



ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Cluster System

Principal Survey 2006

August 2006
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ALBUQUERQUE PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

During May 2006 principals and assistant principals received a brief survey about the cluster system. The goal of the survey was to assess the impact of the cluster system on the role of each principal. The survey consisted of 15 items on a Likert scale (strongly agree – strongly disagree) and two open ended items. A total of 97 surveys were returned completed. Return rates among the five groups are presented in Table 1. The number of possible returns at each group was adjusted to account for CLP membership.

Table 1 – Distribution of Surveys and those Returned

Group	Distributed	Returned
CLP	12	2
High School	6	4
Mid School	24	14
Elementary	80	42
Assistant Principals	50	35

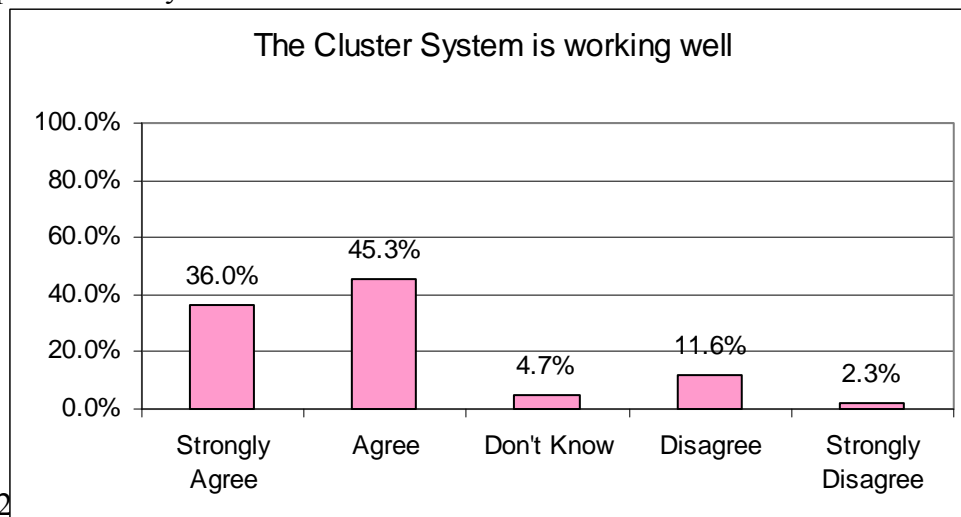
The items have been grouped into four categories for presentation:

- Clarity of purpose and effectiveness of the cluster system
- Impact on instructional practice
- Communication
- Resources and support.

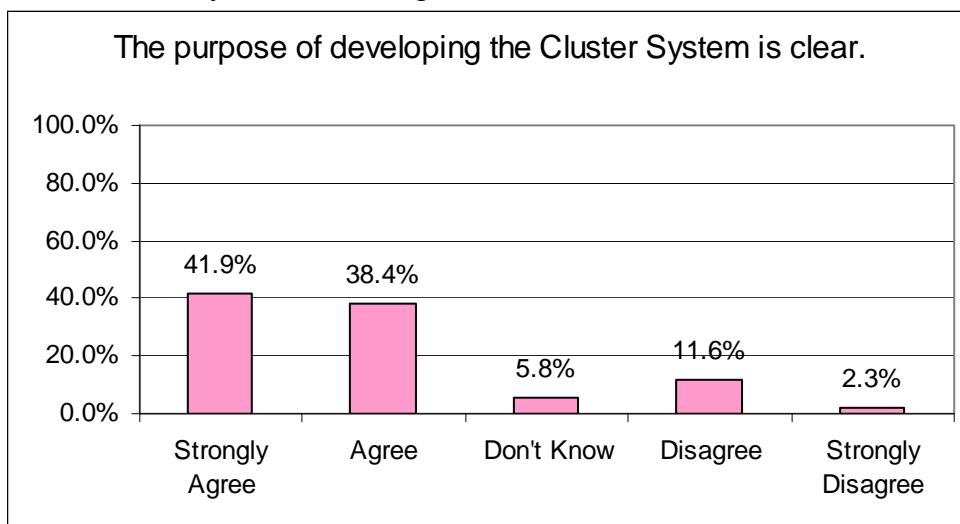
Graphs display the responses to the scale items. The responses to the open ended items, as well as the comments, have been incorporated into the summary of each category. At the end of the report is a quick reference summary that presents each survey item with percent of responses in each rating.

