

RELEVANCE & RIGOR:

Creating the Future of Education Research

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Using Research at the Classroom, School, District & State Levels: Results from the Knowledge Utilization R&D Centers

**National Center for Research in Policy and Practice
Center for Research Use in Education (R4S)**

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About NCRPP

The National Center for Research in Policy and Practice is an IES Knowledge Utilization Center funded in 2014.

Our primary research questions:

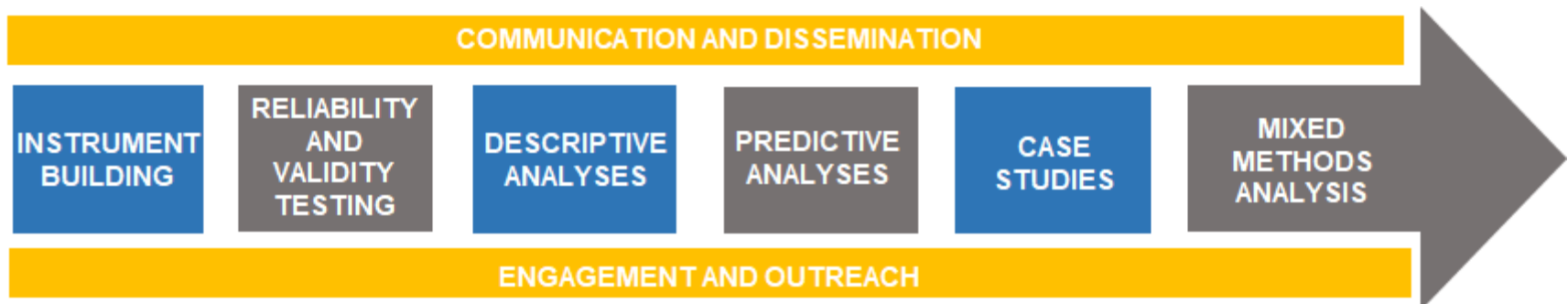
- How do school and district leaders use research?
- What conditions in districts hinder or support research use?
- How does the design of research-practice partnerships shape research use?



ABOUT R4S

Our approach:

- Assumption that issue is bidirectional, focus is on both research production and research use
- Attention to role of research evidence in school-based decisions, so greater emphasis on instrumental use
- Development of measures that capture a) practices of research use and production, b) gaps in communities that influence use/production, c) networks within and between communities, and d) capacity for use



Overview of session

- What are key educational decisions, and how do they get made?
- How does research get used in these decisions?
- What are pathways for research use?

Educational decision making

- What range of educational decisions do people at different levels of the system make?
- How do these decisions get made?



Kinds of decisions: Schools

When asked about *organizational decisions*:

- Decisions addressed problems that were academic, but also cultural and resource-related, e.g.
 - Meeting student needs through RTI
 - Tardiness
 - Understaffed areas
- Decisions included adoption, implementation, training, and structural
 - Moving to full-day kindergarten
 - Refining interventions delivered in tiered supports
 - Workshops for teachers on new curriculum
 - Adjusting recess to accommodate PLC meetings

Kinds of decisions: Classrooms

When asked about *classroom* decisions:

- Decisions addressed problems that were primarily about academic and behavioral outcomes, with less resource-related issues acted on, e.g.
 - Increasing student engagement
 - Raising test scores
- Decisions more likely adoption and implementation of curriculum and instruction than about training or structural change, e.g.
 - Implementing new technology platform
 - Small group instruction
 - Using data for progress monitoring



Kinds of decisions: State leaders

State curriculum supervisors in science say they are involved in decisions about:

- Reviewing or developing state science standards (in lead or support role)
- Advising state on course content and/or graduation policies
- Designing state assessments
- Designing and leading professional development
- Identifying resources to share with districts

