WEC
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Wisconsin
Evaluation
Collaborative

Wisconsin Educational Leadership Development Evaluation Report

Year 3 | 2020-21

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UNIVERSITY OF WISCONSIN–MADISON

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WEERP
Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness Research Partnership

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About the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative

The Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) is housed at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. WEC's team of evaluators supports youth-serving organizations and initiatives through culturally responsive and rigorous program evaluation. Learn more at http://www.wec.wceruw.org.

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Acknowledgements

Copyright Information

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Section 1

Introduction

Introduction

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) has leveraged Title II, Part A funding from the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) in a contract with the Wisconsin Foundation for Educational Administration (WFEA) to provide professional learning opportunities for district and school leaders during the 2018-19, 2019-20, 2020-21 school years. The funding enables the Association of Wisconsin School Administrators (AWSA) and the Wisconsin Association of School District Administrators (WASDA) to support a variety of leadership learning opportunities that also align with statewide educational priorities promoted by DPI.

As described in AWSA's Professional Learning catalog for the 2020-21 school year, opportunities for professional learning are based on a three-tiered structure:

- **Tier 1:** Conferences that provide professional learning, information, and networking opportunities across state administrator standards (breadth);

- **Tier 2:** Academies that provide focused training on targeted pillars and related high-leverage practices and competencies for leaders (depth); and

- **Tier 3:** Coaching to further equip leaders with tools and strategies to lead effectively (reflection).

The DPI contract is directed to Tier 2 and 3 activities and allows AWSA and WASDA to facilitate leadership academies, subsidize costs for eligible leaders to attend the academies, and provide coaching for new principals and superintendents. In funding the WFEA, DPI has specified four key areas for leadership development:

1. Leading for equity
2. Supporting educator practice
3. Promoting safe, supportive, and rigorous learning environments
4. Utilizing effective data practices.

DPI intends for each area to involve continuous improvement processes and represent themes within each academy. As a collaborator, WASDA also extended learning opportunities to new district leaders through its First Year Superintendent Academy.

DPI and WFEA have again asked the Wisconsin Evaluation Collaborative (WEC) at the Wisconsin Center for Education Research (WCER) to conduct an evaluation designed to provide formative feedback on the professional learning series. This report builds on similar work from year 1 (2018-19) and year 2 (2019-20) activities.[1] This report is also informed by the School Administrators' Institute for Transformational Leadership (SAIL) case studies conducted during 2020-21. The case studies highlighted the work of five SAIL teams representing different years of engagement in the SAIL Academy, team types, and ongoing journeys incorporating the learning in their school and district work.[2]

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1 Kimball, S., Carl, B., Arrigoni, J., Blitz, M., Bartley, C., & Gugerty, J. (2020). *Wisconsin Educational Leadership Development Evaluation Report: Year 2*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Madison, WI.

Kimball, S., Carl, B., Arrigoni, J., Blitz, M., & Gugerty, J. (2019). *Wisconsin Educational Leadership Development Evaluation Report*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Madison, WI.

2 Arrigoni, J., Kimball, S., Bartley, C., & Blitz, M. (2021). *SAIL Academy Cross-Case Summary*. Wisconsin Center for Education Research, Madison, WI.

This report first provides context for the evaluation and the evaluation design, including data collection methods and evaluation questions. Next, we present findings based on our evaluation activities across the year. We conclude by summarizing key findings and reflection questions for program facilitators and grant partners.

Context

The 2020-21 AWSA Professional Learning Series included eleven Tier 2 leadership academies.

The AWSA and WASDA academies are developed for school- and district-level educators, but other educational system leaders (e.g., DPI and CESA staff) may also participate. Table 1 provides a summary description of each academy included in the evaluation along with format adjustments from prior years due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

As evident from Table 1, the academies address a wide range of leadership skills that include coaching, data use, professional learning communities, mental health, and leading for equity. Additionally, some academies are specifically designed to support school and district administrators new to their positions, district leadership teams, and district leaders who work with principals. Two of the academies, Data Leadership and Mental Health and Resilience, are designed and facilitated in partnership with consultants from DPI. One of the academies, Leading for Equity, is designed and facilitated by partners from the organization, Integrated Comprehensive Systems for Equity.

Academies were presented virtually due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The format for two of the academies, Data Leadership and Mental Health and Resilience, was changed to webinars in order to better support participants' needs and availability due to the pandemic. These webinars were standalone sessions. Participants could attend just one of the webinars or the entire series of webinars. Another change this year involved shifting facilitation of the Leading Professional Learning Communities Academy from Solution Tree to AWSA.

Table 1: 2020-21 Academy Descriptions and Formats

ACADEMY	DESCRIPTION	2020-21 FORMAT
Building Effective Leadership (BEL)	Training for school administrators on how to be a learning leader who is developing a learning organization. The academy helps create a professional learning network of peers to support ongoing work. This year, due to the smaller number of participants, participants were also offered leadership coaching.	Same content, presented virtually over 6 half-day sessions.
Data Leadership Academy (DLA)	Develops the capacity of school and district leaders, along with their teams, to lead continuous improvement efforts that focus on high-quality evidence-informed teaching, learning, and systems improvement. Participants utilize DPI's WISExplore in the academy.	A series of 5, standalone, free 90-minute webinars.
First Year Superintendent (FYS)	Designed to provide just-in-time information for superintendents. In addition to training sessions, superintendents are paired with a coach who works with them for the entire year.	In addition to being presented virtually, the academy offered a new structure with weekly sessions in the fall and every other week sessions in the spring. Sessions were recorded for participants who could not attend.
Impactful Coaching (IC)	Training on coaching and feedback to principals, coaches, and other school and district staff who support staff growth and reflection.	Same content, presented virtually over 4 full-day sessions (2 cohorts).
Impactful Coaching: Advancing Your Skills (IC2)	A sequel to the 4-day Impactful Coaching Academy.	Same content, presented virtually over 2 full-day sessions.
Leading for Equity (LEA)	District-level teams analyze district data and systems to identify problems of equity and develop action plans to address these problems.	Same content, presented virtually over 3 full-day sessions (3 cohorts).
Mental Health and Resilience (MHR)	AWSA partnered with DPI to offer a series of webinars designed to grow the capacity of school leaders to build resilience and mental health supports in the communities where they live and serve.	A series of 5, free 90-minute webinars. Each webinar was recorded for later viewing.
New Building Administrators (NBA)	Just-in-time learning for first year principals, plus resources and networking with peers. Participants have the opportunity to work with a coach.	Same content plus supports related to COVID-19 presented virtually over 5 full-day sessions.
Leading Professional Learning Communities (PLC)	Helping school leaders build or advance collaborative learning teams in their schools or districts. It is specifically designed to help participants through unique challenges and targets areas such as leadership, assessment, and collaboration.	Same content, presented virtually over 4 full-day sessions.
School Administrators' Institute for Transformational Leadership (SAIL)	A two-year, team-based academy that helps school and district teams build focus and coherence in their improvement priorities. Teams work through a common root cause analysis process, develop a theory of action, and implement and monitor customized 100-day plans. A SAIL coach supports teams during and between sessions.	Same content, presented virtually over 3 consecutive all-day sessions in June and then follow-up all-day sessions in November and March.
Supporting Principal Excellence (SPE)	Facilitated by WASDA and AWSA to equip superintendents, central office leaders, and others who directly support principals with the tools and practices that enhance principal performance in leading schools of equity and excellence for student success.	Same content, presented virtually over 4 half-day sessions. Sessions were recorded for participants who could not attend.