RESULTS

About 80% of the respondents believe that the cluster system is working well. Approximately the same proportion agrees that the purpose for developing the cluster system is clear. The few principals who disagree with the functionality of the cluster system are fairly strong in their disagreement as evidence by their comments. At least one respondent’s comments suggest the major issue is more specific to the CLP him/herself rather than the system. Personal feelings about individuals can always impact how opinion items about systems are answered. The strong feelings (positively and negatively) about individuals will be a factor in the responses on opinion and perspective surveys.



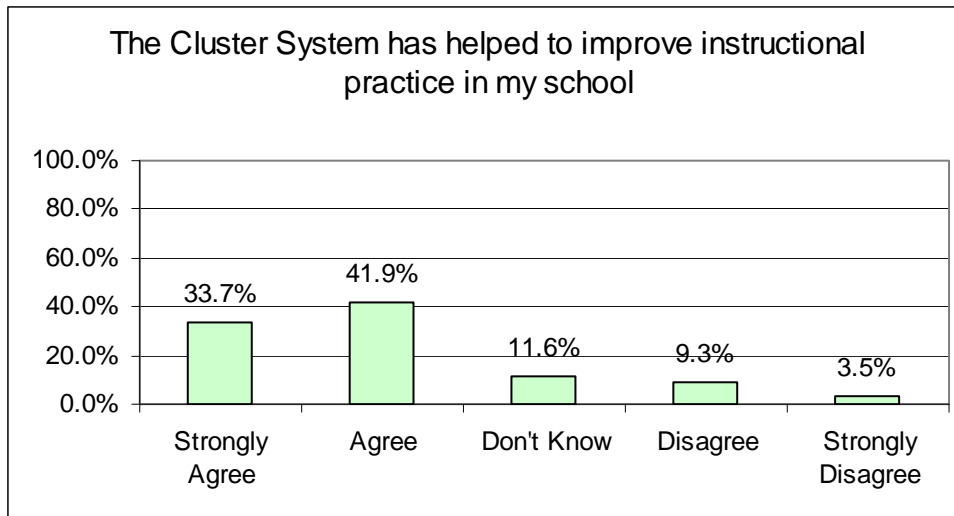
Most of the respondents who said the system is not working well also provided insight into their reasoning. In general, these respondents said that CLPs do not have the time to mentor principals and run their own schools. They also described poor role definition among CLPs, ICAs, service team staff and instructional coaches. A concern that the system was under – resourced was also expressed. Interestingly, these are similar to the comments provided by those respondents who said the system is working well.



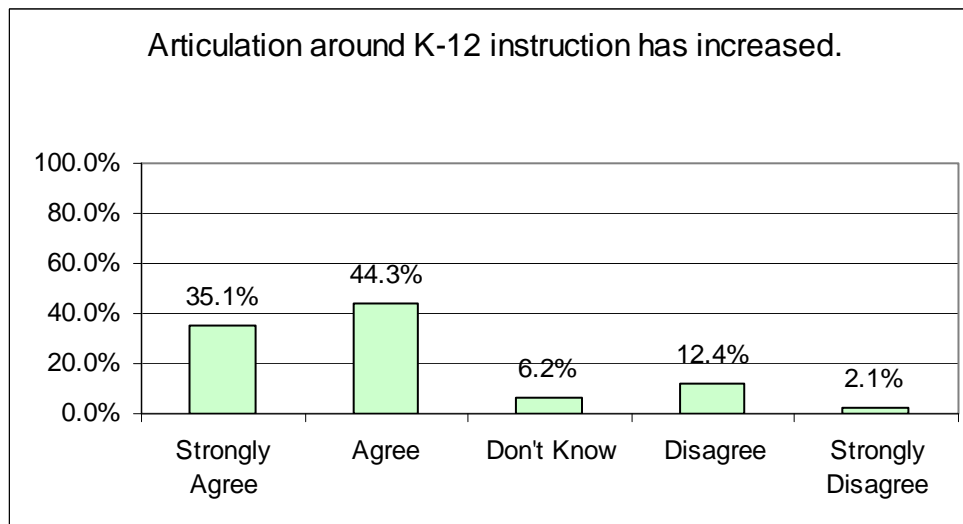
A recurring theme among the comments was that the CLP job is too demanding to perform effectively while serving as a full time principal and that is the primary weakness of the system. A few principals noted that the timeliness of response from the cluster service team was problematic and influenced their perspective about system effectiveness. Many attributed slow response time from the CLP to the fact that they are also principals dealing with their own school.