How decisions get made

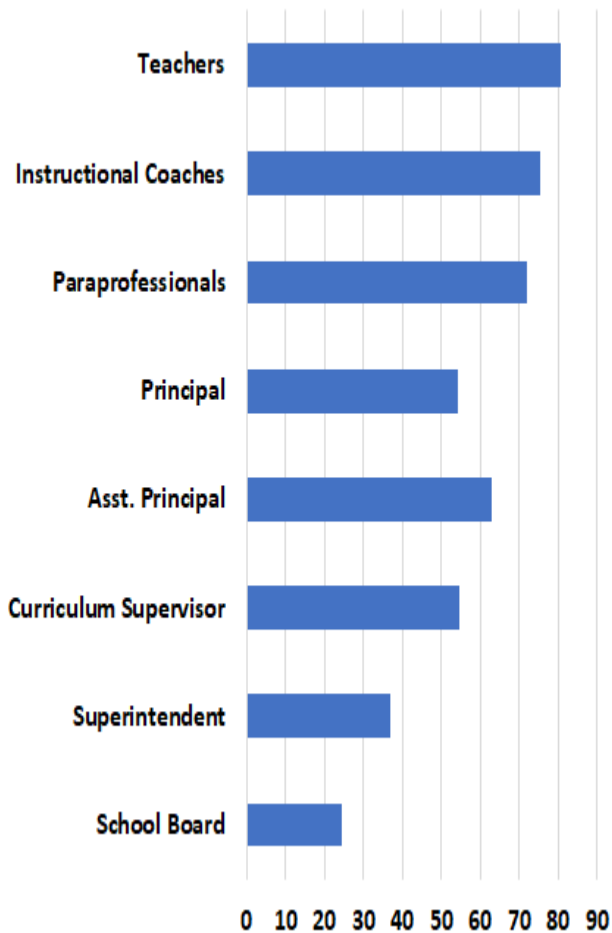
Decision making is not a single event: decisions “accrete” (Weiss, 1980).

By “accrete,” we mean that decision making:

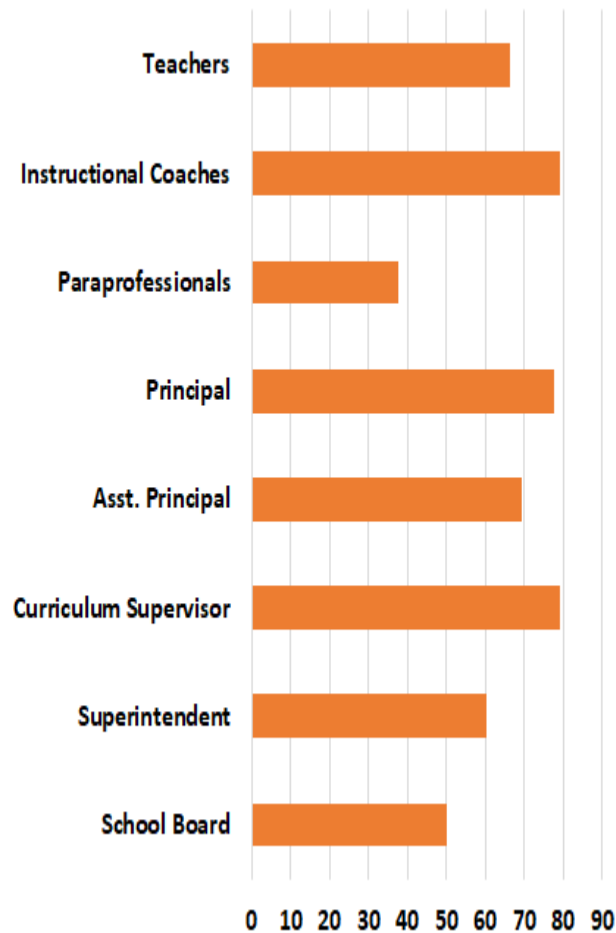
- Is an interactive process;
- Involves multiple people in multiple roles; and
- Is stretched across many divisions and layers in any large district.