Purpose and Use of Report

This evaluation was designed as a formative study with the goals of informing the grant partners (DPI, AWSA and WASDA) about:

    a.   Participants' level of engagement in the sessions

    b.   Participants' perceptions of the relevance and utility of the knowledge and skills

    c.   Impact of the virtual format on participant satisfaction and attendance

    d.   Potential areas for refinement

Findings presented in this report focus on academy participants in school and district leadership roles (rather than other types of attendees, such as CESA and DPI staff) because the funding through the grant is primarily directed to school and district leadership professional learning.

Evaluation Questions

Two overarching evaluation questions guide the evaluation activities:

    1.   How are the academies designed (in terms of content and structure) to develop and support school and district leadership practices?

    2.   What are the benefits from the professional learning and coaching support provided through the academies, as reported by participants?

Data Collection and Analysis

The evaluation questions are informed by multiple data sources, including observations, interviews, surveys, and document review.

Observations

WEC evaluators observed one virtual session for each of the academies. Observers recorded notes and used a standardized observation protocol to collect consistent data across the academies. Observers collected data related to the materials shared with participants, slides used during instruction, the engagement of the participants, opportunities for participants to reflect on their learning, and how participants demonstrate mastery of the new learning.

Interviews

At the conclusion of the academies, evaluators interviewed session facilitators. The interviews helped inform our understanding of how the academies went, instructional shifts facilitators incorporated based on the switch to virtual learning, and their perceptions of successes and challenges.

Survey

We administered a survey to all school and district leaders at the conclusion of each of the academies. The survey provided an opportunity for respondents to provide feedback about their experiences and allowed for common response categories across the academies. Following the initial invitation to respond to the survey, two reminders were sent via email. Across all academies, 789 school and district leaders were invited to respond to the survey, and 328 did so, for a response rate of 42%. Response rates for each academy are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: School and district leader survey response rates by academy

ACADEMY	NUMBER INVITED TO RESPOND	NUMBER OF RESPONDENTS	RESPONSE RATE
BEL	12	6	50%
DLA	97	19	20%
FYS	39	21	54%
IC (cohort 1 & 2)	121	58	48%
IC Advanced	15	7	47%
LEA	166	70	42%
NBA	33	19	58%
PLC	69	28	41%
MHR	54	16	30%
SAIL	164	74	45%
SPE	19	10	53%
TOTAL	789	328	42%

Document Review

We reviewed documents from each of the academies, including the AWSA Professional Learning catalog, registration data, the PowerPoint presentations and agendas from academy sessions, and handouts shared with participants.

Limitations

There are evaluation limitations to consider when interpreting results. First, due to resource considerations, we limited each academy observation to just one session. We recognize that sessions not observed may have yielded interesting examples of learning or challenges with the experience. A second and obvious limitation is the relatively low response rates to participant surveys; those responding may not represent the views of all attendees. Third, COVID-19 school closures (which were common in many districts during 2020-21) and shifts in academy format likely impacted participants' ability to engage in some sessions and their willingness to respond to the survey. Despite these limitations, data triangulation and analysis produce findings and themes that are largely consistent across data sources (surveys, facilitator interviews, and observations). We believe that the results of our work, in other words, provide a comprehensive picture of participant experiences, perceived utility of the academies, and potential areas for improvement.

Section 2

Findings

Findings

Participation

Pandemic challenges appear to have constrained academy registration, particularly for those with deadlines after April 2020. Two academies (LEA and SAIL) had registration deadlines prior to COVID-related school closures. LEA experienced an increase in registration numbers compared to 2019-20 and 2018-19. Academy facilitators stated that they have seen a "renewed and increased interest" in LEA. SAIL, meanwhile, saw a slight dip in registration numbers compared to 2019-20, though still an increase from 2018-19. DLA and IC both saw increases in registration even though they had later registration deadlines. According to the DLA facilitator, the free format of the webinars may have helped "boost registration numbers during COVID." The free format did not appear to affect MHR participation in the same way. Six of the academies (BEL, IC2, MHR, NBA, PLC, and SPE) had registration numbers that were roughly half the previous year or less. FYS saw a slight decline in registration numbers compared to 2019-20 but still an increase in participation numbers compared to 2018-19. Table 3 presents registration numbers for each academy, including all district and school staff (with teachers) but not agency staff (i.e., CESA, RtI Center, DPI) or community stakeholders.

Table 3: Participant Registration by Academy

ACADEMY	20-21 REGISTRATION	19-20 REGISTRATION	18-19 REGISTRATION
BEL	12	27	N/A
DLA*	97	68	51
FYS	39	45	30
IC	129	102	94
IC2	16	76	N/A
LEA	331	222	55
MHR*	54	106	N/A
NBA	33	69	72
PLC	84	147	69
SAIL	210	232	182
SPE	19	44	40
TOTAL	1,024	1,138	593

*Individual registrants may have participated in the entire series of webinars or participated in only one or two webinars. Registration data for these two academies did not include positions.