INSTRUCTIONAL PRACTICE

About $\frac{3}{4}$ th of the respondents agree that the cluster system has helped to improve instructional practice at their schools. Some of this improvement stems from increased curriculum and instructional alignment within and across schools. Principals report that the instructional leadership of the CLP and the opportunity for principals in the cluster to work together around instruction is an important factor in the success of the cluster system.

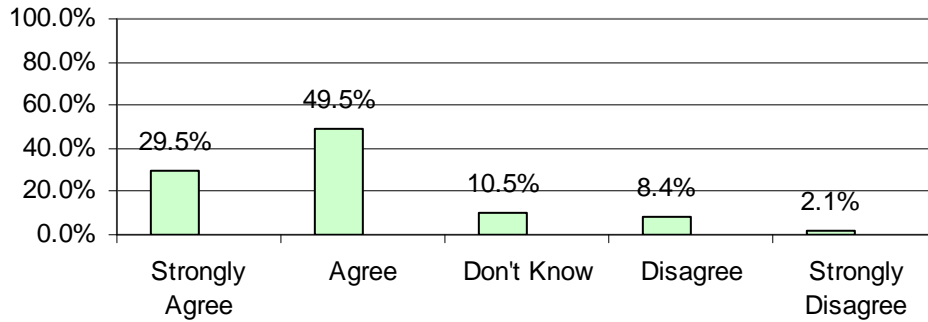


The principals' comments indicate that the opportunity to discuss instructional issues and the cluster-based professional development were key in the instructional program improvements. Curricular articulation and the increase alignment across schools were attributed to the opportunity to jointly plan instructional improvement and the guidance around professional practice provided by the individual CLP, instructional coaches, ICAs and staff developers.

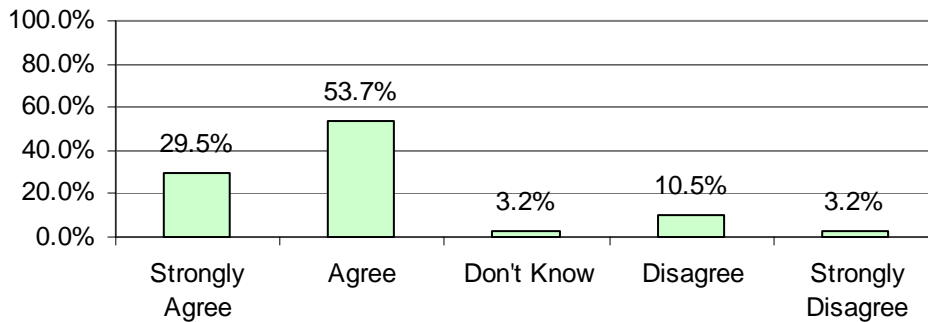


A few respondents stated that the instructional improvement focus of the cluster meetings was disrupted by “business” issues taking up meeting time. Some suggested a once-a-month business-only meeting while others reported already having this in place. The comments suggest that principals see the PSS on the service teams as compliance resource but did not say that the position served as an instructional resource.

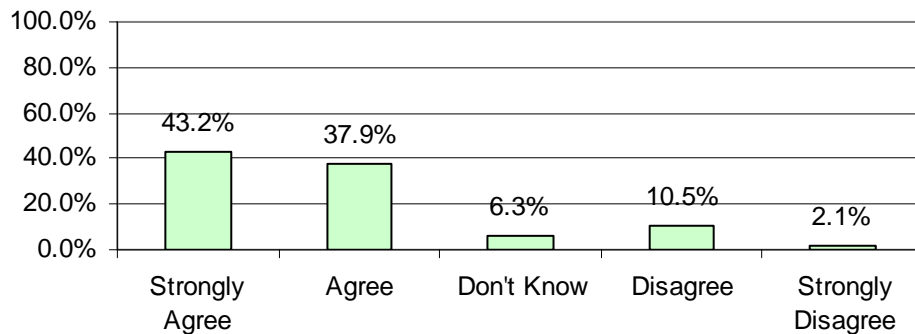
Curriculum/Instruction are more Aligned Within/Across Schools



I am more Involved in Selecting Instructional Programs and Strategies



Support From my CLP is Readily Available.