Involvement in decision-making

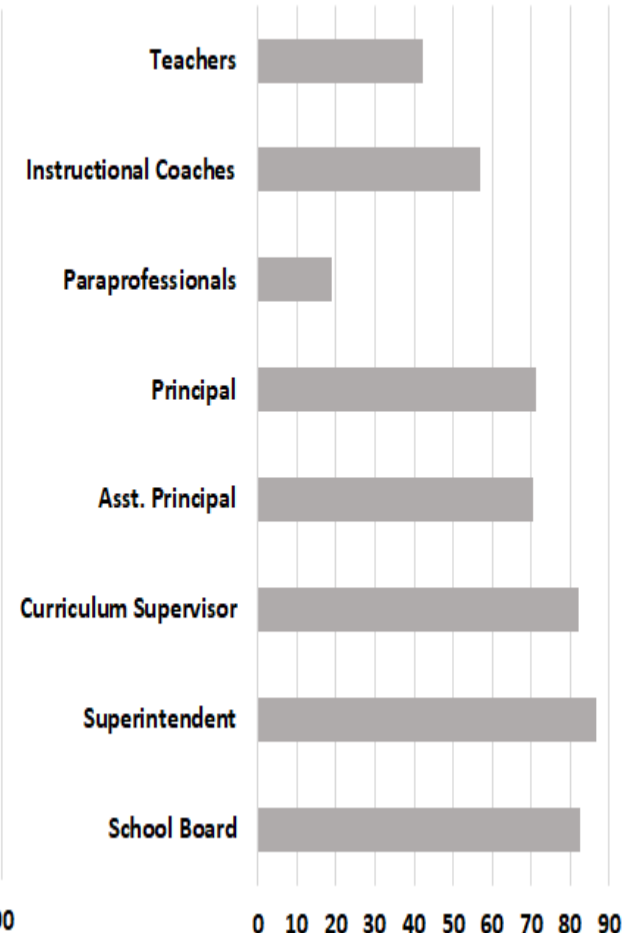
Collecting Information



Evaluating Information



Decision Making



Audience Discussion #1

Think about your own mental model of how decisions get made in schools, districts, and states:

How does it compare with the evidence we have presented?

Role of research in decision making

- How often is research used for instrumental, conceptual, and symbolic (political) purposes?
- How often is research use imposed?
- How influential is research relative to other forms of evidence?

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Uses of research: Instrumental

Table 4. Frequency of Instrumental Uses of Research

	Never	Sometimes	Frequently	All the time	Did Not Engage in Activity*
Purchased an intervention or program	1%	7%	24%	31%	37%
Designed professional development for teachers	1%	13%	36%	29%	20%
Designed professional development for administrators	2%	15%	32%	26%	25%
Conducted major adoption of a curriculum	2%	9%	23%	25%	42%
Considered scaling up a program	2%	10%	24%	23%	42%
Redesigned a program	1%	13%	22%	23%	40%
Directed resources to a program	2%	17%	31%	23%	28%
Considered eliminating a program	2%	16%	23%	20%	39%

