Model Schools Network Program

Capacity-Building Interventions in Leadership

POLICY
Recommendations

This report is the fourth of four final reports each highlighting important thematic outcomes of AMIDEAST's Model Schools Network (MSN) Program. This report presents findings from capacity-building interventions aimed at enhancing the quality of school leadership through in-service professional development and networking among school principals, supervisors and district -level staff. Extensive evaluation of the USAID-funded, AMIDEAST-administered three-year engagement with 40 public schools has produced the following evidence-based policy recommendations. These draft policy recommendations are based on the statement that leadership development programs work best when:

1 Improved instruction in the classroom becomes the focus of leadership support from principals, district support staff and supervisors.

2 The newly accredited Leadership Diploma Program (LDP) implemented by the National Institute of Education and Training (NIET) becomes a mandatory credential for all principals. Variations of the framework and curriculum should be adapted for new and experienced principals.

3 NIET receives the necessary budgetary support and human resources to scale-up the Leadership Diploma Program to include routine cohorts of principals throughout the year.

4 Administrative mechanisms at the district and school level are linked to the Leadership Diploma and are targeted to support a process of school-based management reform.

5 The Ministry of Education's Effective School Standards are institutionalized as a basis for school planning and improvement.

6 Professional networking of principals is strengthened through a system that clusters schools so that neighboring principals benefit from shared experience, as well as to support collaborative practice as a mechanism for improvement.

7 An incentives structure is developed and aligned with school, district, and MoE policies to provide clear motivation for participation in professional development by principals and other administrative staff.

8 Ministry of Education policies ensure a principal's tenure at a school is a minimum of three years in order to provide consistent leadership throughout school-based management reforms. Principals should not be transferred to another school while earning the Leadership Diploma.

9 The Ministry of Education develop and codify Principal Standards and link them to performance indicators that have relevance and substance to career enhancement.

10 Community engagement in schools is strengthened through renewed consideration of approaches and policies linking parents, principals and teachers. This could be informed through a comprehensive study focused on how to improve existing approaches.

Background and Research Approach

The primary aims of MSN's Leadership Development Program were to significantly improve the quality of school leadership in MSN schools, enhance instructional leadership, as well as develop a culture of school-based reform and continuous professional development among school principals. The program focused on three key actors within Palestinian basic education: principals, district administrative staff and supervisors. The framework for this approach was the Leadership Diploma Program (LDP) for the 40 MSN public school principals. This pilot program is now accredited by AQAC and was implemented in conjunction with the National Institute for Education and Training (NIET).

The LDP for principals required a total of 320 hours divided among a practicum, action research, face-to-face training, reflective learning circles, virtual learning, and a school leadership project. These components took place over eighteen months. Half of the components involved face-to-face meetings with homework assignments. The other half encompassed an on-the-job practicum. The LDP involved eleven monthly face-to-face, full-day sessions and eleven bi-weekly learning circles lasting 2-3 hours. The learning circles were a venue for principals to begin reflecting and acting upon a shared vision for school improvement. The content of LDP sessions integrated real issues in the daily life of school principals with theories of leadership in order to be relevant for participants. Importantly, the LDP was designed and delivered locally with NIET staff leading the effort supported by MSN staff. The features of this program were designed for sustainability and scalability.

Successful school improvement led by the principal was further supported through a collaborative district structure. MSN's approach involved the creation of two types of leadership teams: School Improvement Teams (SITs) and District Leadership Teams (DLTs). A key rationale for these teams was the belief that decentralized management and control is essential for school management to improve and expand. The major objective of the SITs was to lead the school-based improvement effort. Each school's SIT was comprised of the principal, teachers, and parent representatives who participated in a pre- and post-school self-assessment. The SIT lead the improvement planning process at each school.

These efforts were linked to the DLTs in order to take advantage of the considerable influence resting with district education offices, as well as to formalize the institutional support for the school improvement process. Each DLT was headed by the district director, their two deputies, and the heads of sections relevant to the school improvement domains. These departments included: supervision; student affairs; technology; school building and construction; public relations; and school principal representatives. Each district assigned a coordinator whose role was to be a liaison between the district and MSN staff. The objectives of the DLTs included reviewing, revising and approving all school improvement plans jointly with each school.

