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# **Partners in Pittsburgh Public Schools' Excellence for All Initiative: First Year Implementation Findings**

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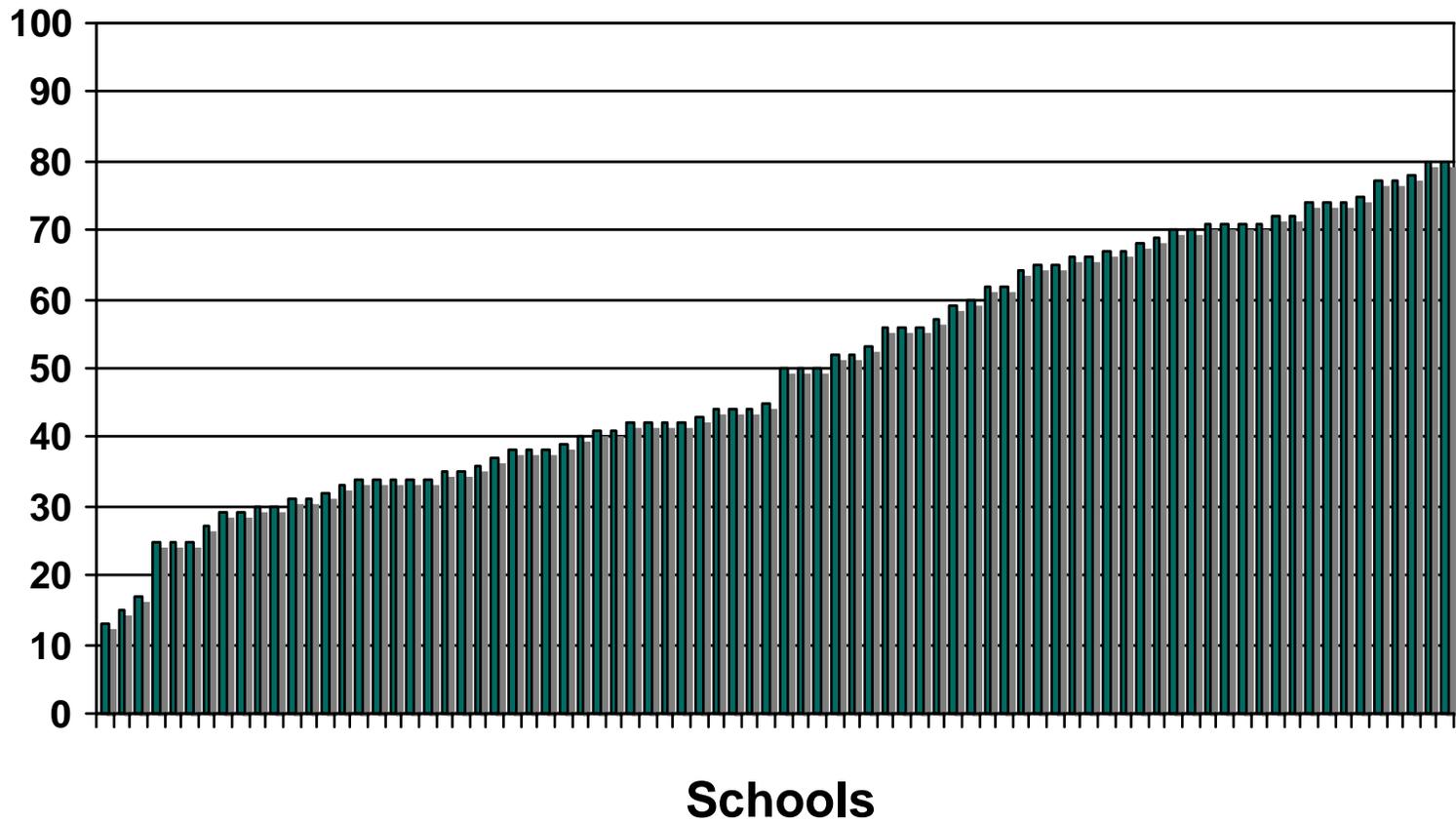
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# Excellence for All motivated by desire to improve achievement district-wide and reduce gaps in achievement