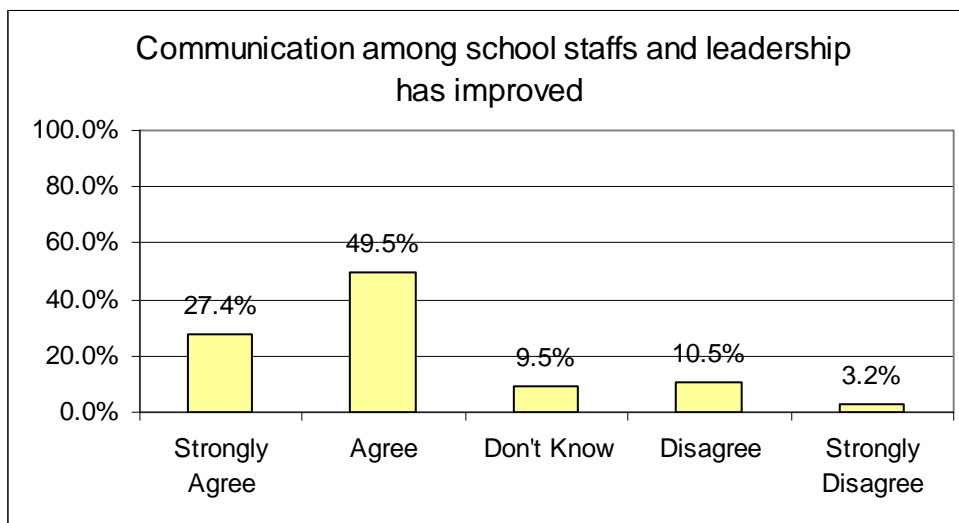
Comments about the instructional coaches and their impact on professional practice show that many principals view this position as part of the cluster system. There was some question about separating the role of the coach from the ICA and a few comments questioning the instructional focus of the ICA.

While no one respondent specifically used this phrase – the collegiality of the cluster meetings appears to be the greatest influence on instructional leadership among principals.

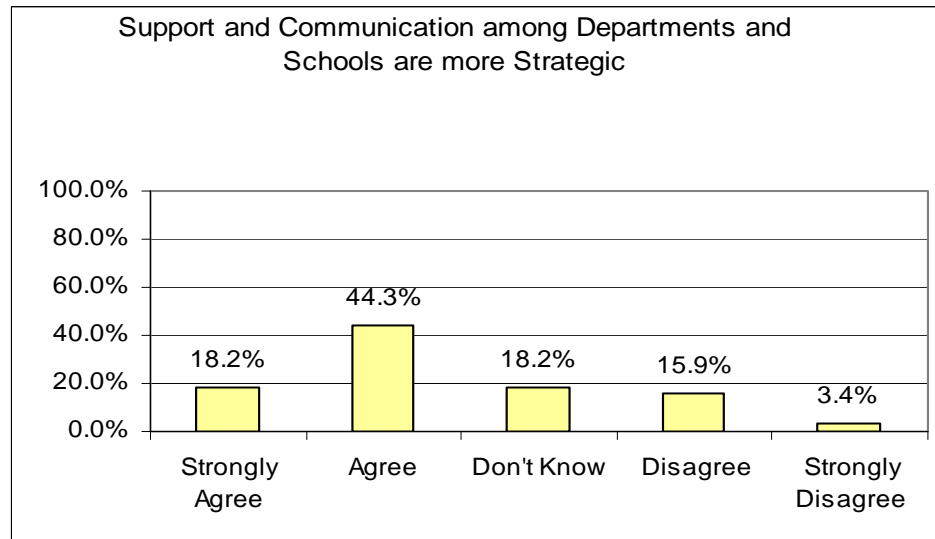
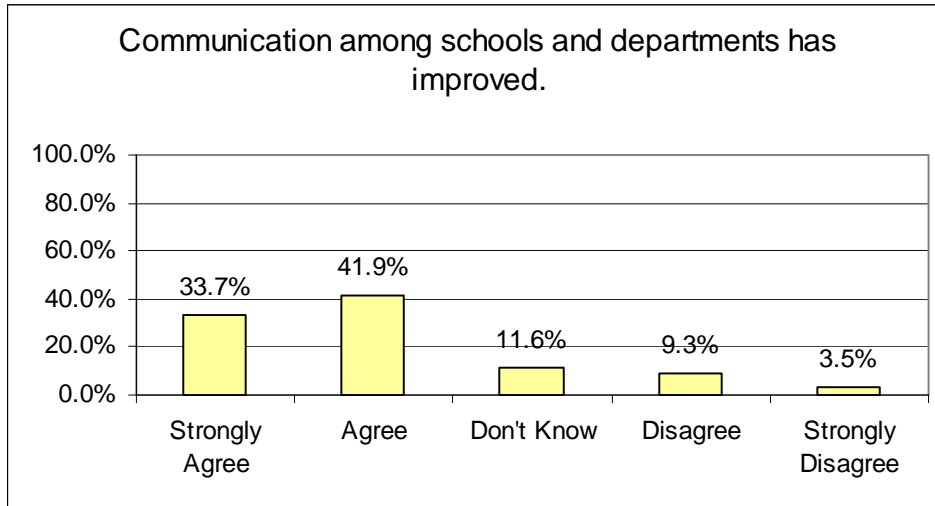
COMMUNICATION