Of the 1,024 school and district staff who registered for 2020-21 academies, the following were the predominant role types:

- 209 principals

- 199 general education teachers

- 100 associate principals

- 76 coaches

- 68 district directors

- 59 district administrators/superintendents

Some academy facilitators reported a change in who attended and how frequently. A DLA facilitator reported that "many attendees in 20-21 were 'singletons' (mostly principals) rather than the intended teams." In contrast, the LEA facilitator reported that there were no school teams this year, only district teams, which was the intention. Indeed, the LEA facilitator also shared that the "focus was on district leadership teams" because equity work "... is hard to do as a school in a district, without the district also being involved. The idea is that the district team learns about the work and then they can decide, do we want to move forward, and then school leadership teams attend LEA." Additionally, the facilitator of the MHR webinars noted a "big difference" this year because "everybody didn't attend all at the same time," so "attendance was random across sessions." On a more positive note, the FYS facilitator reported that in the past, February academy attendance is typically lower due to difficulty leaving the building for a full day in the winter; however, because the academy was virtual this year, they "didn't have a dip [in attendance]," and FYS participation in general "was really high and consistent."
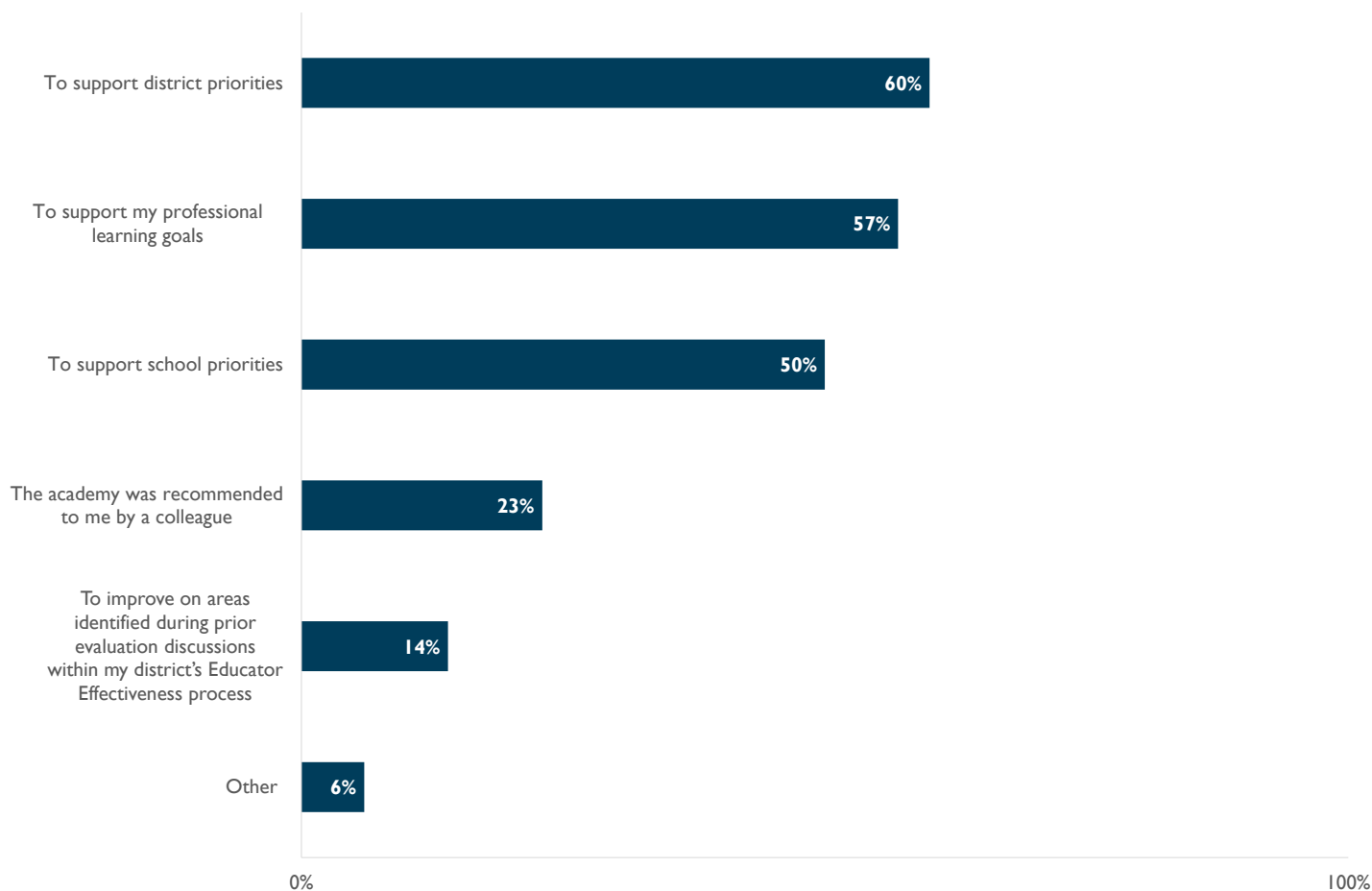
Figure 1 below displays participants from each CESA across the state. Attendees from CESA 2 (19%) and CESA 9 (19%) made up the largest percentage of attendees, followed by CESA 1 (15%). CESAs 3, 8, 11, and 12 had the lowest percentage of attendees.

Figure 1: Participant geographic representation
by CESA
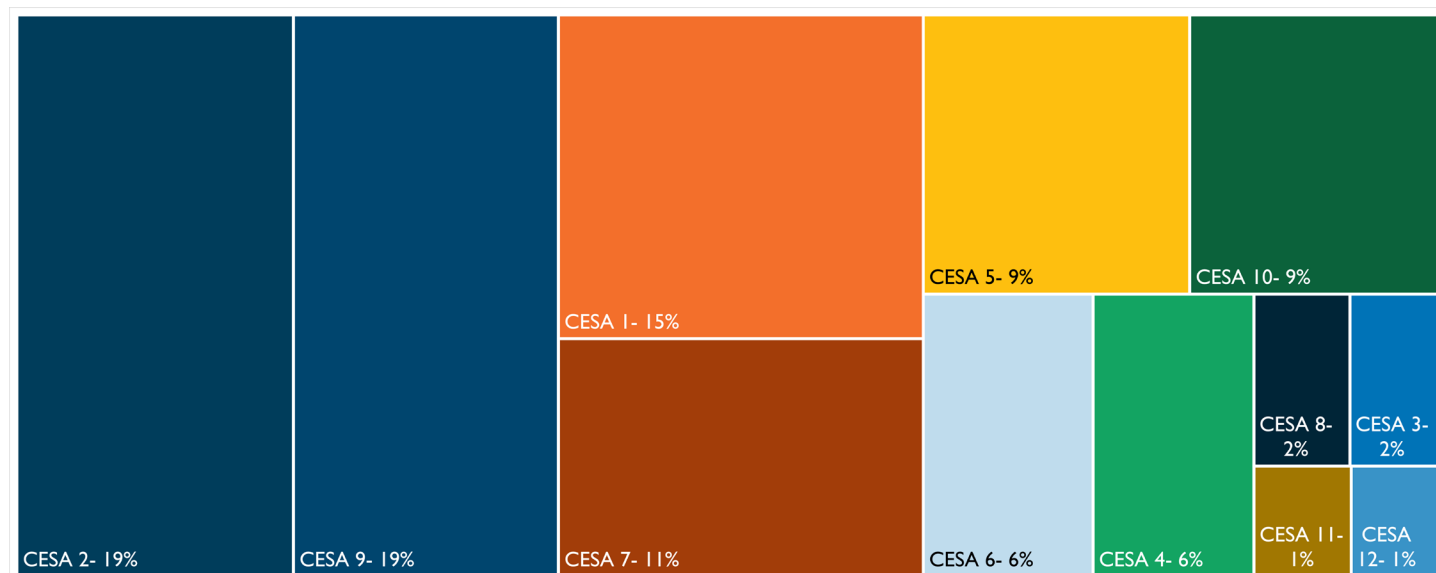
According to survey responses, a majority of participants learned about the academy offerings either through the AWSA Professional Learning Catalog (28%) or recommendation/referral by their supervisor (28%). Colleague recommendation was also cited (19%), and 8% of respondents indicated that their participation was a required element of their district's Research to Practice Inclusive Community (RPIC) grant supported through DPI special education funding. When asked to select motivating factors for registering, participants most frequently cited support for district priorities (60%), followed by support for their own professional learning goals (57%), and then support for school priorities (50%). Of those who selected "Other," the most common motivation was the requirement of the DPI Research to Practice Inclusive Communities (RPIC) project grant. Figure 2 displays the motivating factors and the percentage of respondents selecting each (note that respondents could select more than one motivating factor for registering).

