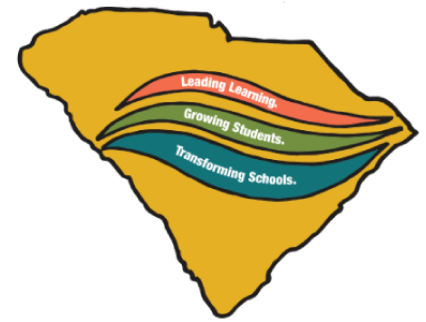


South Carolina Collective Leadership Initiative

2021 Summary Results: Year Four

Jon Eckert and Grant Morgan, Baylor University



Executive Summary

“I could not imagine doing 2021 without the collective leadership foundations we have had. I am so thankful I have CLI to fall back on.”

– Scott Floyd, Principal, Schofield Middle School, March 2021

The South Carolina Collective Leadership Initiative (CLI), a partnership between the SC Department of Education (SCDE) and the Center for Teaching Quality (CTQ), engages teams of leaders within schools to lead changes that help students meet the Profile of the SC Graduate. A two-year pilot (2017-19) assisted SCDE in constructing scalable supports for other schools seeking to respond to equity and improvement challenges by engaging teachers and administrators as leaders of effective innovation. A total of ten schools completed the pilot, with districtwide expansion in one LEA. This report summarizes findings at the close of year four. Three cohorts comprise the current CLI initiative. This study reports data from 22 schools:

- Cohort 1 (2017-2021): 4 schools
- Cohort 2 (2019-2021): 8 schools
- Cohort 3 (2020-2021): 10 schools

Over the course of this unprecedented academic year, our monthly data collection about schools’ identified adaptive goals, as well as the quality of supports through virtual meetings (face-to-face convenings were eliminated due to restrictions related to the pandemic) across the participating schools, served to triangulate findings from the survey around the seven conditions that support collective leadership development. Additionally, due to the challenges related to COVID-19 as well as a confirmatory factor analysis, we streamlined the 2020 survey to more accurately assess the seven conditions and initial outcomes. For these reasons, comparisons across years should be made cautiously as the participating schools changed somewhat. We describe the results in tables and charts in more detail below, organized by the seven conditions that correlate closely with successful, collectively-led innovation and improvement efforts within schools.

Survey response rates remained remarkably high across school sites with 886 respondents of a possible 1,187 for a 75% response rate (see Table 3). Of the respondents, 41% served elementary students, 24% served middle school students, 32% served high school students, and 1% served PreK-12 (see Figure 3). Respondents had a wide range of experience in their respective buildings with 26% serving in their third-fifth years (see Figure 4).

Data collection for 2020 and 2021 occurred in May of each year while all schools were engaged in various educational delivery models, and our expectation was that schools would be significantly less positive about collective leadership and initial outcomes for students as compared to previous years. However, that was not the case with the CLI schools demonstrating significant increases on five of the seven conditions and on initial outcomes in 2020.

Below are eight key findings:

- 1) In 2021, respondents were remarkably consistent with 2020 results maintaining score levels across 22 schools, 10 of whom were new. When averaged, no condition changed by more than 0.24 from 2020-2021 for schools who continued (see Table 1 and Figure 1). The 0.24**

decrease was in “enabling work structures” which should be expected when the design of educators’ work was so significantly disrupted.

