

**District Leader Interview  
Special Education Office  
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?
  - a. Have you ever taught in the classroom?
  - b. If so, what subject(s)?
  - c. What grades?
3. What groups of students does your office serve?
  - a. Learning disabilities?
  - b. Physical disabilities?
  - c. English Language Learners?
  - d. Gifted education?
  - e. Others?
4. How is special education organized in the district?
  - a. Are students generally mainstreamed?
  - b. Do schools have “special education classrooms”?
  - c. Are any schools designated for special needs students?

**Initiatives**

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

5. What are the district's current plans for improving mathematics instruction in middle schools in the district?
  - a. Who or what has been most influential in creating the district plan for middle school mathematics?
  - b. Can you walk me through the concrete steps your office took as part of developing this plan?
  
6. What are the Special Education office's responsibilities in the district middle school mathematics initiative?
  - a. Can you walk me through the concrete steps your office is taking as part of implementing this plan?
  
7. Could you describe the gaps in mathematics achievement between various groups of students?
  - a. In your view, what are the reasons for the gaps in mathematics achievement between these groups of students?
  - b. What is your office's role in reducing these gaps?
  
8. How will you know when the goals for improvement of middle school mathematics teaching and learning have been achieved particularly for students who receive special education services? *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?
  - d. What data will you use or do you currently use to evaluate (the math initiative)?
  
9. Is(are) the current math initiative(s) in conflict with any other initiatives that are currently operating in the district?
  - a. How are you working to resolve these issues?

### **Mathematics Instruction**

*Now I would like to ask you some questions about your perspective on middle school math instruction for students who fall under the Special Education category and are mainstreamed.*

10. We are interested in knowing your view of what counts as high quality instructional leadership in special education, specifically for mathematics.
  - a. What do you think is important for middle school principals to know and do to be effective instructional leaders in mathematics for students who receive special education services?
  - b. For example, if you were to go into a middle school, how would you know that there is high quality instructional leadership in special education?
    - i. Specific to mathematics education?
  
11. Does your office hold middle school principals accountable for anything regarding special education services?
  - a. If so, what are they held accountable for?
  - b. Anything specific to mathematics education?

12. What sources of assistance or support does your office provide to principals to help them meet district expectations in the area of special education in middle school mathematics?

13. 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, **especially for students receiving special education services**?

*\*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.
  - 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 in small groups?
  - d. Is there anything else you would look for?
    - i. If so, what?
    - ii. Why?

14. What sources of assistance or support does your office provide to mainstream middle school teachers to help them meet district expectations in the area of special education?

- a. Are any of these supports or assistance specific to mathematics instruction?
- b. If so, can you describe the mathematics specific supports?

15. What are some of the challenges in developing instructional leadership in middle school special education in this district? Particular to mathematics?

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

### **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.*

16. To whom do you report?
  - a. On what criteria are you evaluated?
  
17. In general, how would you describe the working relationship between Special Education and the following units:
  - a. Curriculum and Instruction
    - i. In a district initiative around math instruction, how does policy for special education fit with mainstream education?
  - b. Leadership
  - c. Research, Evaluation, and Assessment
  - d. Office of English Language Learners
  
18. 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?
  
19. 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 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 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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    2. What do you generally discuss or decide at these meetings?
    3. What materials you use in these meetings to help communicate expectations for instructional leadership or math instruction? (e.g., *curriculum framework, standards, student achievement data*)
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        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?

c. math coaches?

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2. Were you able to resolve these differences?

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

d. groups of math teachers?

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2. Were you able to resolve these differences?

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

20. 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?