Figure 2: Which of the following factors motivated you to select this particular academy?
(select all that apply)

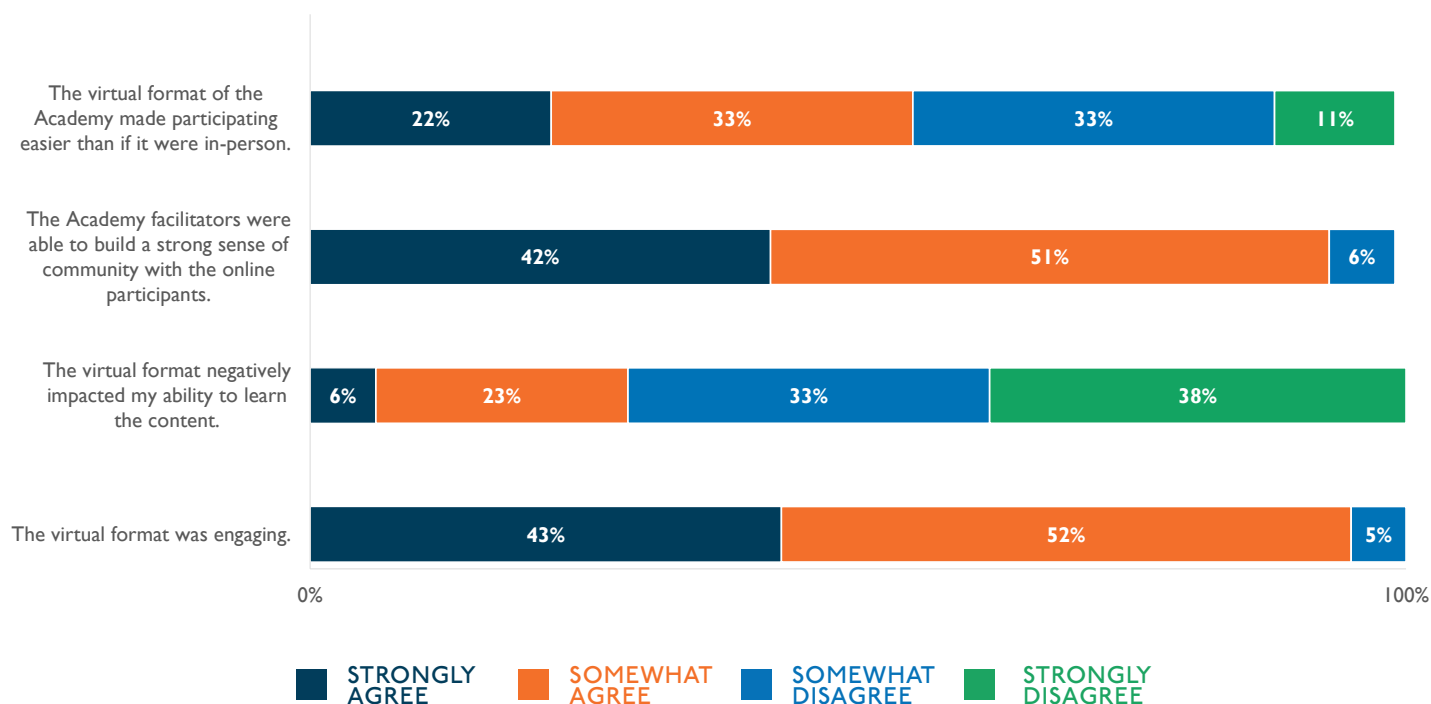| Factor	Percentage
To support district priorities	60%
To support my professional learning goals	57%
To support school priorities	50%
The academy was recommended to me by a colleague	23%
To improve on areas identified during prior evaluation discussions within my district's Educator Effectiveness process	14%
Other	6%

Academy Learning Structure

During the 2020-21 academic year, all professional learning academies were switched from in-person events to online events. Nearly all academies presented the same information and materials, over the same number of sessions, as in previous years; exceptions here were the MHR and DLA academies, which switched from an academy structure (with sequenced content) to a series of independent, standalone webinars.

While facilitators largely aimed to keep the content the same as in previous years in a virtual environment, changes were needed for content delivery and facilitation. One reported difference was a shift in team and group work time. A DLA facilitator, for example, reported that there was "little to no time for teams to work together," and the SPE facilitator said that they "reduced the amount of group time" for participants. During available team time, facilitators still provided support, with several doing so by popping into virtual breakout rooms.

Overall, academy facilitators emphasized adaptation in the learning structure this year. Some facilitators, such as LEA, had extensive previous experience with virtual instruction, and thus were able to mold their course easily to changing circumstances. The SPE facilitator reported that they were able to succeed in the virtual environment by being "flexible and adaptable, dependent on the circumstances of participants." Additionally, several focused on providing the most important content to participants in the time they were provided. One facilitator noted that they wanted to make sure not to waste participants' time, so they took "opportunities to consolidate" and make the content "relevant to [participants'] own context." The FYS facilitator reported that their presentations "were clearer [than in previous years] because we were short on time." Academy facilitators made these necessary tweaks, all while keeping as much content as possible, and according to one facilitator, "not lowering expectations."