- 2) When comparing year to year results from 2018-2021, the gains that were realized in 2020 on five of seven conditions have held steady through a year disrupted by a pandemic (see Table 1). As illustrated in the introductory quotation from Principal Floyd, schools were dependent on the collective leadership of teachers and administrators.
- 3) Similar to 2020, educators remained extremely confident in their ability to influence student learning. This confidence was evident in the “initial outcomes” items (see Table 2). This strong sense of collective efficacy is confirmed by the three iterations of the Collective Teacher Efficacy survey administered in December 2020, February 2021, and May 2021. Larne Elementary, Meadow Glen Middle, Pleasant-Knoll Elementary, and Ridge-Spring Monetta High and Walker-Gamble Elementary all posted extremely positive results across the school year (see Table 5).
- 4) From Cohort 1, Walker Gamble Elementary and Meadow Glen Middle continue to demonstrate strong results. Blythewood High has reported significant improvement since 2019 (see Table 4).
- 5) Seven of the eight Cohort 2 schools demonstrated overall improvement on their collective leadership total score from 2020 to 2021 (see Table 4).
- 6) Crosswell Elementary, Leavelle McCampbell Middle, and Ridge-Spring Monetta High reported the highest levels of collective leadership of their school type in Cohort 3. Their collective leadership levels were the highest or nearly the highest of all three cohorts. This is particularly remarkable given that their supports were entirely virtual, and their onboard occurred in the midst of a pandemic.
- 7) We continue to hypothesize that “supportive administration” and “shared influence” are increasing due to the shared burdens that collective leadership supports. The one condition that has declined significantly from 2018-2019 to 2020-2021 is “adequate resources” (e.g., financial resources, human resources, and facilities) which should not be surprising given the unprecedented nature of those two years. This offers further evidence of the value of collective leadership to continue improvement despite adverse external conditions.
- 8) Since 2018, there has been a significant increase in the number of respondents who consider themselves leaders in their schools, from 45% in 2018 to 67% in 2021. Even though the sample of schools has changed, this is an encouraging trend and a major emphasis of the CLI.

Findings and Implications by Condition

Lessons learned below offer implications for future collective leadership development based on each condition. We have combined quantitative data with qualitative survey responses to the question, “What is the biggest challenge your school faces that collective leadership can address?” and through meeting notes from monthly check ins from each cohort.

Vision and Strategy: There was a significant increase in respondents’ perceptions of the vision for collective leadership development at their schools on the 5-point (“strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”) scale at 3.83 to 4.07 in 2020, and this held steady at 4.04 in 2021 (see Table 1). Specific actions were taken at the five Cohort 1 schools after the 2019 survey demonstrated a drop in shared vision and strategy

with school-wide professional learning about collective leadership, learning labs, and an emphasis on collective leadership as a process, not a program. Half-day, school-wide professional learning sessions on the CLI were new last year and continued as virtual site visits this year. Several leaders cited these as particularly beneficial. With all of the support moving to virtual this year, a drop-off in effective communication of vision or a reduced understanding of collective leadership might have been expected, but this was not the case. The fact that the overall mean of shared vision and strategy remained the same with the addition of 10 schools as part of Cohort 3 is encouraging. The Cohort 3 schools appear to have benefited from the lessons learned by Cohorts 1 and 2 on this condition. Even more impressive is that this occurred through the pandemic. Moreover, feedback from the virtual showcase was extremely positive and is likely also contributing to coherent vision and strategy.

Two illustrative comments from survey respondents offer both encouragement and direction for future efforts. In response to a question about a challenge that collective leadership could address, respondents wrote:

“[We need the] ability to strictly focus on one to three goals/tasks for the school. Making sure those goals/tasks are intentional, fluid, and complete before moving to others.” – Pleasant Knoll Elementary

“The constant change of things. Seems like every time we get used to something we are asked to change and try a different way. Too much change at one time confuses us and parents and students. I don’t think we are such bad teachers that we can’t see what our students need and help them grow. New ideas can be good but not all the time.” – Johnsonville Elementary

Implications for the future: To ensure that vision and strategy are clearly communicated:

1. Reinstate half-day schoolwide professional learning sessions and/or continue effective virtual site visits to describe collective leadership and to identify a shared problem of practice.
2. Reinstate learning labs (cancelled due to the pandemic in 2020-21) at CLI schools to showcase what they are doing collectively to improve their schools.
3. Continue the annual showcase in May to communicate the good work going on in CLI schools. Schools interested in the CLI might continue to be invited to bring teams of administrators and teachers to the showcase.
4. Continue to emphasize that collective leadership is not a program. It is a process.
5. Continue to refine the process of identifying a shared problem of practice with co-ownership across the school community.