Finally, district supervisors were a third important element to encourage continuity between the district and the school. Supervisors were included due to their important role in instructional leadership at the schools vis-a-vis subject specific teachers and the overlapping role of the principal. The supervisors were integrated into this framework and received resources and training to better support the MSN teachers participating in a teacher professional development program, which occurred over 18 months.

Table 1 Sample Sizes of Research groups

	MSN Schools		Control Schools	
	Pre	Post	Pre	Post
Teachers	521	655	146	104
Principals	57	40	13	10
Parents	918	1603	180	364
Students,grades 4-5	147	726	111	96
Students,grades 6-9	739	1799	275	314

The sample of principals in the pre-study indicated a subsample of deputy principals: 17 from the MSN schools and 3 from the control schools.

In order to explore the impact of these interventions, the MSN Monitoring and Evaluation team (M&E), which included technical input and data gathering from the MoEHE's Assessment and Evaluation Department, designed a robust mixed-methods approach for data collection. Quantitative methods included a satisfaction survey administered at four intervals, a survey of randomly-selected district supervisors who monitored classroom instruction in MSN schools, and a pre-post survey developed by MSN's External Assessment team. Qualitative data from focus groups and in-depth interviews with principals, teachers, district supervisors, students, and parents helped to explain and contextualize findings from the quantitative research. Furthermore, a number of statistical scales were created from the surveys which strengthened the quantitative analysis. These included the following: the Scale of Principal's Leadership; the Scale of Educational Leadership; the Scale of Principals' Satisfaction with Professional Development; and the Scale of Satisfaction with School Management and Leadership. Finally, a school self-assessment instrument was also utilized by each school's SIT.

KEY FINDINGS

MSN Principals' Satisfaction with their Professional Development Experiences

Based on internal evaluation surveys, principals' satisfaction with the LDP experience was consistently high. The most significant percentage changes between the beginning (pre-) and end of program (post-) evaluations were reflected in the overall framework and logistics (4%) and results (3%), as well as the role of facilitators (3%). AMIDEAST also created the Scale of Principals' Satisfaction with Professional Development, which consisted of seven questions designed to gauge principals' perceptions about the effectiveness of their professional development experiences on their relationships with teachers, students, and other principals; how new ideas and skills improved their work performance; how well professional development aligned with the objectives of the school improvement plan (SIP); and how satisfied they were with the overall quality of the professional development activities. Based on these indicators, principals' overall satisfaction with the impact of their professional development experience on their leadership capacity increased 7.6% at the conclusion of the program.

Changes in the mean scores for the individual questions on the Scale indicate, as seen in Table 2, that MSN principals credit their professional development experiences with improving two key dimensions of school management and leadership. Firstly, their experiences fostered more productive and meaningful relationships with teachers, students and fellow principals. In other words, MSN's Leadership Development provided conditions in which principals could enhance their connection with their own school as a community of learning, as well as with principals from other schools in a broader community of practice. Secondly, MSN principals were not only exposed to new ideas about school leadership, but