Participants were asked how the virtual format impacted their level of engagement, learning, and ability to network with peers, and if the virtual structure made participation easier. Figure 3 presents each of the virtual-related survey questions and responses.

Figure 3: Perceptions of virtual academy format

Question	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree	Strongly Disagree
The virtual format of the Academy made participating easier than if it were in-person.	22%	33%	33%	11%
The Academy facilitators were able to build a strong sense of community with the online participants.	42%	51%	6%	
The virtual format negatively impacted my ability to learn the content.	6%	23%	33%	38%
The virtual format was engaging.	43%	52%	5%	

0%   100%

■ STRONGLY AGREE   ■ SOMEWHAT AGREE   ■ SOMEWHAT DISAGREE   ■ STRONGLY DISAGREE

As shown above, a majority of participants found the virtual format engaging (95%) and were still able to feel a strong sense of community with other participants (93%). A majority of participants also reported that the virtual format did not negatively impact their ability to learn the content (71%). Interestingly, the number of respondents agreeing that the online format made attending easier (55%) was only slightly higher than those who disagreed (44%).

Participants who shared additional information in the survey through an optional open-ended question reported in general that "given the circumstances…it was a great offering" and that "it was very well-designed, but nothing will beat in-person learning." Related to travel, many reported the virtual format saved time and money, but some also noted that it "was very difficult to stay engaged as there were building issues that arose" and "normal school distractions." Several suggested that future academies have a hybrid approach, with some sessions in-person and some virtual.

Content and Pedagogy

The academies included a mix of direct instruction, hands-on activities, opportunities for one-on-one and small group interactions (in breakout rooms), role play, and large group reporting out and related discussions. Each session included a slide deck with links to additional tools, selected readings, and books. Application activities included use of role play with vignettes and case studies framing discussions. Participants were encouraged to practice learning experiences and tools in their local context and report back on results.

Participants were exposed to tools, resources, and practice around multiple issues during each session. For example, in DLA, participants used the Wisconsin Information System for Evaluation (WISE) tools, and focus on the Data Inquiry Journal as a means to document their data analysis, root cause analysis, and continuous improvement efforts. In LEA, participants completed an equity audit of teaching and learning opportunities in their local contexts prior to attending the academy, which led to the development of an equity plan. In the PLC academy, participants completed an "action journal" throughout each session. SAIL focused teams on leveraging data for continuous improvement planning and implementation with 100-day plans. In the IC and IC Advanced academies, there were built-in opportunities to practice and apply the skills being taught.

During this year's sessions, academy content also addressed issues related to managing COVID-19. FYS included sessions on how to navigate the politics around the pandemic in participants' communities and three sessions on "learning loss." Additionally, MHR and FYS facilitators reported putting an emphasis on staff mental health. The MHR facilitator reported that "...In previous years, we really focused a lot on the systems-building, but recognize this year that maybe wasn't at the top of everyone's minds... We were able to provide very tangible, useful supports for folks during a very difficult time." Further, a DLA facilitator recognized that many "...attendees were focused on students' [social-emotional learning] rather than on student achievement and engagement as would be typical in a 'normal' year," and that they had been able as facilitators to adjust content accordingly. Regardless of whether skills specifically addressed COVID-19, many were skills that survey respondents found beneficial in helping them manage changes related to the pandemic, such as identifying and remaining focused on school and district priorities, communication, time management, and collaborative and strong teams. Figure 4 displays survey results on COVID-related skills, with over 80% of respondents agreeing that these skills were helpful.

Figure 4: Managing COVID-19

The skills I learned in the academy helped me manage changes related to the COVID-19 pandemic.

STRONGLY AGREE
SOMEWHAT AGREE
SOMEWHAT DISAGREE
STRONGLY DISAGREE

2%
15%
35%
47%
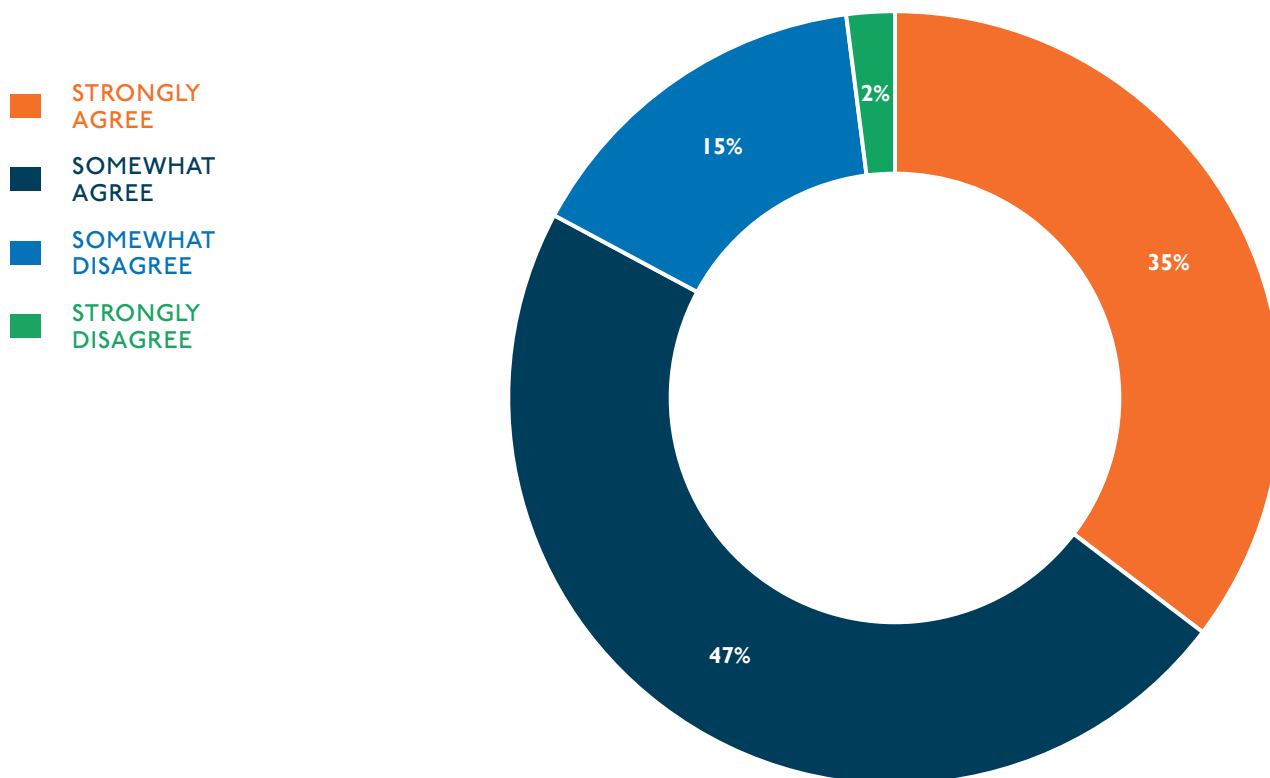
Based on this year's virtual learning experience, facilitators reported that several academies will either use a hybrid approach or be completely online for the 2021-22 school year. DLA, FYS, and MHR will be hybrid academies, with both in-person and virtual sessions. SPE will offer two cohorts, one in-person and one virtual. The two cohorts will include the same content and same amount of time, under the rationale that if a participant has to miss an in-person session, they can participate in the virtual session. LEA will remain all-virtual; the facilitator reflected that it made the academy more accessible and allowed for greater participation across the state. The IC2 academy will be a topic-specific webinar series instead of an in-person academy.