Four items specifically address improved communication as a result of the cluster system. The results are presented in this section. However, principals made more comments about communication that help to interpret the ratings.

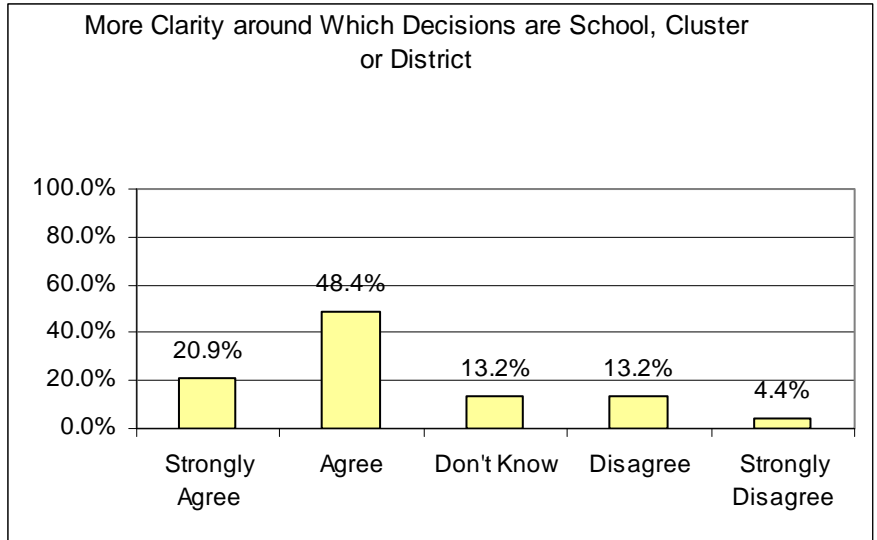
Principals see a function of the CLP is to communicate with principals about district issues. At the same time, they perceive that this task takes away from the CLP’s “real role” as instructional leader for the cluster. A few commented that the CLP role and the opportunity to discuss issues as a cluster have improved how district leadership meets school needs. This perception is borne out in the response to the item specific to improved communication with leadership.



While nearly as many respondents believe that the cluster system has improved communication among schools and departments, their comments identify room for improvement. Some principals believe departments are stretched too thinly to be useful support while others believe the department presence at cluster meetings is unnecessary. The opposite perspective was that having ‘one time’ communication with support department staffs during the cluster meeting was efficient and ensures that everyone hears the same information. Generally principals believe that the cluster system has improved support and communication with departments. Their comments attribute this improvement to the CLP advocacy. A few respondents felt that the cluster system further distanced them from leadership and departments and increased the communication gaps.