Table 2

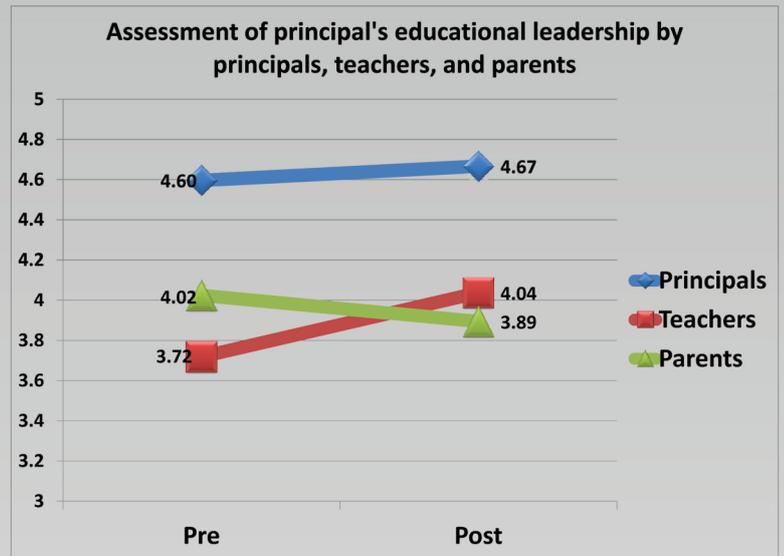| Professional development experiences this year…	Pre	Post	%change
Included opportunities to work productively with teachers at my school	3.74	4.25	14
Helped me understand my students better	3.8	4.19	10
Included opportunities to work productively with principals from other schools	3.76	4.14	10
Led me to make changes in my work	4.02	4.39	9
Included enough time to think carefully about, try, and evaluate new ideas	3.7	4.03	9
Were closely connected to my school's improvement plan	4.3	4.36	1
Were sustained and coherently focused, rather than short-term and unrelated	4.17	4.22	1

many felt motivated to apply their new learning in ways that resulted in substantive changes to their work as principals. Finally, MSN principals indicated their professional development experiences were closely aligned with their SIP, an opinion that remained mostly consistent from the beginning to the end of the MSN program.

A principal from the Hebron District noted, *"It was good training. The newest aspect for us was the participation of teachers, students, and the local community in writing the vision of the SIP. It was hard at first to do the planning, but by the end we were really happy."*

Stakeholders' Views about the Overall Quality of School Leadership

MSN created the Scale of Principal's Leadership. This scale consisted of six questions designed to assess the perceptions of principals, teachers and parents on the quality of school management and leadership[1]. The questions elicited opinions about the leadership role of principals in promoting school reform; new methods of instruction; professional development of teachers; shared decision making; the school as a community of learning; and parental and community involvement. Results overall for the three groups of stakeholders were generally positive, as shown in Figure 1. Principals offered the most positive opinion of their leadership, a view that remained constant throughout the study. The mean score for teachers - the stakeholder group with the most instrumental contact with principals - was not only positive, but also improved 8% by the end of the study. The results for parents showed a slight decrease of 3%, a finding that is discussed in last section of this report.

Figure 1

Assessment of principal's educational leadership by principals, teachers, and parents

- Principals: Pre 4.60, Post 4.67
- Teachers: Pre 3.72, Post 4.04
- Parents: Pre 4.02, Post 3.89

Table 3

A review of the individual questions within the Scale, shown in Table 3, reveals that the principals believe they encourage teachers to try new methods of instruction, an opinion substantiated by survey results for teachers and parents. Results also indicate principals believe they have improved their efforts toward increasing parental and community involvement. Principals also indicate they are taking more direct interest in the professional development of teachers. Indeed, teachers appear to agree fully that

At this school, the principal…	Principals			Teachers			Parents		
	Pre	Post	% Change	Pre	Post	% Change	Pre	Post	% Change
Encourages teachers to try new methods of instruction.	4.82	4.93	2	3.99	4.27	7	4.12	4.12	0
Works to create a sense of community in this school.	4.82	4.83	0	3.74	4.02	7	4.05	3.87	-4
Takes a personal interest in the professional development of teachers.	4.61	4.78	4	3.76	4.14	10	4.01	3.78	-6
Promotes parental and community involvement in this school.	4.3	4.53	5	3.74	4.07	9	4.04	3.86	-4
Is a strong leader in school reform.	4.49	4.5	0	3.78	4.07	8	4.15	3.95	-5
Is strongly committed to shared decision making.	4.53	4.45	-2	3.31	3.66	11	4.15	3.95	-5

their principals' attention to their professional development increased markedly. Likewise, they also credit principals for being more proactive about encouraging parental and community involvement.

