

**District Leader Interview**  
**Office of Curriculum and Instruction**  
**January 2008**  
**MIST WEBSITE**

**Before turning the tape recorder on:**

1. Explain the purpose of the interview.

*Thank you for taking the time to meet with me today. In this interview I am going to be asking you questions about your role in the district, the current middle school math initiative(s), and how the different units in the district office work together to promote instructional leadership and improvement in middle school mathematics instruction.*

2. Consent Process: Please be sure to consent the participant if s/he has not consented before (see Interview Process document). In all cases, tell the participant:

*Before we begin the interview, I want to remind you that participating in this study is voluntary and your responses are completely confidential. At any point during the interview, if you would like me to turn off the recorder, just tell me to do so. Do you have any questions about the study before we begin?*

**Background**

1. Could you tell me about your current position in the district?
  - a. What are your current job responsibilities?
  - b. How many years have you been in this position?
2. What did you do prior to this position?

**Initiatives**

*I'd like to ask you about the district's current plans for improving middle school mathematics instruction.*

3. What are the district's current plans for improving mathematics instruction in middle schools in the district?
  - a. Who or what has been influential in creating the district plan for mathematics?
  - b. Can you walk me through the concrete steps your office took as part of developing this plan?
  - c. Can you walk me through the concrete steps your office is taking as part of implementing this plan?
  - d. What role do teachers have in this plan? Principals? Coaches?
4. Who are the key individuals involved in carrying out this plan?
  - a. How do district leaders in other units (e.g., head of Leadership, head of Special Education), principals, coaches and teachers learn about this initiative?
  - b. Who communicates this policy to teachers/principals/coaches?

5. Could you describe the gaps in mathematics achievement between various groups of students in the district?

- a. In your view, what are the sources of the gaps in mathematics achievement between these groups of students?
- b. (*\*Note: We will only ask this question during Jan 08.*) What is the history of mathematics achievement for different populations of students in the \_\_\_\_\_ School District?

6. (*Only ask if the achievement gap was not described as part of the plan the District Leader described in Q3.*) What approaches is the District taking to address the achievement gaps in mathematics, particularly in the middle grades?

- a. What role does your office play in this plan?
- b. Can you describe to me the concrete steps your office is taking as part of this plan?

7. I would like to ask you how the initiative for improving middle school math instruction that you have described so far has been received.

- a. Initially, did you support this initiative?
- b. Did the teachers?
- c. Principals?

8. How will you know whether the goals for improving middle school mathematics teaching and learning are being achieved? *Only ask these probes if the interviewee does not talk about each level.*

- a. At the district level?
- b. At the school level?
- c. At the classroom level?

9. Is(are) the current math initiative(s) in conflict with any other initiatives that are currently operating in the district?

- a. *If so*, how are you working to resolve these issues?

### **General Information about the Organization of Mathematics Teaching**

*I'd like to ask you a few questions about how middle school mathematics instruction is organized in your district.*

10. What courses are middle schools expected to offer in mathematics? (e.g., 8<sup>th</sup> grade algebra)

11. What is the district's policy on skill-level grouping in middle school mathematics?

- a. How does your office enforce this policy?
- b. What happens if your office finds out that a school is not adhering to this policy?

12. What is the district's average class size in math in middle schools?

- a. (*If it is over 30, ask*) Are any steps being taken to reduce class size?

13. Can you describe to me the hiring process for teachers, particularly middle school math teachers?

- a. How are teachers placed in schools?
- b. How often do teachers move from school to school?
  - i. Why do they tend to move?

### **Instructional Leadership and Mathematics Instruction**

*Now I would like to ask you some questions about your perspective on instructional leadership and quality classroom instruction in middle school mathematics.*

14. We are interested in knowing your view of what counts as high quality instructional leadership in mathematics.

- a. What do you think is important for middle school principals to know and do to be effective instructional leaders in mathematics?
- b. For example, if you were to go into a middle school, how would you know that there is high quality instructional leadership in mathematics?

15. What does your office hold middle school principals accountable for regarding instructional leadership in mathematics?

*Interviewer should ask about the following things. For anything that principals are held accountable for, ask How are they held accountable?*

- a. assisting math teachers in improving their practices?
- b. making use of the mathematics coach?
- c. understanding the intent and the challenges of the math curriculum?
- d. improvement in student achievement in mathematics?
- e. Is there anything else that principals are held accountable for regarding math instruction?