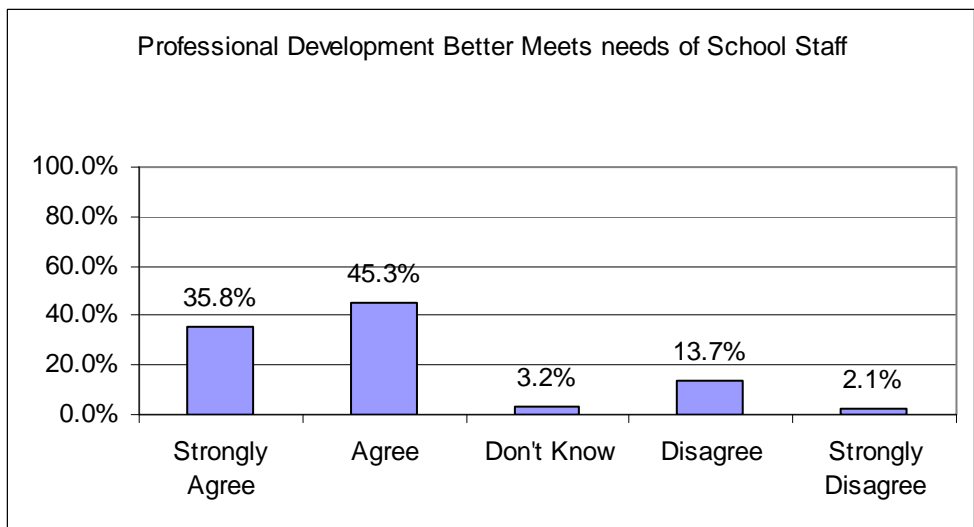


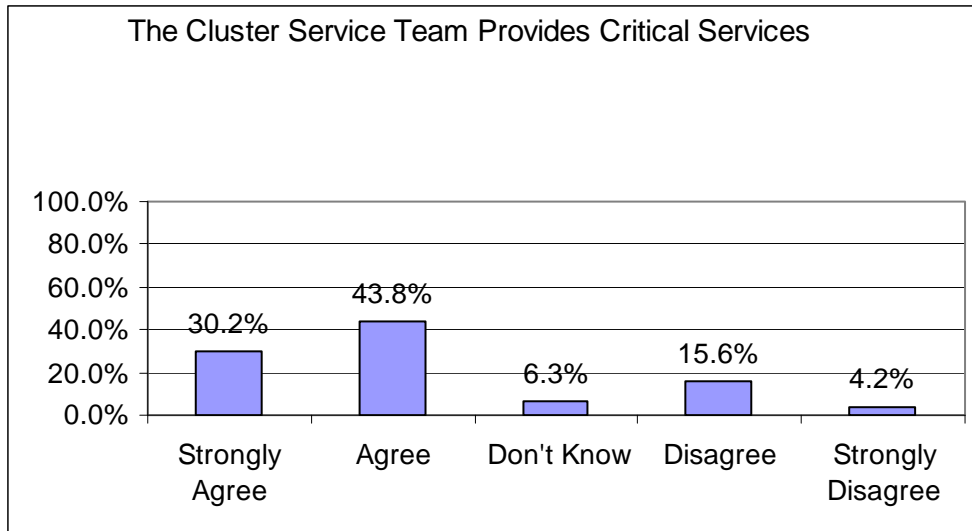
About $\frac{2}{3}$ rd believe that the cluster system has brought more clarity around which decisions are school, cluster or district-based. There were no comments that expanded on this delineation. However, it is important to note that while agreement is strong, it is not quite as strong as the agreement on the other items around communication.



RESOURCES AND SUPPORT

Items about resources and support generated more “don’t know” responses than items in other categories. Overall, the principals believe that the cluster system has created more access to resources or better aligned those resources to need. About 80% said professional development better meets the needs of their school staff and about 70% said that the cluster service team provides critical services to schools.