The Scale of Principal's Leadership also points to a promising change. When asked to assess the extent to which principals are strongly committed to shared decision-making, the mean score for teachers increased 11% by the end of the MSN program. This surprisingly strong increase suggests that MSN's LDP has had a measure of success in helping principals use multiple opportunities for engaging teachers about school reform through the SITs and DLTs.

A principal from Ramallah District commented, *"When I first became a principal, I concentrated on the administrative side of things. The MSN leadership course made me focus on educational improvement and the needs of the teacher. I went and observed the classes and instead of asking about the light bulb and if it is working and if the window is closed, I started asking, 'Why aren't you getting the students to participate? Where is the critical thinking? Where are the questions? You are talking too much.' The MSN leadership program opened my eyes to these things. The workshops and training made me a better leader."*

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1. The scale was based on a 5 points Likert agreement scale.

LEADERSHIP and Teacher Performance

Enhancement of student learning outcomes was a major goal of the MSN Program. Consequently, the LDP focused on instructional leadership which pertains to how a principal encourages educational achievement by making instructional quality the top priority for schools.
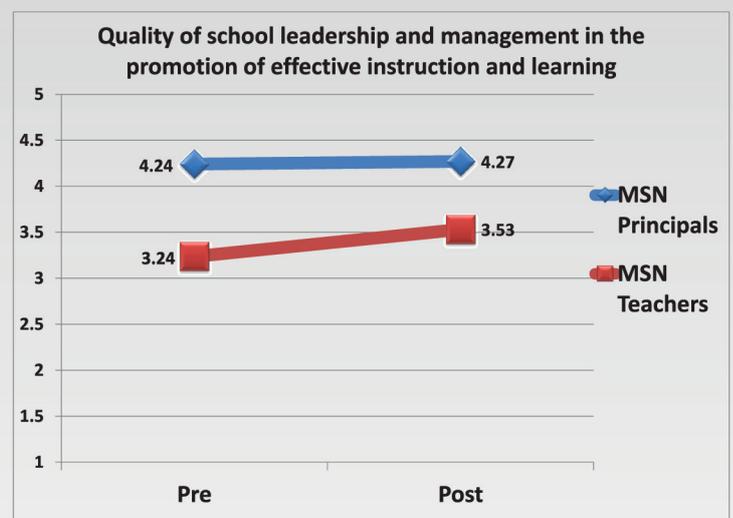
The Scale of Educational Leadership was designed to gauge the perceptions of both principals and teachers about their schools' capacity to enhance teachers' instructional performance through the provision of greater autonomy, supportive supervision, and constructive feedback[2]. Thus, the scale sheds light on the effectiveness of the principal in creating a supportive professional environment for teachers to practice good teaching and take more responsibility in making decisions on matters of curriculum and instruction.

The results of the Scale shown in Figure 2 indicate that principals rate their school's leadership in support of good teaching to be quite positive. Even though this assessment remained virtually unchanged by the end of the MSN program, it highlights how seriously principals take their role in providing educational leadership to support teachers' efforts to improve their instructional performance. Results for the teachers on this same scale support this conclusion. Although teachers were more restrained in their assessment, their recognition of educational leadership rose 9% by the end of the MSN program. This increase suggests that teachers perceived their principals were making an increased effort to support their work in the classroom. Interviews with principals highlight the prominence of this aspect of the LDP training. A principal from the Jerusalem Suburbs District observed, *"I became more involved in how teachers teach and how students learn, my observations and follow-up is no more limited to administrative issues but expands to other academic issues."*

Figure 2

Quality of school leadership and management in the promotion of effective instruction and learning

MSN Principals: Pre 4.24, Post 4.27
MSN Teachers: Pre 3.24, Post 3.53

A Ramallah District principal: *"I started to see changes in the quality of assessment in my school, exam papers and worksheets are different than what they were before the program. I see more focus on critical thinking. Teachers start to share their papers and only after they get the feedback from their colleagues they the final design version. Teachers use the resource library a lot."*

2. The scale consisted of 11 questions and was based on a 5 points Likert agreement scale.

A review of specific questions comprising the Scale of Educational Leadership, as shown in Table 4, reveals that teachers felt most positive about the capacity of school leadership to enhance their teaching performance through supportive supervision and constructive feedback. For instance, teachers gave the highest scores in the case of support offered to new teachers; the provision of constructive feedback to improve teaching; feeling.