- ▣ PPS proficiency levels are substantially below state averages; many schools fall short of Adequate Yearly Progress standards
- ▣ Large differences in achievement across schools
- ▣ Council of Great City Schools cited absence of coherent and consistent district-wide instructional model
- ▣ Substantial student mobility suggests need for district-wide consistency in content and pacing of instruction
- ▣ Sense of urgency motivated a decision to introduce district-wide interventions at all grade levels simultaneously

# Average Achievement in PPS Schools Varies Widely

2004 and 2005 Results Across Grades, Subjects, and Tests



# EFA aims to increase student achievement by improving classroom teaching across the district through managed instruction (MI)

Managed instruction includes:	
Consistent curriculum (what and when to teach)	Consistency across the district in curriculum content, use, delivery, and pacing
Proven pedagogy (how to teach)	Consistent use of scientifically validated pedagogy
Assessment & data use (testing what was taught/ using data to improve)	Systematic use of assessment data to differentiate instruction to students with different needs
Accountability Structure	Leadership, oversight, monitoring, and coordination mechanisms to promote implementation

# EFA: Building the capacity for managed instruction

- ▣ Substantial investments in professional development for all role groups
- ▣ Site based curriculum coaches to provide customized support for rollout of strategy
- ▣ Accelerated Learning Academies
- ▣ Support and monitoring by Executive Directors to promote consistently high level of implementation across the district

## Four key external partners vary in their expected contributions to MI

	Macmillan	Kaplan	IFL	America's Choice
Consistent curriculum (what and when)	X	X		Selected materials only
Proven pedagogy (how)	X	X	X	X
Assessment & data use	X	X	Promotes use of data from existing assessments	
Accountability structure	PPS central office responsibility			X

## EFA involves ambitious scale-up of multiple programs across grades and subjects

PARTNER (# of Schools)	Grade Level												
	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Kaplan (43)							E	E	E/M	E/M	E/M		
Macmillan (43)	E	E	E	E	E	E							
America's Choice (8)	●—————●												
Inst. for Learning (57)	●—————●												

Curriculum reform is focusing on Math (M) and Reading/English Language Arts (E) within those levels

# Purposes of this evaluation

- To provide formative feedback on the first year of implementation of four partner initiatives that are key components of Excellence for All (EFA)
- To identify key issues related to implementation that may affect academic achievement
- To suggest opportunities to strengthen implementation in Year 2
- This is *not* an evaluation of effectiveness/impact of the overall strategy or individual providers
  - Achievement impact will take time
  - PPS can't wait for achievement impact to assess whether EFA is moving forward as intended
  - Impact assessment planned to begin in year 2

# Evaluating year 1 EFA implementation

## Research Questions

- ▣ How is each partner intervention being received and rolled out by school staff?
- ▣ How are partner interventions advancing the overall EFA strategy (curriculum, pedagogy, data use, accountability)?
- ▣ What have been key supports for and barriers to implementation?

# Year 1 implementation challenges mirror those documented by other studies

- ▣ Full implementation—yielding substantial changes in classroom practices—often takes 3 years or more
- ▣ Implementation of different reform elements typically varies
- ▣ Teachers often struggle with implementing new curricula and instructional practices
  - Teachers often perceive even substantial amounts of PD to be insufficient
- ▣ Ongoing (multi-year) PD and other forms of support are necessary for successful implementation

# Data collection examined implementation through interviews in 16 schools

- Schools randomly sampled by grade level; 100% of selected schools participated
  - 5 K-5 schools
  - 5 K-8 schools
  - 3 middle schools
  - 3 high schools
  - Sample included two Accelerated Learning Academies
- Interviewees included all principals, 28 instructional coaches, and 48 randomly selected classroom teachers
- Confidentiality was assured for all participating staff and schools

# ***Key Findings***

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## **Deep instructional improvement is a long, hard task, but first year saw encouraging signs**

- ▣ Differentiated instruction widely implemented—at least in grades K-5
- ▣ Macmillan curriculum, AC framework, and Kaplan data have all provided useful, concrete support
- ▣ Use of data remains highly dependent on individual staff skills, background, and initiative
- ▣ Support from Kaplan and AC needs improvement
- ▣ PPS needs to make clear how school staff are expected to use IFL
- ▣ Coaches are key to deepening and institutionalizing the changes
- ▣ Principals need guidance on balancing their roles as instructional leaders and building managers