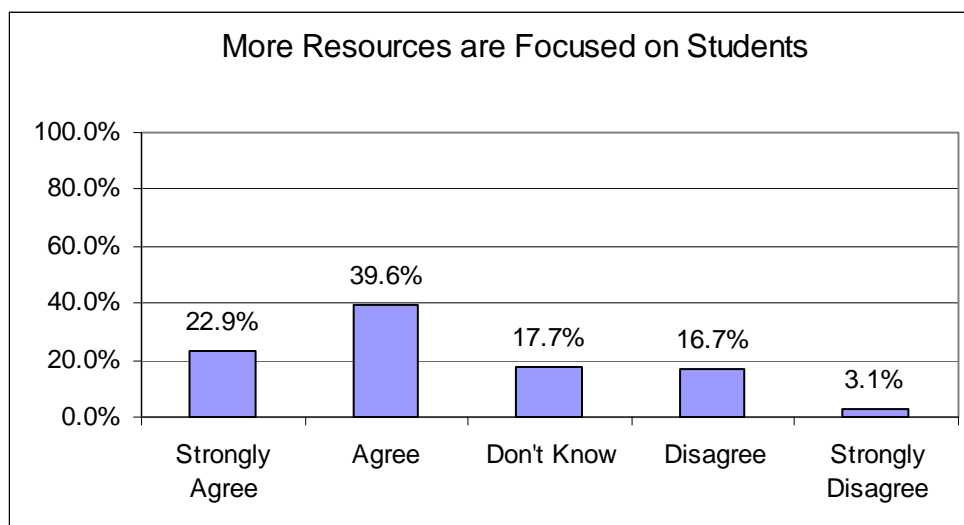




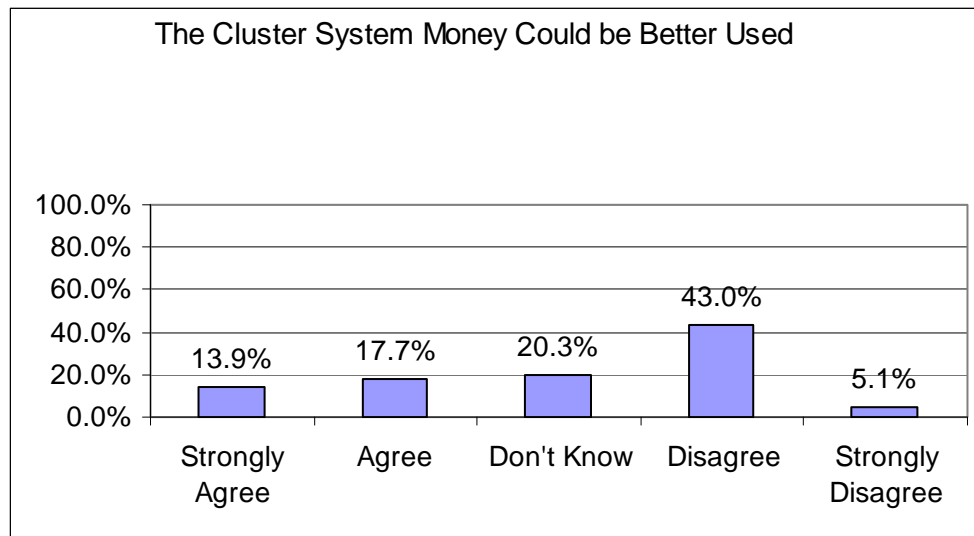
Principals' comments suggest that because of the collegial focus on instructional issues they were better able to articulate school needs for support in professional practice. This clarity of need then generated better use of professional development and other support resources.

One principal articulated a change in the role of the staff developer that could increase professional development for principals. Other comments alluded to such a resource change. From their perspective the staff developer job could be re-designed as a cluster instructional coach providing even more access to professional development resources for principals. Others' comments suggest that this already happens in their cluster

About $\frac{2}{3}$ rd believe that more resources are focused on students as a result of the cluster system. There is little additional information to help describe how this occurs or to help better define it. However, one might extrapolate from the response about instructional support and professional practices. Principals did comment on the effectiveness of sharing instructional program planning and common materials adoption. This may be why some feel that there are more student-focused resources.



The item asking if the cluster system money might be better spent on other needs generated some confusion. The intent of the item was to elicit opinions about the usefulness of the cluster system. This item was to be used as a validation of two other items on the survey. However, principals' comments suggest a different interpretation. Principals used the item to evaluate how effectively money available to the cluster is being spent. Some said more of the cluster funds should be spent on principal professional development while others said the way the CLP used cluster funds was acceptable. There are sufficient comments to show that the item did not function as intended and probably is not a useful item to include in analysis.