Table 4

	Pre	Post	% Change
School leadership makes a sustained effort to address teacher concerns about new teacher support.	3.78	4.09	8
Teachers receive constructive feedback that helps them improve teaching.	3.65	4.01	10
Teachers feel empowered by the leadership of this school.	3.68	3.98	8
School leadership promotes an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school.	3.58	3.97	11
Teachers feel comfortable raising issues and concerns that are important to them.	3.67	3.94	7
Procedures for teacher performance evaluations are applied fairly and consistently	3.66	3.82	4
Teachers pursue opportunities to participate in school leadership roles	3.07	3.39	10

empowered; fostering an atmosphere of trust and mutual respect within the school; feeling comfortable raising issues and concerns important to teachers; fairness in how teacher evaluations are conducted; and finally, opportunities to participate in leadership roles

Table 5

On the other hand, Table 5 shows that questions measuring the extent of teachers' autonomy in matters of curriculum and instruction received the lowest assessments - an indication of some dissatisfaction. However, the percent change on the three questions is significant and can be explained as a result of

|	Pre	Post	% Change
Teachers are provided with opportunities to determine the content of in-service professional development programs	2.95	3.34	13
Teachers are integrally involved in decision-making about educational issues.	2.59	2.91	12
Teachers are trusted to make sound professional decisions about instruction.	3.07	3.33	8

program interventions. For example, although teachers did not feel they had sufficient opportunity to determine the content of their in-service professional development program, they did take advantage of their opportunity to provide feedback and evaluate the modular curriculum.

Four different evaluations over the course of their training provided important feedback and led to some changes in content and delivery methods. Teachers also registered a 12% increase in their involvement in decision-making, which may reflect their contribution to the school improvement planning process. Finally, teachers also showed an 8% increase in terms of being able to make decisions about classroom instruction. This may be a reflection of an increase in their knowledge and skills based upon MSN's teacher in-service professional development program. In sum, the reflective and participatory nature of the in-service leadership and teacher professional development programs clearly provided new opportunities for teachers to increase their feeling of autonomy in matters of curriculum and instruction, although there is also room for improvement.

MSN also created a scale to measure the satisfaction with education leadership. This scale consisted of three questions from the surveys given to principals and teachers. The questions explored stakeholders' perceptions of overall school management and leadership; the school's capacity to support teachers and provide for professional development; and, the school's capacity to consider the needs of teachers[3]. The surveys were administered at four intervals over the course of the MSN Program. The results suggest the MSN professional development programs targeting both principals and teachers reinforced a common vision toward improving teaching and learning. Evidence

Figure 3

Satisfaction with Educational Leadership in MSN Schools
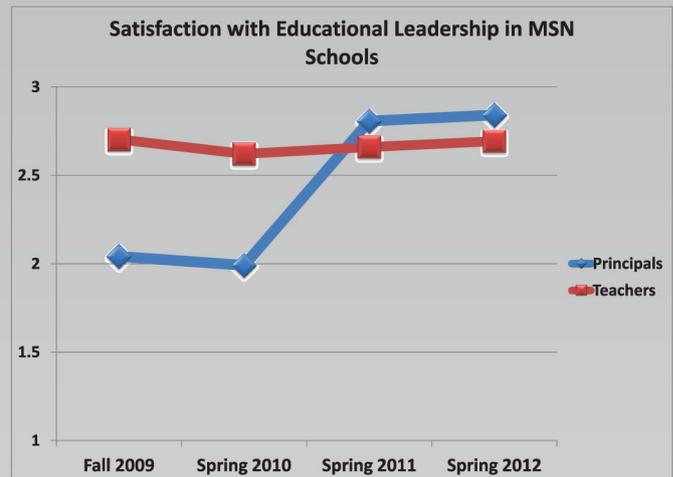
of this common vision is illustrated in Figure 3. At the inception of the MSN program, a substantial gap in perception existed between principals and teachers. However, during the course of the LDP, principals broadened their view of their responsibilities to include instructional leadership and better responding to teachers' needs. In other words, MSN's professional development programs created opportunities for principals and teachers to see the important interrelationship between school leadership and classroom instruction, particularly the principal's role as an instructional leader. A principal from a Jerusalem suburb made these remarks about this process: "I feel that I have a better understanding of what I do. I learned that I should do things in comprehensive ways that include students, teachers and administrative staff. As a school leader, I am now more aware for my role in teaching and learning in addition to administration role."