Coaching Support

Four academies (BEL, NBA, SAIL, and FYS) provided opportunities for participants to engage with an external coach trained by AWSA or WASDA. Each team participating in the SAIL academy, for example, had a coach dedicated to supporting their work. This year, the SAIL facilitator reported "more coaching" for SAIL; because of the virtual format, coaches wanted to check-in with each team more frequently. Coaches had 10- to 15-minute check-ins at the end of every session where the coach would ask, "What worked well and what do you need?" These more frequent coaching sessions helped SAIL facilitators to make sure they "…weren't missing something because [they] couldn't read the [virtual] room as well" as they usually do. In previous years, attendees in the BEL and NBA academy had the option of being assigned a coach. This year, because registration numbers were lower, each of the BEL participants received individual coaching; in NBA, according to the facilitator, about 60% of participants chose to have coaching support. All superintendents in the FYS academy were assigned a coach to work with for the academic year. LEA typically does not offer dedicated coaching support, but the virtual format allowed the two facilitators to meet with each team in each session to address questions and provide support.

Alignment to Standards

As noted in previous evaluation reports (Kimball et al., 2019, 2020), the content of the academies is intentionally aligned with national leadership standards (such as the Performance Standards for Educational Leaders), and typically less so with Wisconsin-specific leadership standards (such as the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership or the CESA 6 School Administrator Performance Evaluation System). That said, over 90% of survey respondents reported that the academy helped them make connections to the leadership standards used by their district for principal evaluation and support.

Figure 5: Alignment to Standards

The Academy helped me make connections to the professional leadership standards applied by our district for principal evaluation and support (i.e., the Wisconsin Framework for Principal Leadership or CESA 6 EP/School Administrator Performance Evaluation System).

