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For immediate release Wednesday, May 13, 2009

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Full report available at: <http://www.policymattersohio.org/LeadersAtManyLevels.htm>

Teachers, administrators support collaborative school improvement Leaders from many levels should be harnessed to boost student achievement

Research by Policy Matters Ohio has found widespread support for key elements of the Ohio Improvement Process among districts participating in a pilot cohort, especially for its requirement that teachers play an integral role in collaborative planning. The process is a state initiative, started in the 2007-08 school year, to create a unified approach to school improvement that focuses on data analysis, collaboration, professional development, and teacher leadership.

The study, which included 37 interviews in 18 school districts, found that teachers and administrators in Ohio believe teachers should help lead collaborative school improvement efforts. These elements of the Ohio Improvement Process had wide support. Interviews with teachers and administrators representing Ohio's five largest urban districts found less support for the process, in part because it is seen as duplicating existing efforts at the district level.

"We recommend that the state provide the resources and time teachers need to work together to plan lessons, engage in shared learning, and take on leadership roles," said Piet van Lier, Policy Matters senior researcher and author of this report.

House Bill 1, the biennial budget bill now before the Ohio Senate, includes a focus on teacher leadership, innovation and professional development that can provide opportunities to ensure teachers are part of collaborative efforts at the school and district levels, as the Ohio Improvement Process envisions.

"Once this bill becomes law, planning for new approaches to school improvement should ensure that teachers fully participate in school improvement efforts, and that adequate support is given to foster collaboration," said van Lier. "Doing so harnesses everyone's expertise and energy for maximum improvement to student performance."

A significant majority of teachers and administrators who participated in this study expressed a critical need for ongoing, job-embedded professional development, broadly defined as opportunities for teachers and other staff to plan lessons together during the school day, share opportunities for professional learning, and work with lead teachers, mentors or instructional "coaches" who can help teachers improve classroom practices.



Across the board, respondents said participation in the Ohio Improvement Process has been time consuming. Even most of those who appreciated the process spoke of “impossible deadlines” and an “unrealistic timeline.” Although the time pressure was considered burdensome, some respondents acknowledged that it accelerated project completion.

“This study counters a common belief that school reform is best undertaken by a strong superintendent or principal acting independently,” said van Lier. “Rather, the educators I interviewed feel it is more effective to engage teachers and others more directly in leadership roles. The Ohio Improvement Process, while a new effort, shows promise as one way of doing so.”

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