Supportive Administration: The perception of administrative support also declined across the first three surveys from 4.01 to 3.80 to 3.20 but demonstrated a significant bounce in 2020 to 4.25. Again, 2020 represents a significant shift in the schools surveyed, but this result was nearly replicated with 10 new schools with a mean of 4.18 in 2021. Perhaps the continuing schools and the new schools persisted or applied to participate because of supportive administration. Administrators and facilitators might have been more effective in communicating what supportive administration is and what is required. Additionally, the pandemic provided multiple opportunities for administrators to demonstrate their support for teachers leading emergency learning. While this was true in 2020, this appears to have continued in 2021.

A recurring challenge reported across schools was communication of support from administration. Two survey responses are illustrative:

“Communication. Sometimes the leadership assumes you already know something, or know how to do something, but you don’t, so you have to ask around to find the answer. Sometimes things are told to us last minute which is stressful when you already are trying to have clear plans and expectations for the students to follow.” – Schofield Middle School

“Currently, there is too much of an ‘us’ and ‘them’ attitude with the way that the administration treats teachers.” – Sumter High

Implications for the future: To ensure and develop supportive administration:

1. Continue to communicate clearly the role of administrators in collective leadership – catalyzing work and providing coherence.
2. Consider more opportunities for integration of the CLI process in the administrator development programs (e.g., Principal Induction Program, Instructional Leadership Academy, and Building Instructional Capacity).
3. Continue to encourage stability and consistency in administration, whether this entails efforts to successfully retain staff, ensure that all prospective leaders share an orientation toward collective leadership work, or ideally both. As leaders develop in schools, they will step into roles with a certain level of credibility and trust.
4. Enhance channels for clear communication of support and two-way communication between teachers and administrators that reduces the sense of “us” versus “them.”

Resources and Capacity: Respondents in 2020 reported a significant dip in resources, 3.71 from 4.50. This could be due in part to the changes in survey items undergirding this condition; however, given the significant challenges related to COVID-19, a shift in perception toward resources and human capital capacity to meet demands should not be surprising. In 2021, this score dropped further still to 3.61 which emphasizes the challenges schools faced. In last year’s report, we anticipated this when we wrote, “Scarce resources and stretched capacity will continue to be a challenge in 2020-21 and will likely be a limiting factor in what schools can accomplish.” Time for collaboration and leadership was the most commonly cited challenge for collective leadership across all respondents. Here are three responses that illustrate the challenge that lack of time presents and the way one school has managed this:

“I think the biggest challenge my school faces is time. Leadership is something that needs planning and extra time. Creating great ideas that help the students to learn requires time. And the school spends a lot of planning time in many other activities. So teachers have to work extra time at home to create engaging activities.” – Polo Road Elementary

“We do not have adequate time to engage in leadership roles... mainly due to COVID.” – Blythewood High

“All changes should have the shared vision of lightening the burden on teachers and administration. I think we currently do a good job of meeting only when absolutely necessary. I feel that school administration respects our time.” – Meadow Glen Middle

Funding and allocations continue to be a challenge in several schools.

“We have limited resources because of funding. We have to make more out of less on a daily basis. There are many teachers and administrators that wear many hats at EC.” – East Clarendon Middle-High

“It does not seem as if money is evenly distributed across grades – or maybe some are more comfortable with asking and therefore prosper. Some teachers have free will with the p-card; some teachers do not even know it exists. First grade gets a bundle of supplies (construction paper and markers) at the beginning of the year; some other grades do not get this.” – Blacksburg Primary

Implications for the future: To maximize resources and capacity:

1. Emphasize the variety of resources at hand to consider, beyond dollars (e.g., rethinking time, internal expertise, community support), to encourage more innovative strategies.
2. Share ideas for equitable re-allocation of resources within the school/district and with external partners to creatively address areas of need particularly with educational delivery and support.
3. Identify and strategically develop rising leaders who have additional capacity to grow while performing leadership work. As leaders emerge through challenging times, provide support for their further development.
4. Consider how to launch 2021-22 based on the reality that this is an opportunity to re-set expectations for time, collaboration, and resource allocation.