- STRONGLY AGREE
- SOMEWHAT AGREE
- SOMEWHAT DISAGREE
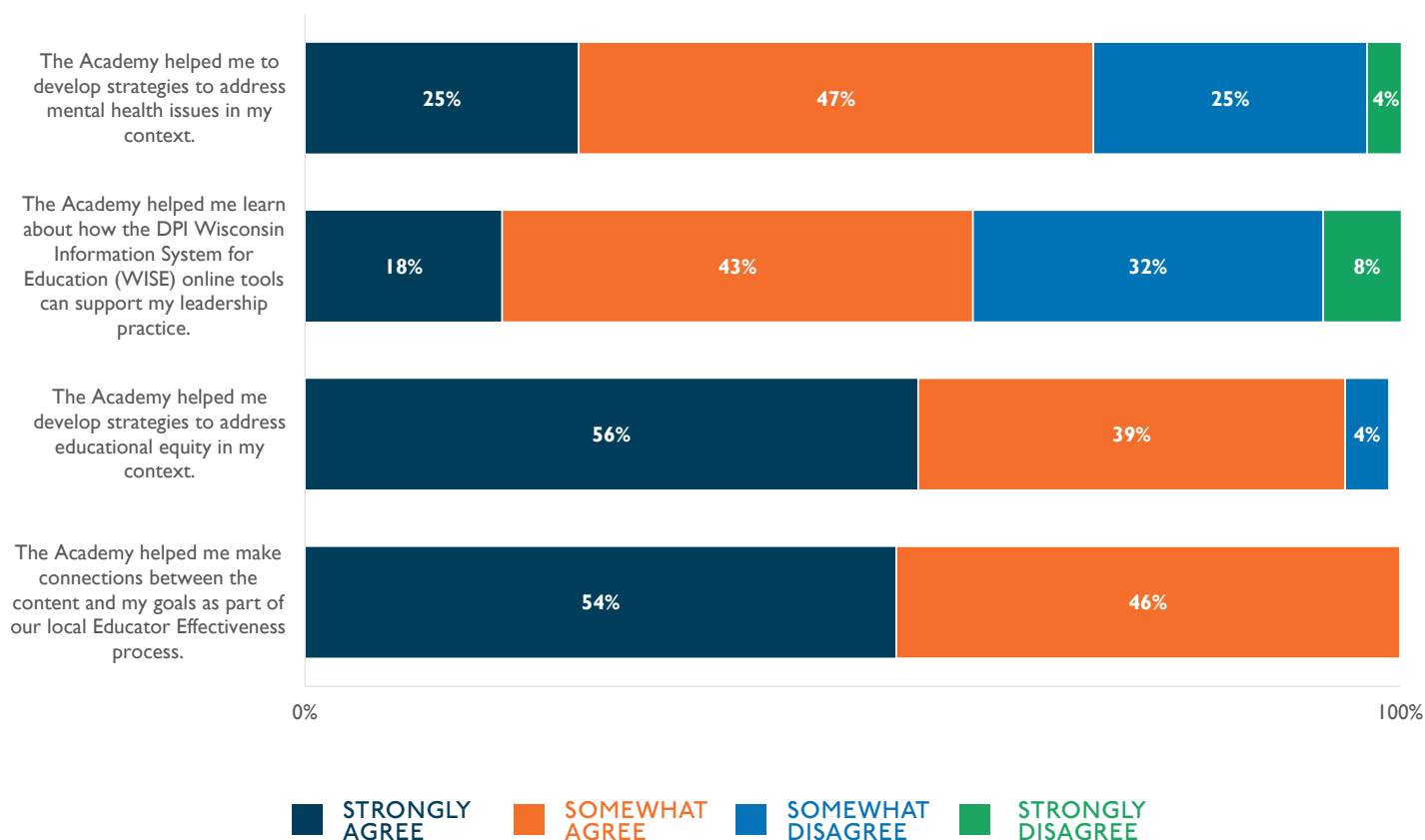- STRONGLY DISAGREE

8%

52%

40%
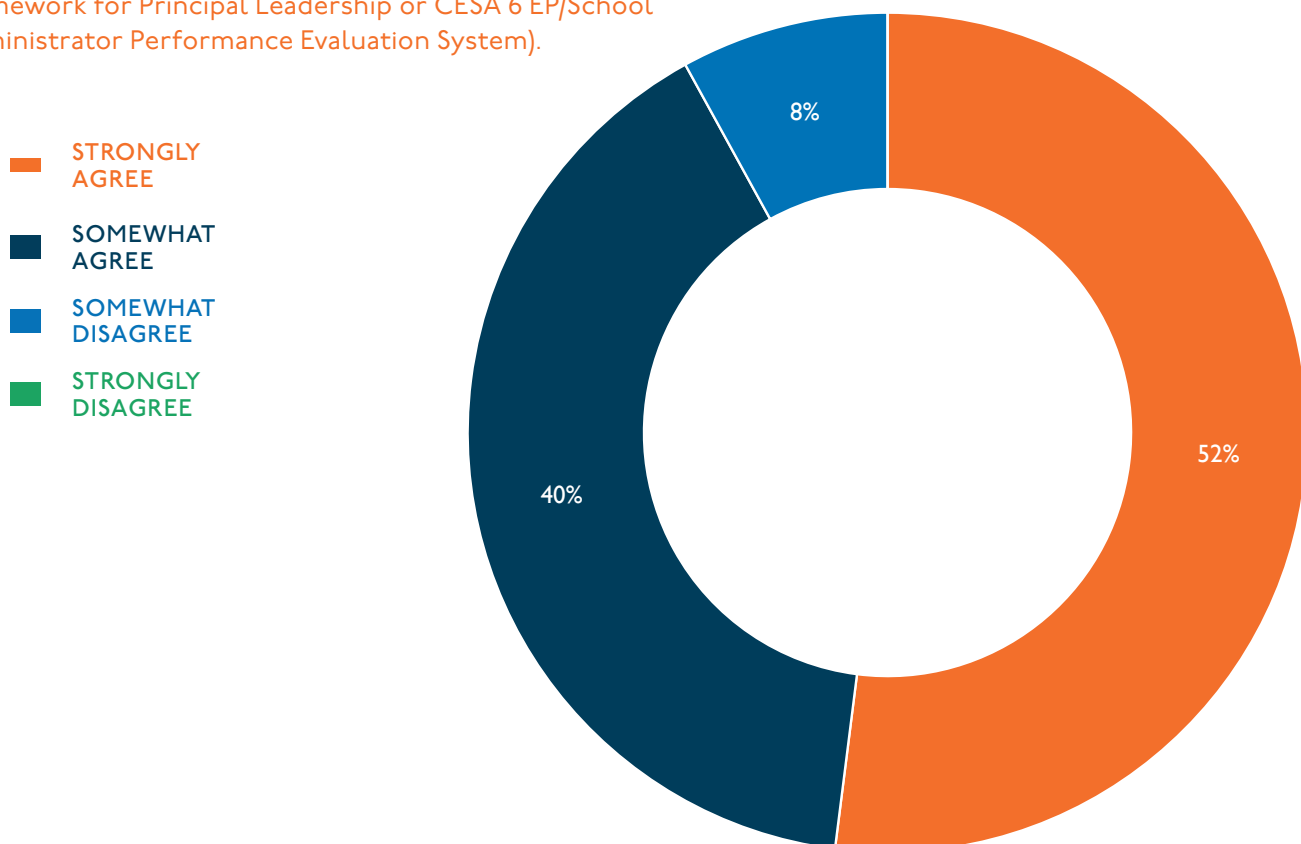
Alignment with DPI Priorities and Messaging

Equity and mental health continue to be priorities for the Department of Public Instruction, along with leveraging the Educator Effectiveness (EE) and WISE suite of tools for continuous improvement. A DLA facilitator, for example, shared their connection to the WISE suite of tools: "DLA has always included a specific focus on WISE tools, such as the Data Inquiry Journal." Further, according to academy facilitators, SPE and NBA explicitly connect to the EE system. The SPE facilitator noted that they have become more explicit in addressing EE over the past couple years by bringing in a speaker from DPI to address any "misinformation, misunderstanding, or misapplication"

surrounding the EE process. In NBA, they discuss "EE processing and the mechanics of that" and "how you use EE for improvement and feedback, not just for evaluation." The LEA facilitator shared that the academy does not help participants address their local EE processes, but that "it should." She further explained that she knows the "EE folks want to do more equity work," and that facilitators talk about "aligning with other work they [participants] are doing" and the need to figure out "where does all that [EE] fit."

When participants were asked how the academy they attended helped them address each of these areas, the majority of respondents agreed that the academy supported their learning (although a bit less so in the case of the WISE suite of tools). Figure 6 displays the responses for each priority area.

Figure 6: Participant learning and DPI priority areas

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
The Academy helped me to develop strategies to address mental health issues in my context.	25%	47%	25%	4%
The Academy helped me learn about how the DPI Wisconsin Information System for Education (WISE) online tools can support my leadership practice.	18%	43%	32%	8%
The Academy helped me develop strategies to address educational equity in my context.	56%	39%	4%	
The Academy helped me make connections between the content and my goals as part of our local Educator Effectiveness process.	54%	46%		

Relevance and Impact of Academy Participation

Participants were asked in the survey to respond to a series of statements about the extent to which the academy supported their motivation for attending, whether goals were clear, and if facilitation was appropriately balanced between sharing of knowledge and hands-on activities. Participants were also asked if they will be able to apply the skills and strategies in their own context, and if the strategies support their continuous improvement efforts. As shown in Figure 7, the majority of respondents "strongly agreed" with each of the statements about the academies' relevance.

Figure 7: Survey responses about relevance and impact of training experience

Statement	Strongly Agree	Somewhat Agree	Somewhat Disagree
Skills I learned in the Academy help with our local continuous improvement efforts.	78%	21%	1%
I feel confident that I can apply learning from the Academy I attended within my context.	77%	21%	3%
The Academy provided useful leadership strategies for me to implement in my context.	75%	23%	2%
There was an appropriate balance between facilitation and practical application for me to…	74%	24%	2%
The Academy was engaging.	69%	27%	4%
The Academy goals were clear to me.	85%	15%	
The Academy met my professional learning goals.	74%	26%	
The Academy supported my school's priorities.	75%	16%	9%
The Academy supported my district's priorities.	76%	24%	

Legend: STRONGLY AGREE · SOMEWHAT AGREE · SOMEWHAT DISAGREE · STRONGLY DISAGREE

When asked if they would recommend the academy they attended, 98% of respondents selected yes and 2% selected no. Of those that responded no and elaborated, one clarified that they would recommend the academy (MHR) for a team but not for an individual, and the others indicated that they were not fond of the virtual format.