n = 733

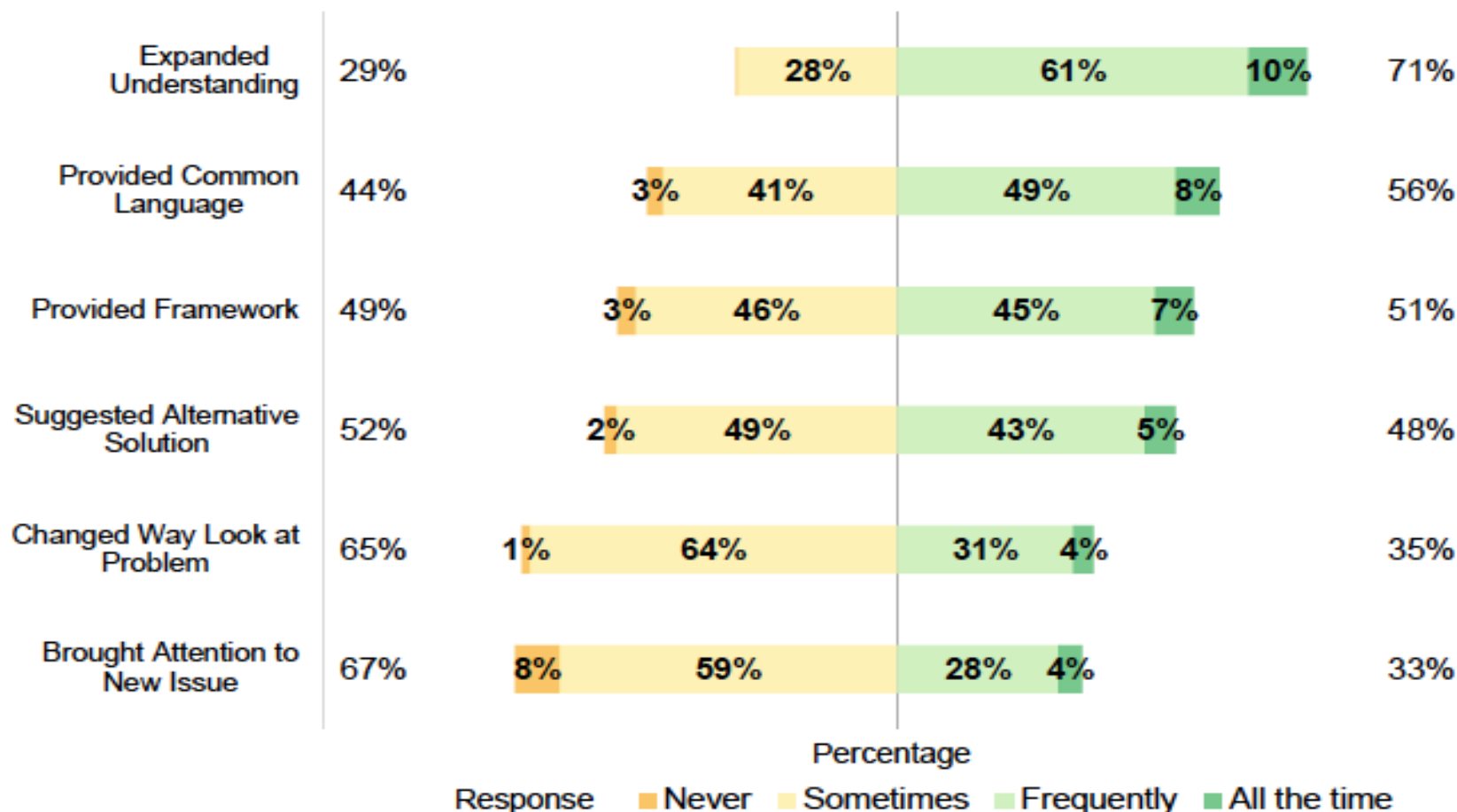
*Includes respondents who indicated this activity did not take place or that they were not involved in the activity



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Uses of research: Conceptual