Enabling Work Structures: Responses about the design of teachers' and administrators' work demonstrate the most significant drop from 2020 to 2021. In 2020, the average response was 3.78 but dropped to 3.54. "Enabling work structures" and "resources" have a great deal of overlap particularly when it comes to time. Given the diversity of conditions schools faced within and across school contexts, this decrease in the reported condition should not be a surprise. Schools shifted from virtual, to hybrid, to in person; and some vacillated between all three throughout the year. This made consistent time for planning, collaboration, and peer observation extremely challenging. After time, collaboration for engaging virtual, hybrid, and in person students was the most frequent challenge for collective leadership to address.

"[We needed opportunities for] boosting staff morale during the pandemic, providing teachers with opportunities to observe each other, motivating virtual students." Another respondent added, "Teachers do not feel like they are making a difference in the lives of their students because they feel disconnected from them. Remote learning has been hard on both teachers and students. Remote teachers also feel separated from their F2F teacher colleagues. There is not a time for them to interact with them during the day because the schedules are so different." – Northwoods Middle

Without enabling work structures, respondents expressed the exhaustion they were experiencing and needs they have.

"Time to meet with other teachers is a problem because teachers are just too tired to meet after school all the time. Teachers need their teacher workdays to catch up on things in their own classrooms instead of going to in-services and meetings. There should be special days set aside for this extra training." – Johnsonville Middle

Implications for the future: To improve the design of teachers and administrators' work for collective leadership:

1. Examine and adjust school schedules to create time to increase collaboration and provide individualized student support especially with the opportunity to re-set in 2021-22.
2. Use existing resources to provide opportunities for teachers to lead while remaining in the classroom during their work week.
3. Find strategic ways to create time for teachers and administrators to do leadership work together that results in co-learning and better school outcomes.
4. Provide as many opportunities as possible to incentivize peer observation and feedback for teachers and administrators.

Supportive Social Norms and Working Relationships: From 2018 to 2019 to 2020, CLI schools demonstrated a significant increase from 3.5 to 3.66 to 4.50, respectively, on responses related to social norms and working relationships. This positive view continued in 2021 with an average response of 4.47. This kind of improvement could be a leading indicator of future growth toward other conditions that are dependent on the development of relational trust. Over the past two years, several schools focused on school culture for their problems of practice which likely also contributed to this improvement. Building trust through relationships was made increasingly challenging this year due to the pandemic and other structural shifts at schools.

“One of the biggest challenges was bringing the staff together and building the relationships between elementary and middle schools and sharing the same goals. We have grown so much as a staff and work together so much better, but there is still room for growth. Unfortunately, this year we have had to work alone so much due to COVID, it was still a challenge.” – R.E. Davis College Preparatory Academy

“[The biggest challenge is] teachers trusting other adults – administrators and other teachers.” – Horse Creek Elementary

Implications for the future: To cultivate healthy social norms and working relationships:

1. Continue to share, at least on a monthly basis, successes and areas to stretch with one another.
2. Maintain professional norms that allow for non-judgmental feedback and solutions-oriented thinking based on peer observation and student work.
3. Revisit norms and relationships to ensure support of a productive culture.
4. Directly address relationships and trust in professional learning and interactions to launch 2021-22.

Shared Influence: Similarly, respondents reported that their influence had increased. The increase from 2.24 in 2019 to 3.84 in 2020 was in part due to moving to a consistent 5-point scale (from a 4-point scale) across conditions. However, this still represents a significant increase even without the 1-point scale increase. In 2021, 3.80 demonstrates that this result has been sustained. The fact that social norms and shared influence improved and remained stable during a pandemic is cause for optimism about future growth in support of school improvement. Additionally, the increase to 67% of respondents identifying as school leaders is an encouraging trend. Particularly during the pandemic, shared influence might have increased due to the need to depend on the collective leadership of all teachers and administrators during emergency teaching and learning.