16. What sources of assistance or support does the district provide to principals to help them meet district expectations for instructional leadership in mathematics?

- a. Do you offer any specific supports (e.g., professional development, plan to reduce class size, hiring more math teachers for high-need schools) to principals in order to address the achievement gap in mathematics?
  - i. Can you describe those supports to me?
  - ii. What has been the response of principals?

17. What are some of the challenges in developing effective instructional leadership in mathematics in this district?

- a. How is the district dealing with these challenges?

18. *\*Notes to interviewer:*

- Probe on **depth/specificity** of response until you understand what the participant describes (e.g., If a teacher says “student engagement,” ask “Engaged in what?”).

- Keep the **form/function** distinction in mind. Ask participants why they think \_\_\_\_ is important (e.g., *Why do you think it's important for kids to work in groups? Why do you think it's important to hold a whole class discussion?*).
- If the interviewee talks about the **structure of discourse** (who's talking to whom and when) probe on **content** (and vice versa). If the interviewee says, "Teachers (or students) should be asking questions," probe to find out the kinds of questions the teacher (or students) should ask and for what purpose, as well as whether they conceive of discussion as happening in whole class settings and/or in small groups alone.

If you were asked to observe a teacher's math classroom for one or more lessons, what would you look for to decide whether the mathematics instruction is high quality?

- a. What are some of the things you would expect to find the teacher actually doing in the classroom for instruction to be of high quality?
  - b. What kinds of problems or mathematical tasks would you expect to see the students working on for instruction to be of high quality?
    - i. Can you please describe a \_\_\_\_\_ [use the word or phrase—e.g., "task" or "problem"—that the participant used for "task"] that you would consider to be of high quality?
  - c. Can you please describe what classroom discussion would look and sound like if instruction were of high quality?
    - i. Would you expect to see the entire class participating in a single discussion, or would students be talking primarily small groups?
  - d. Is there anything else you would look for?
    - i. *If so*, what?
    - ii. Why?
- 
- a. (*Only ask if interviewee has told you that schools group students by skill levels in mathematics*) What are your expectations for how math teachers should adjust their instruction *across* the different classes they teach?
  - b. What are your expectations regarding how math teachers should adjust their instruction *within* classes?

19. What are some of the challenges in developing high-quality instruction in middle school mathematics?

20. What would you consider high quality professional development in middle school mathematics for teachers?

- a. What would the focus of the PD be?

### **Relationships between District Units**

*Now I'd like to ask you a few questions about the relationships between units of the District Office as they relate to math instruction and about your contact with different groups of people in the district.*

21. To whom do you report?

- a. On what criteria are you evaluated?

22. How would you describe the working relationship between Curriculum and Instruction and the following units:

- a. Leadership
- b. Special Education
- c. Research, Evaluation, and Assessment
- d. Office of English Language Learners

23. Are you generally “on the same page” as other district units regarding decisions about middle school math instruction and instructional leadership?

- a. *If not*, in what ways do you differ?

24. Who do you turn to for help or advice regarding teaching or instructional leadership in middle school math?

25. Do you participate in regularly scheduled meetings with:

- a. members of other district units?

1. How often do you have these meetings?
2. What do you generally discuss or decide at these meetings?
3. What materials do you use in these meetings to help communicate expectations for instructional leadership or math instruction? (e.g., *curriculum framework, standards, student achievement data*)

- i. *If they do use these materials, ask*, Do you generally find that you are interpreting and using these materials in similar ways?

1. *If not*, can you give an example to help me understand how you were using \_\_\_\_\_ in different ways?

2. Were you able to resolve these differences?

- A. *If so*, how did you do so?

- b. principals and/or assistant principals?

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- A. *If so*, how did you do so?

- c. math coaches? (*Other than PD for coaches*)

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26. Have you had any communication with parents or the larger community about the middle school math initiative and/or textbook adoption in the district?

a. *If so*, can you please describe the communication? (e.g., meetings with parents, flyers, etc.)

b. What has been the general reaction of the parents to the middle school math initiative and/or textbook adoption?

27. Is there anything that I have not asked that would help me better understand your role in the district, the current math initiative(s), and how the different units in the district office work together to promote instructional leadership and improvement in mathematics instruction?