School Improvement Teams

The School Improvement Teams were charged with two core responsibilities. First, they conducted a school self-assessment based upon a set of seven Effective School Standards developed by M&E. The school self-assessment helped set school priorities and was linked to the second responsibility of participating in a school improvement planning process. Survey results from teachers and principals representing 30 of 40 pre - and post-school self-assessments revealed an average 38% increase across the seven domains[4]. Figure 4 illustrates these dramatic increases between

Figure 4
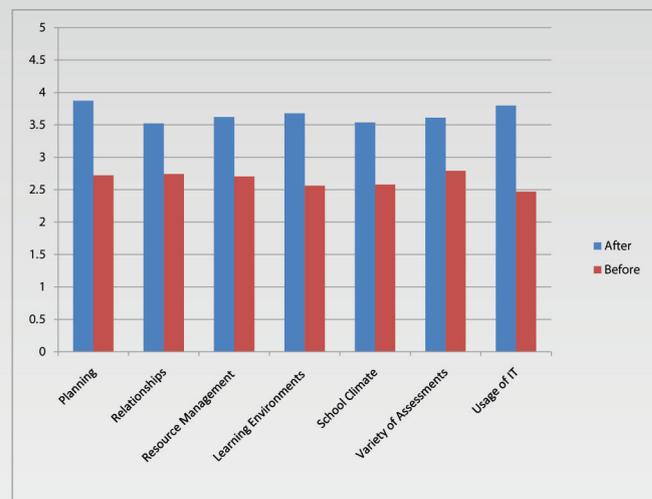
January 2010 and May 2012. Use of technology for both administration and teaching and learning purposes registered the largest gain, 54%. Two other domains that changed dramatically were planning based upon a school vision and mission, which increased 42%, and changes in school climate, which increased 44%. The areas of alternative assessment and external relationships changed the least and need further support from the MoE. Overall, the perspective of teachers and principals who served on their school's School Improvement Teams highlight their strong belief that their schools are more effective institutions as a result of participating in MSN's interventions.

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3. The alpha reliability coefficient for the three items in the Principals' scale: alpha = .603 ; and for the Teachers' scale: alpha = .857.
4. All 40 MSN schools conducted a pre-self-assessment; however, 10 schools did not submit the post-self-assessment. Thus, these results reflect a completion rate of 75%. Principals from five of these ten schools were transferred to other schools during the MSN program which affected the continuity of this process.

The school improvement planning process involved creating a comprehensive improvement plan that outlined school priorities and needs. The outcome was a plan that detailed each school's major priorities; specific areas of improvement; and institutional initiatives which would be revised annually. It also included an explanation of the school's vision, internal professional development needs, and detailed new equipment and renovation needs. This document was then used as a blueprint for the MSN program to procure high priority items for each school. Based on a pre- and post-evaluation from each School Improvement Team, 32 schools (80%) of MSN public schools completed at least 70% of their school improvement plans. A further eight schools believe they accomplished at least 90% of their goals. Given that more than a third of MSN schools saw a transition in leadership during the program , as well as the fact that AMIDEAST was not able to fully fund some school improvements due to funding limitations, this outcome is considered quite positive.