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# Partner-Specific Findings

# Macmillan: Strong 1<sup>st</sup> year rollout

- ▣ Materials valued as comprehensive, well-integrated, and effectively sequenced
- ▣ Both curriculum and assessment data support teachers in doing more differentiated instruction, a major EFA goal
- ▣ PD needs to go deeper on classroom use
- ▣ Provider seen as responsive to Year 1 glitches

# Kaplan: Considerable improvement needed

- ▣ Data system is valued but use needs more support
- ▣ Materials vague and difficult to navigate
- ▣ Just in time delivery has made instructional planning challenging
- ▣ PD seen as shallow

# IFL: Buy-in at leadership level, but classroom impact minimal in year 1

- ▣ IFL PD helped coaches define their role
- ▣ Building a common language of instructional leadership, teamwork among principals and coaches, and a network among coaches
- ▣ Training needs more differentiation by experience
- ▣ Many teachers are unfamiliar with IFL or see it as having limited practical utility
- ▣ Need for clearer expectations for classroom transfer

# America's Choice: Framework in place, but increased support needed

- ▣ Tangible elements are in place
- ▣ Useful framework for instruction and instructional leadership
- ▣ Seen as consistent with EFA strategy
- ▣ Writing approach valued
- ▣ Depth of implementation hindered by limited PD and support
- ▣ AC's use of its accountability plan provided less guidance than needed



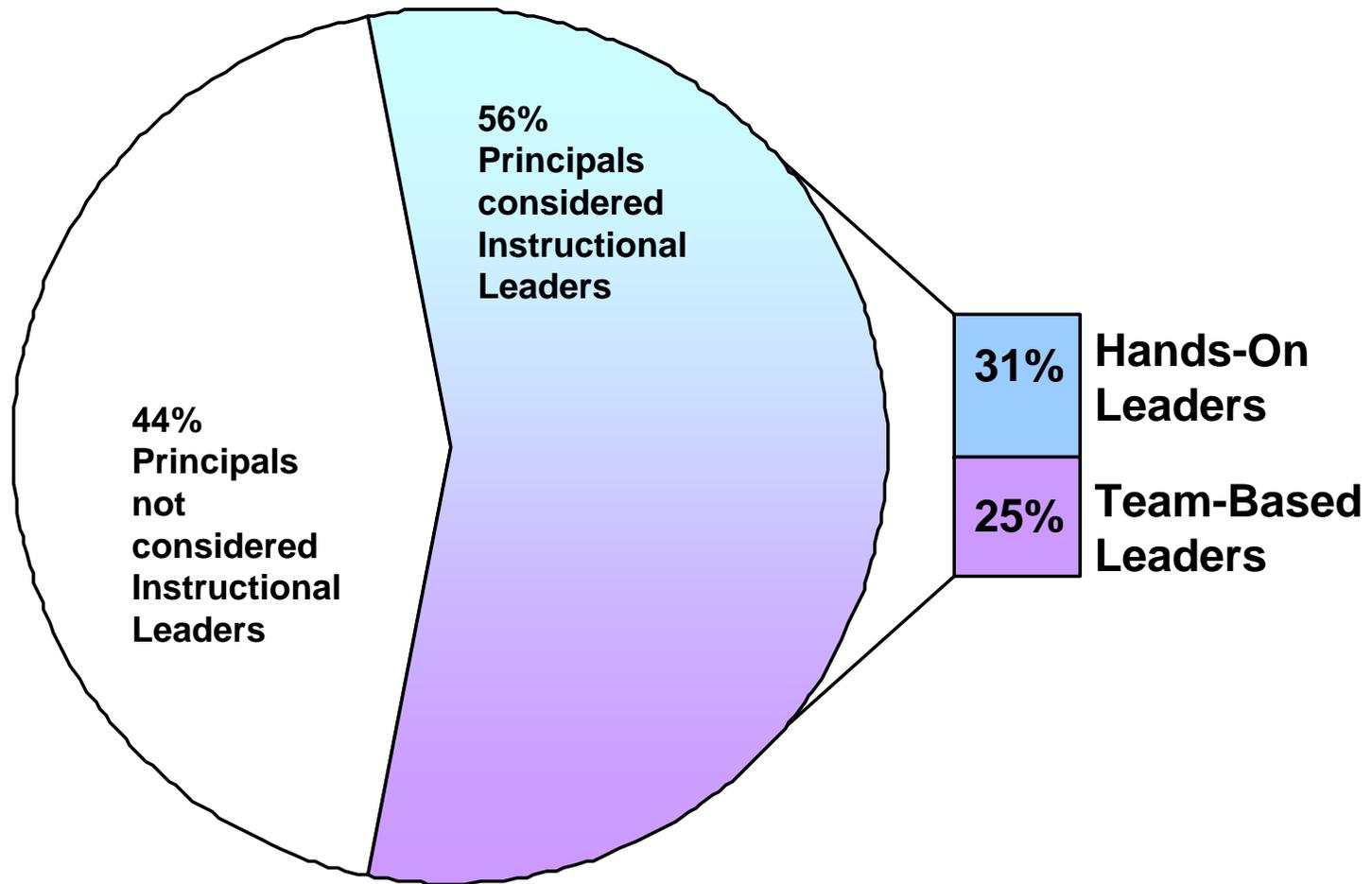
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# **Findings on District Accountability and Support Systems for EFA**