Figure 2. Frequency of Conceptual Uses of Research



726 ≤ n ≤ 733

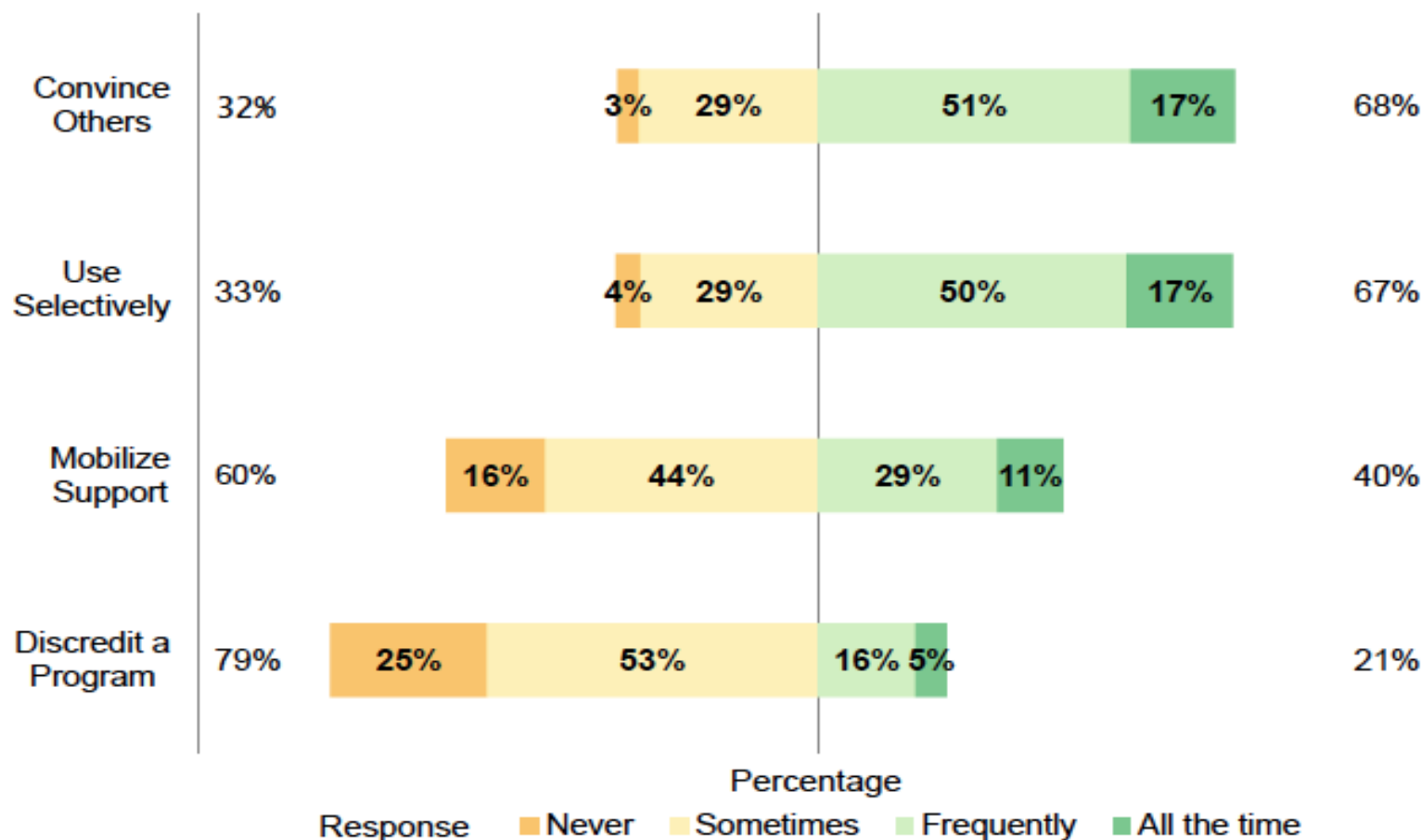
Note: In all figures, not all categories may total 100% due to rounding



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Uses of research: Symbolic

Figure 3. Frequency of Symbolic Uses of Research



n = 733

Uses of research: Imposed

Imposed use was most common for decisions regarding curriculum adoption, for which leaders were required to choose from among research-based programs.

- About 60% of respondents reported using research frequently or all of the time for this purpose.



