

## COORDINATING STATE & DISTRICT POLICIES

*“Close collaboration and coordination between states and districts has not been the historic norm. It is complex, time-consuming and challenging to maintain. And it takes the sustained backing of top government and education leaders with the authority to make change happen.”<sup>1</sup>*

### RESEARCH FINDINGS:

#### ■ **Better state-district policy coordination has important payoffs.**

- Where district and state policies are closely aligned, school principals report relatively strong authority over hiring teachers, determining school schedules, and defining student achievement goals; and, they are able to devote more of their time on average to the improvement of classroom instruction.<sup>2</sup>
- Principals in less coordinated states report greater frustration over time spent in improving instruction and also report that they had less authority over evaluating and removing teachers and administrators.<sup>3</sup>

#### ■ **Effectively connecting state and district policies, while rare, can be a promising path to statewide school improvement.**

Places making the most progress in creating and sustaining more cohesive education leadership policies had the following in common:

- Strong political support and the engagement of top leaders (state, city, district);
- Comparatively little staff turnover at key policy positions;
- Common state-level policies such as academic standards and graduation requirements;
- Pre-existing social networks and collaboration among governmental and non-governmental organizations; and
- Shared vision and goals among school boards and superintendents – essential if districts are to translate state policies into local practice.<sup>4</sup>

#### ■ **Top leadership commitment is also essential in coordinated efforts to expand learning opportunities outside the school day and year.**

- Committed public and private leadership is “the price of admission” for achieving large-scale improvements in out-of-school time learning opportunities.<sup>5</sup>
- Similarly, committed and inclusive leadership has been crucial to recent efforts to expand access to and quality of arts education in New York City, Los Angeles, Alameda County, CA, Boston, Chicago and Dallas.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Leadership for Learning: Making the Connections Among State, District and School Policies and Practices*, The Wallace Foundation, 2006, 6

<sup>2</sup> Findings are from upcoming research by RAND, expected to be published later in 2009, on how developing “cohesive leadership systems” has the potential to improve school leadership.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> *A Place to Grow and Learn: A Citywide Approach to Building and Sustaining Out-of-School Time Learning Opportunities*, The Wallace Foundation, 2008, 4

<sup>6</sup> Susan J. Bodilly, Catherine H. Augustine, *Revitalizing Arts Education through Community-Wide Coordination*, RAND, 2008, 65