Impact on Professional Practice

Participants were also asked to describe how they are applying the learning from the academy in their own professional context. Commonly reported themes included use of coaching skills and the PLC framework, implementing 100-day plans, equity modules, and regularly referencing resources. Below are selected quotes that highlight the themes from each of the areas:

Coaching skills and stems

- "Giving stronger feedback to my teachers is the number 1 thing I am taking with me."

- "I am changing the questions I utilize when checking in with my teachers."

- "The coaching stems have helped me move from a fixer to a coach."

- "The structure of coaching conversations and the written feedback we provide our teachers in EE is much more consistent now that we have participated in this academy."

PLC framework

- "I meet every other month with my PLC Guiding Coalition, and I use the content and strategies from this workshop series at each meeting to push professional development of my building."

- "We are cleaning up our strategic plan to be more focused and using the PLC framework as the tool to get our teams to a place where we can live out our vision."

- "We continue to work on structure so PLCs have time to work together within the school day."

100-Day plans

- "My associate principal and I are using the 100-day cycle of inquiry and the high-impact calendar to advance our school goals even in the midst of the pandemic year, and look forward to leveraging these tools at an even greater rate as we plan for our summer work and next year's goals."

- "Continuous improvement cycles are in place and set up for monitoring."

- "Our SAIL plan is the plan. All of our leadership teams are working coherently towards our mission and vision"

Equity

- "Increased understanding of how to apply equity into everything we do."

- "We are instituting an equity audit. We are also starting a district equity advisory board."

- "We attended the LEA as a district team last school year, school-level teams this summer, and are now sharing the modules with all staff, during monthly staff meetings."

Resources

- "I refer back to the handouts and resources regularly."

- "The resources shared were awesome. We can use them to implement right away."

There were also more general comments from attendees of NBA and BEL. One NBA respondent noted, for example, that "...as a new administrator, I'm taking all of the learning and applying it every day." Participants in the FYS academy wrote that they were applying what they learned related to budgeting, communications (specifically communications with boards of education), and legal issues. One district administrator shared that they "...learned the most from the legal sessions and communications sessions. This has helped me navigate the COVID-19-year legal issues balanced with practical leadership."

Relatedly, facilitators were asked how they believed participation in the academy would change educator practices and student outcomes. One facilitator described short-term and long-term impacts from participation: in the "short term, reaction, learning, skills, organizational practices and leadership practices. Over time, behaviors change and so will student outcomes…those are the ones that are lagging." Specific to the PLC academy, the facilitator shared that the "themes in PLC are around school culture, collaboration, improvement, [and] student engagement. So, whatever they put in their action journal should leverage change at the system level." The facilitator of the IC academy described the impact in this way: "With every conversation [participants] get better, get other people to better reflect on practice, and then practice improves, then engagement and achievement." Superintendents who attended the FYS academy built confidence, skills, and resources, according to the facilitator, allowing them to "tackle issues that they might be timid about." MHR facilitators reported that attending the academy helps participants…

> "…develop those skills to be resilient and then that can, in turn, make sure that they can implement the things that are helpful to students. Also, along those lines, with social and emotional learning, that was really focused on how you can integrate that learning into the classroom, into the school setting, into everything that happens at school."

Anticipated Challenges

Participants were also asked to reflect on challenges they anticipated in applying the learning in their professional contexts. The two most frequently-cited challenges were finding enough time and staff buy-in. One of the academy facilitators echoed one of these challenges by noting that "…One big challenge is finding time for this type of work." In addition, participants stated that staying focused would be a challenge, as one respondent stated: "…primarily the discipline to maintain focus in the midst of a busy school year." Several also noted that impacts of COVID-19 were hindering their ability to utilize what they learned: "We are in the midst of so many changes in our district, unfortunately between COVID and closing schools we have not utilized our learning." Facilitators also discussed two other challenges: the tendency to "revert back to what we know or might prefer or what's convenient…in times of challenge or stress," and specific to LEA, the need for implementation to be systematic. The facilitator stated that district or school teams can't implement on their own. They both need to be trained, and implementation can't be "piecemeal; it needs to be at the system level."

Section 3

Summary and Reflection Questions

Academies were well-attended, even during this past year, and well-regarded by participants for providing an engaging experience on relevant and useful leadership knowledge and skills. Reflecting on the following findings and questions may help facilitators and grant partners continue to strengthen the learning experience and further expand participation.

Alignment with DPI priorities and processes continues to grow and participants are making connections.

- Continue to strengthen partnerships with DPI staff to promote cross-collaboration. Help to align coaching, PLC, EE, and continuous improvement resources and learning. DPI encourages participation and co-facilitates some academies; how can the partnership further leverage resources to broaden attendance and strengthen alignment in supports so that schools and districts have a clear and actionable roadmap for improvement?

Academy facilitators and participants demonstrated flexibility and commitment to the content during the 2020-21 school year.

This speaks to the strength of the academies, the importance of communication, and the value of facilitator consistency from year-to-year. Reflections on virtual instruction, the planned switch to hybrid or all-virtual academies, plus the emphasis on maintaining academy content during instructional shifts helped to identify elements of the academies that can remain and those that can be modified to better encourage participation and support learning.

- Continue to assess how the format of the instruction (in-person and all-virtual) impacts attendance, participation, and engagement. How can shifts in instruction and content increase participation and address participant learning needs?

Participants learned skills that helped them navigate COVID-19, but at the same time, COVID-19 prevented participants from fully implementing what they learned.

- How can academies continue to build in time for addressing real-time issues while not taking away from course content?

- How can facilitators offer follow-up support to participants who attended an academy during 2020-21, and in general provide "refresher" or ongoing learning as a means to reinforce learning and strengthen implementation?

One of the key findings from the SAIL case studies was the importance of team composition and support from school and district leaders.

In addition to SAIL, for any team-based or team-encouraged academy, team composition and attendance is key to the success of implementation of learning. Leadership support, whether for a team or an individual in attendance, is also key to the success of implementing skills and knowledge. Relatedly, staff engagement and acceptance from those who are not directly part of the academy remains a challenge for academy participants.

- How can academy facilitators provide guidance across academies on how best to select team members, demonstrate to participants the importance of attendance (whether team or individual), and give suggestions for how to address staff and leadership buy-in?