“While teacher leadership is encouraged, there is no direct follow-up to the changes or improvements discussed during collective leadership meetings. This tends to cause frustrations with those who seek improvements. Or, opinions on matters are asked for, and when valid concerns are raised, they are not always taken into consideration.” – Riverwalk Academy

On a December cohort check in, both Bates Middle and Larne Elementary discussed supporting families in their communities. They both facilitated a Parent University to help parents understand how to help their children navigate virtual school. Larne’s Parent University aligned with their problem of practice and focused on helping students in poverty with their learning environment. Parents were able to log on to practice and experience a lesson in the ways that their children would. They also connected and worked with daycare providers that work with their students.

In December at Blythewood High, a teacher led a group of AP teachers in integrating the executive skills that students need to be successful in AP classes. Teachers recognized that ninth grade students did not get this type of instruction at the end of last year as they normally would have. They are focusing on

ensuring that they teach the requisite executive skills needed to be successful in AP rather than that being a gatekeeper to entry into these courses.

Implications for the future: In order to support shared influence:

1. Create more opportunities for peer observation, feedback, and collaboration at the launch of the 2021-22 school year.
2. Increase opportunities for teachers and administrators to work on problems of practice and collection of evidence. This should include identification of initiatives that should stop. Progress should continue to be shared monthly across schools.
3. Provide opportunities for schools to “go public” with their stories of impact to further influence external stakeholders, colleagues, and other schools.
4. Extend influence to families and community members to support the holistic needs of students.

Orientation Toward Improvement: From 2017 to 2021, schools' orientation toward improvement did not change significantly. Schools reported a fairly high tolerance for risk taking from 2018 to 2020. Particularly across two years of significant disruption, teams' strong orientation toward improvement has been critical to their success.

Walker Gamble Elementary won the Palmetto's Finest award in 2020. Their responses exemplify this strong orientation in the face of adversity. One respondent wrote, “Currently, dealing with the impact of COVID has made a huge impact on all schools. I feel as if continued discussion and collective leadership will help us become stronger and find the best ways to fight back from this virus.”

A Blythewood High respondent highlighted what had been gained from collective leadership over the past three years:

“Everything that I think of, we have already taken steps towards addressing. Examples: Wanting/needing more collaboration time. We have that. Taking away extra responsibilities from teachers. We are doing that with only having duty every other week. Reaching out to kids who are failing and/or not participating in class. We are taking steps for that as well. At least in my house we have started to.”

Implications for the future: To encourage a positive orientation toward improvement:

1. Regularly celebrate risks that schools have taken – both successfully and unsuccessfully.
2. Identify shared problems of practice, common evidence, and strategies for improvement so that risks can be shared.
3. Provide opportunities for schools to “go public” with their stories regarding risks and rewards to inform and inspire others.
4. Continue to expand opportunities for other teachers and administrators to take reflective risks for the benefit of the entire school community.

Table 1: Collective Leadership Development by Condition: 2018 to 2021

Condition	2018	2019	2020*	2021
Vision and Strategy	3.97	3.83	4.07	4.04
Supportive Administration	3.80	3.20	4.25	4.18
Adequate Resources	4.42	4.50	3.71	3.61
Enabling Work Structures	3.53	3.43	3.78	3.54
Supportive Norms and Working Relationships	3.50	3.66	4.50	4.47
Shared Influence**	2.08	2.24	3.84	3.80
School Orientation Toward Improvement	4.17	4.25	4.25	4.20
Initial Outcomes	4.04	4.03	4.17	4.12