HOW TO IMPROVE THE CLUSTER SYSTEM

In response to this question, a few common themes emerged that have not already been incorporated into the summary or were so prevalent that they deserve repeating.

The concept of a school-based cluster leader has merit and value that is generally agreed upon. However, the role of cluster leader is seen as a full-time job. Comments show that the demands on the CLP result in either less time with their principals than their principal's desire or more time away from the CLP's school. No where is the concern about absence from the school more noted than among assistant principals' comments.

At least one person feels the system is still too top down while others just asked for more input into the discussions between CLPs and leadership. A once or twice opportunity to meet with leadership around cluster issues was offered as an improvement option.

A pure feeder system was identified as one strategy to make the system more effective. A few principals suggested that the lack of pure feeders obstructed the original intent of the cluster system.

Larger clusters suggested differentiating staffing of the service teams. Larger clusters feel they need more service team members or that smaller clusters could share teams.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE INSTRUCTIONAL LEADER – THE PRINCIPAL

Cluster-focused professional development was by far the most frequently identified way the cluster system is meeting principals' needs as they function in the role of instructional leader. Providing a readily available resource for consistent information is important to principals, too. The collaboration with peers around substantive instructional issues is seen by principals as a primary function of the system that is working well.

Others believe that the role of the CLP in facilitating and guiding this collaboration has been the key factor in making peer collaboration useful and effective.

Mentoring of new principals and those in new principalships (mid to high, etc) was identified as one way the system has supported instructional leadership. A first year principal stated that the collegial support from peers and guidance from the CLP are critical to all first year principals but also renew and refresh seasoned veterans.

Principals and CLPs agree that the focus of the cluster system is to enhance and support school administrators in their role of instructional leader. They also agree that it is not appropriate to judge the system effectiveness by any direct impact on student achievement. The cluster system will have an indirect impact on student achievement by building strong instructional leaders and focused and flexible instructional support systems for teachers.

While principals see room to improve the cluster system, generally they are positive about the concept. As one comment summarized:

*The cluster system is experiencing some growing pains but the direction is good:
A focus on students and quality instruction.*

Principal Survey on the Cluster System

Summary of Responses

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Don't Know	Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Percent Agreement
The cluster system has helped to improve instructional practices in my school.	33.7%	41.9%	11.6%	9.3%	3.5%	75.6%
The cluster system is working well.	36.0%	45.3%	4.7%	11.6%	2.3%	81.4%
The purpose of developing the cluster system is clear.	41.9%	38.4%	5.8%	11.6%	2.3%	80.2%
<i>AS A RESULT OF THE CLUSTER SYSTEM:</i>						
Articulation around K-12 instruction has increased.	35.1%	44.3%	6.2%	12.4%	2.1%	79.4%
Communication among schools and departments has improved.	22.3%	52.1%	8.5%	13.8%	3.2%	74.5%
Communication among school staffs and leadership has improved.	27.4%	49.5%	9.5%	10.5%	3.2%	76.8%
More resources are focused on students.	22.9%	39.6%	17.7%	16.7%	3.1%	62.5%
Professional development better meets the needs of my school staff.	35.8%	45.3%	3.2%	13.7%	2.1%	81.1%
Curriculum and instruction are more aligned within and across schools in our cluster.	29.5%	49.5%	10.5%	8.4%	2.1%	78.9%
I am more involved in selecting instructional programs and strategies for my school.	29.5%	53.7%	3.2%	10.5%	3.2%	83.2%
The money used to support the cluster system would be better used in another manner.	13.9%	17.7%	20.3%	43.0%	5.1%	31.6%
My cluster service team provides critical services to my school.	30.2%	43.8%	6.3%	15.6%	4.2%	74.0%
Support as the principal/instructional leader from my CLP is readily available.	43.2%	37.9%	6.3%	10.5%	2.1%	81.1%
There is more clarity around which decisions are school-based and which are cluster or district based.	20.9%	48.4%	13.2%	13.2%	4.4%	69.2%
Support and communication among departments and schools are more strategic and coordinated.	18.2%	44.3%	18.2%	15.9%	3.4%	62.5%