The following impressions of a principal in Hebron illustrate the value of this process:
"In the beginning, we studied the needs of the school, both material and otherwise. Then the local community got involved and we met to get the opinions of the teachers, the families and the students. Step by step. Before we would meet only with the teachers, but MSN got us to consult with the community and the students as well. What changed is our way of thinking. Before everything was routine, but now we have a work plan to change the atmosphere, to remove violence and make students love school."

The Role of **SUPERVISION**

The MoE assigned 42 district supervisors to follow-up with the math, science and English teachers in MSN schools. The supervisors participated in four orientation sessions relevant to the aims of the teacher in-service professional development program. Each supervisor, as well as the head of the supervision department in each district, received a netbook in order to facilitate communication with teachers and colleagues. The supervisors also conducted at least two classroom observations per teacher in their respective disciplines. To assess the impact this component had within MSN's leadership initiative, a questionnaire consisting of 29 closed - ended and 3 open - ended questions was administered to 14 randomly selected supervisors. Though small in size, the sample of 6 women and 8 men was stratified to provide a balanced representation of supervisors of math, science, and English subjects from schools in all seven districts of the West Bank.

Results of the closed-ended questions indicate the supervisors were very pleased with the impact of MSN's interventions on enhancing their professional capacity and skills. In particular, the program significantly improved the capacity of supervisors to use ICT to carry out their work more efficiently and effectively. Responses to the open-ended questions revealed that the use of technology and the Internet was credited with enhancing the supervisors' capacity to network with fellow supervisors and facilitate follow-up communication with teachers after classroom observations. With regard to the formal process of conducting classroom observations, the supervisors uniformly agreed that MSN's classroom observation form was practical, easy to use, and comprehensive. Supervisors found it consistent with the MSN observation form used by principals.

An important result from the survey indicates the supervisors' agreement that MSN's workshops helped advance their self-confidence in providing not only improved supervision to teachers, but also increased the role supervision plays in fostering positive change in the classroom. This perception of a more cooperative working relationship with teachers is highlighted in the open-ended responses whereby several supervisors credited MSN's leadership training in creating an atmosphere of professional trust and respect between supervisor and teacher. In the words of one supervisor, the MSN workshops for supervisors "broke down the barrier of fear between the supervisor and the teacher, and helped restore teachers' confidence and courage."

CHALLENGES
to Developing School Leadership

A majority of the findings in this report point to the effectiveness of MSN's Leadership Development Program in terms of significantly improving the quality of school leadership. The focus of this program was to foster a culture of school-based reform. However, clear challenges exist to improving upon this effort and scaling it to more than forty schools. For example, the structures AMIDEAST put in place involving District Leadership Teams and School Improvement Teams supported the implementation of the program in important ways. Sustaining these structures and their school-based reform mandates will require changes in MoE policy and practice. These teams need to become part of the district structure so that an official mechanism focuses on school improvement and is tied to in-service professional development. This in-service professional development should include both school leaders and teachers.

Furthermore, although MSN's leadership structure attempted to integrate the community in the planning of school improvement, parents had misgivings about this effort. As noted in Figure 1 and Table 3, the view of parents decreased over the length of the program regarding the following areas: the capacity of principals to promote broader educational reforms in their children's schools and the capacity to build stronger connections between schools, students' homes and the larger community. On the other hand, anecdotal evidence revealed many positive examples of engagement from parents. Nevertheless, the MSN experience highlights that the nexus between parents, principals and teachers needs further research, awareness raising, advocacy and action.

Another critical source of uncertainty seen by all stakeholders was the rupture in leadership caused by the unexpected transfer of principals by the MoE. Over the course of MSN's leadership program, 35% of the principals were transferred to other schools. This instability occurred even after specific understandings had been reached with the MoE about the importance of continuity in school leadership. Clearly, Ministry policies and procedures regarding principal and teacher transfers need to be revisited for any nationally-scaled program of in-service professional development.

A principal noted the following: *"At the start of the MSN project, we were told that we wouldn't be transferred and that we would be able to continue our [school improvement] plans to fruition. I feel I am playing catch-up here and there is no time. Three out of five of the MSN principals in my district were transferred during the course of the project."*