*Note. The specific items comprising the conditions changed in 2020

**“Shared Influence” moved from a 4-point to a 5-point scale.

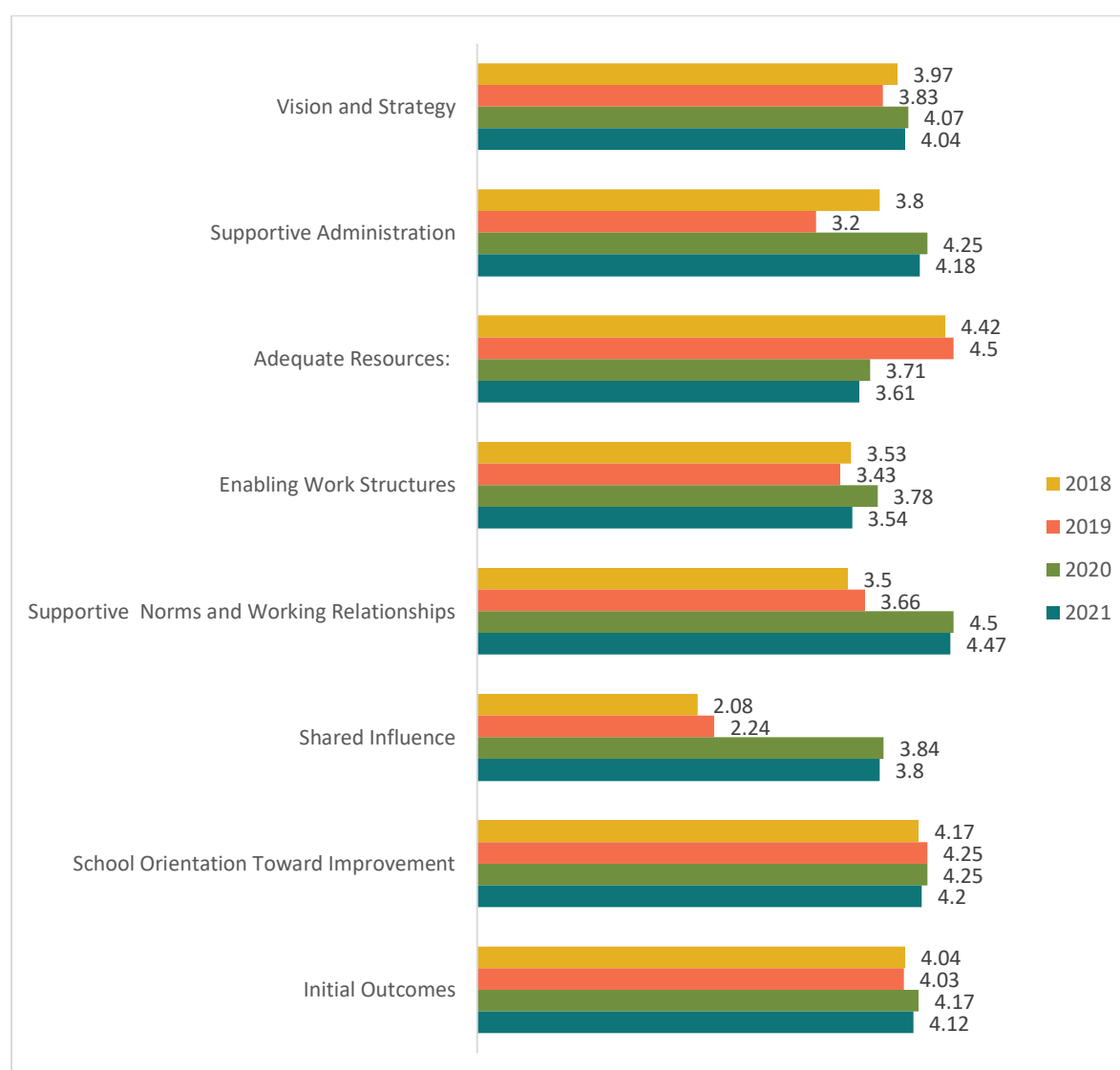
Figure 1: Collective Leadership Development by Condition 2018 to 2021

Table 2: Initial Outcome Results

Outcome Item	2020 Mean	2021 Mean
All in all, I am satisfied with my current job.	4.34	4.22
Collectively, the teachers and administrator(s) at this school can solve most any problem, no matter how difficult.	4.24	4.19
When we try really hard as teachers and administrator(s), even the most unmotivated students learn.	4.13	4.12
I feel that I am making a significant educational difference in the lives of the students at my school.	4.36	4.26
My instructional practices have improved due to the influence of teachers at my school.	4.16	4.16
Student learning has improved due to the influence of teachers at my school.	4.25	4.21
My instructional practices have improved due to the influence of administrators at my school.	3.97	3.93
Student learning has improved due to the influence of administrators at my school	4.01	3.94
I have evidence of improved student learning.	4.10	4.08

Figure 2: Do you consider yourself a leader at your school?