# Coaches are the linchpin of EFA

- ▣ 26 of 28 coaches (93%) in 16 schools were valued by teachers and principals as resources
- ▣ In all schools coaches mediate roll-out of new programs and transfer PD
- ▣ In most schools coaches are also key players in data use and co-instructional leaders
- ▣ However, 1/3 of coaches in our sample faced significant distractions from their core role of developing instructional capacity
  - Principals are key to protecting the integrity of the role.
- ▣ For maximum impact, coaches believe that coach PD needs
  - More differentiation by experience
  - More focus on practical how-to's of partner programs and how to train teachers

# Just over half (56%) of principals in our sample seen as instructional leaders



# Concerns about unrealistic expectations for instructional leadership are common

## Challenges to Instructional Leadership

- ▣ All principals face significant competing role demands → “running the building”
- ▣ Some also lack specific knowledge of content and pedagogy
- ▣ Unrealistic/unclear expectations may breed cynicism about the concept
- ▣ Effective instructional leaders recognize the realities of time constraints and capitalize on distributed expertise
- ▣ Principals and their staff need clarity on which functions are core expectations

# Central office valued for supporting implementation but school staff suggest improvements

- ▣ Increased expectations have been balanced with increased support from Central office
- ▣ Expectations and accountability have been clearer for curriculum than for the pedagogy and data use
- ▣ Staff request more
  - Opportunities to inform district of implementation problems
  - Input into decisionmaking regarding the initiatives
- ▣ Staff suggest
  - PPS capitalize on knowledge and capacity built through past initiatives
  - Best practices used in individual schools be disseminated through District PD

## Staff perceive increased value of PD, but changes may be needed to maximize the investment

- ▣ Staff report significant increase in quality and quantity of PD for all role groups compared to training before EFA
- ▣ Coaches and principals can motivate but not require attendance to training sessions
- ▣ Teachers want deeper training on classroom how-to's, especially data use and differentiated instruction
- ▣ School-based professional collaboration may support and sustain classroom transfer

# Recommendations for strengthening implementation in year 2

- ▣ Broaden and deepen use of valued data tools through
  - Targeted PD
  - Site-based support
  - Dissemination of existing best practices and tools
  - Clear accountability for use
- ▣ Build on strong start on differentiated instruction in Year 1 through
  - PD more focused on classroom “how to’s”
  - Clear focus on coaching and learning walks
- ▣ Build on existing coach networks to
  - Disseminate best practices
  - Create cross-district consistency
  - Strengthen cross-district professional learning community

# Recommendations for strengthening implementation in year 2

- ▣ Broaden and deepen instructional leadership capacity through
  - Continuing to invest in coaches
  - Promoting team-based leadership
- ▣ Ensure coach time with teachers/core role focus
- ▣ Provide and protect more school-based professional collaboration time to support deep, sustainable transfer
- ▣ Ensure all staff understand EFA as a coherent strategy
  - Components are mutually reinforcing
  - Connections and consistency across providers