity of support (days or hours on site)? How much does this support vary from coach to coach? From school to school?
   * How do you monitor the effectiveness of the support provided?
   * Has the amount or quality of instructional support changed since the receivership began? Has the monitoring changed?

Before we wrap up, I’d like to ask you a few questions about the district’s overarching vision for instruction in LPS.

1. How would you describe the district’s vision for instruction in LPS? In other words, what are the overall instructional goals in LPS since the receivership began? Who communicates these goals, and are they clear?
   * Has the district’s vision for instruction changed since the receivership began? If so, how?
   * How do you know if you are making progress on meeting these goals?
2. How would you describe the overall expectations or standards for *student learning* in LPS? Who communicates these expectations, and are they clear? How, if at all, do you believe they function to guide instruction?
   * Have these expectations changed since the receivership began? If so, how?
3. In what ways are the instructional supports you described earlier aligned with the district’s vision for instruction in LPS?
   * Has this changed since the receivership began?

Finally, I’d like to get your perspective on some of the strengths and areas for improvement with regard to instructional support in LPS.

1. Of the instructional supports provided by the district in the past two years, which do you believe were most beneficial to teachers in meeting the instructional needs of their students and why?
2. Are there other specific instructional supports you believe *would* be beneficial for teachers in the district? Or in particular schools? Is there anything that you know the district does not currently provide that you wish it could?
3. What specific changes at the district level would need to be made to provide teachers with improved instructional support? At the school level?

Is there anything I haven’t asked you about instructional supports in the district that you’d like to comment on? I appreciate your willingness to be interviewed. Thank you very much for your time.

# Appendix E. Focus Group and Interview Data Codebook

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Challenges | Benefits and Challenges |
| Changes Since Receiver | Most Beneficial Supports |
| Quotes | Supports Still Needed |
| Defining Instructional Support | Coaches |
| Application of Professional Development | English Language Learners |
| Equipment | Materials |
| Feedback | Other |
| Instructional Goals | Paraprofessionals |
| Other | Professional Development |
| People | Students with Disabilities |
| Administrators | Technology |
| Coaches | Identifying and Communicating Needs of Teachers |
| Colleagues | Targeting Supports to Specific Teachers |
| ELL Teachers | Coaches |
| Paraprofessionals | For English Language Learners |
| Special Education Teachers | For Students With Disabilities |
| Targeted Professional Development | Mathematics and English Language Arts |
| Vision and Expectations | Other Subjects |
| District Coherence | Paraprofessionals |
| Alignment of Instructional Supports to Vision | Personnel Designing or Providing Support |
| Buy-In | External |
| Communication | Internal |
| LPS Expectations for Student Learning | Successes |
| LPS Vision for Instruction |  |
| Strategies to Provide Instructional Support |  |
| Feedback to Teachers |  |
| New This Year |  |
| Other Additional Supports |  |
| Other District Supports |  |
| Other School Supports |  |
| Specific Supports |  |
| Acceleration Academies |  |
| ANet |  |
| Coaching |  |
| Formal Observations and Learning Walks |  |
| i-Ready |  |
| Professional Development Days |  |
| Teaching and Learning Alliance |  |

1. The CLASS observation tool was developed by a group of educators at the University of Virginia to define and measure interactions between students and teachers in their classrooms. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Findings related to Benefits and Challenges are incorporated into the relevant topic areas. Findings related to Best Practices in Other Districts are addressed in the summary and recommendations. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The schools eligible for consideration in the sample were agreed upon by AIR researchers, a member of the ESE research office, and a member of the LPS district central office. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. “The Achievement Network (ANet) is a nonprofit that helps schools strengthen their practice and culture of using standards and data to accelerate student learning in underserved communities” (The Achievement Network, 2013, para. 1). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Researchers also considered a school’s participation in ANet during 2011–12 and 2012–13 because, according to an LPS staff member, that factor could have played a role in respondents’ views of instructional support. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Some schools in the sample of schools for this study serve both elementary and middle grades. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. An LPS district staff member provided AIR researchers with e-mail addresses for all principals, coaches, and teachers in LPS. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. At the time of the study, the research team was told that each school had two coaches. The exception was the high school campus, which shared coaches across the schools. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)