Uses of research: When and How

Whether research is used instrumentally, conceptually, tactically, or is imposed, it can inform different phases of a decision process:

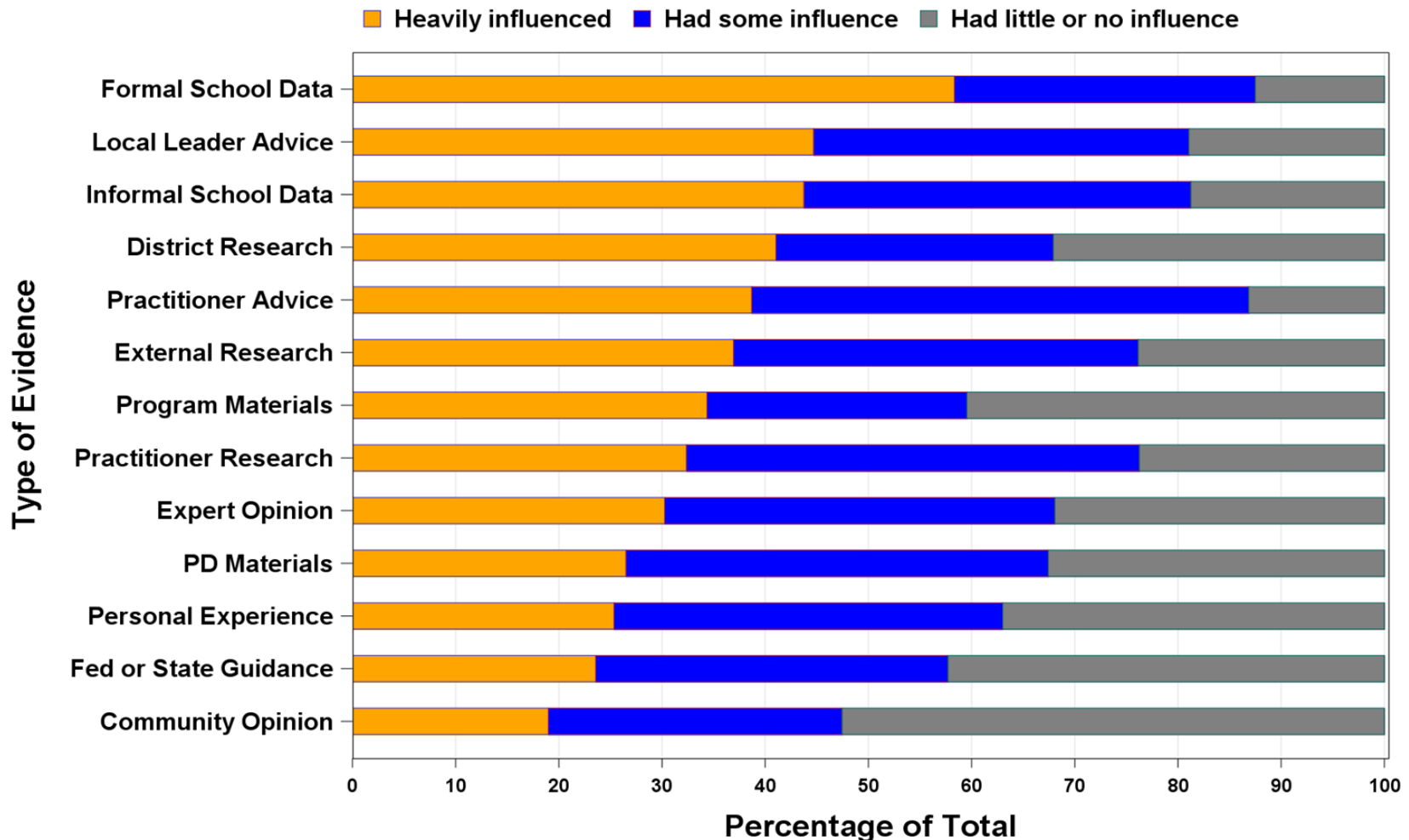
- Identifying or diagnosing problems
- Identifying or selecting solutions
- Implementing solutions
- Revising or improving solution

Different types of research are valued at different points, and research is more often used at some points than others.

Research vs. other forms of evidence



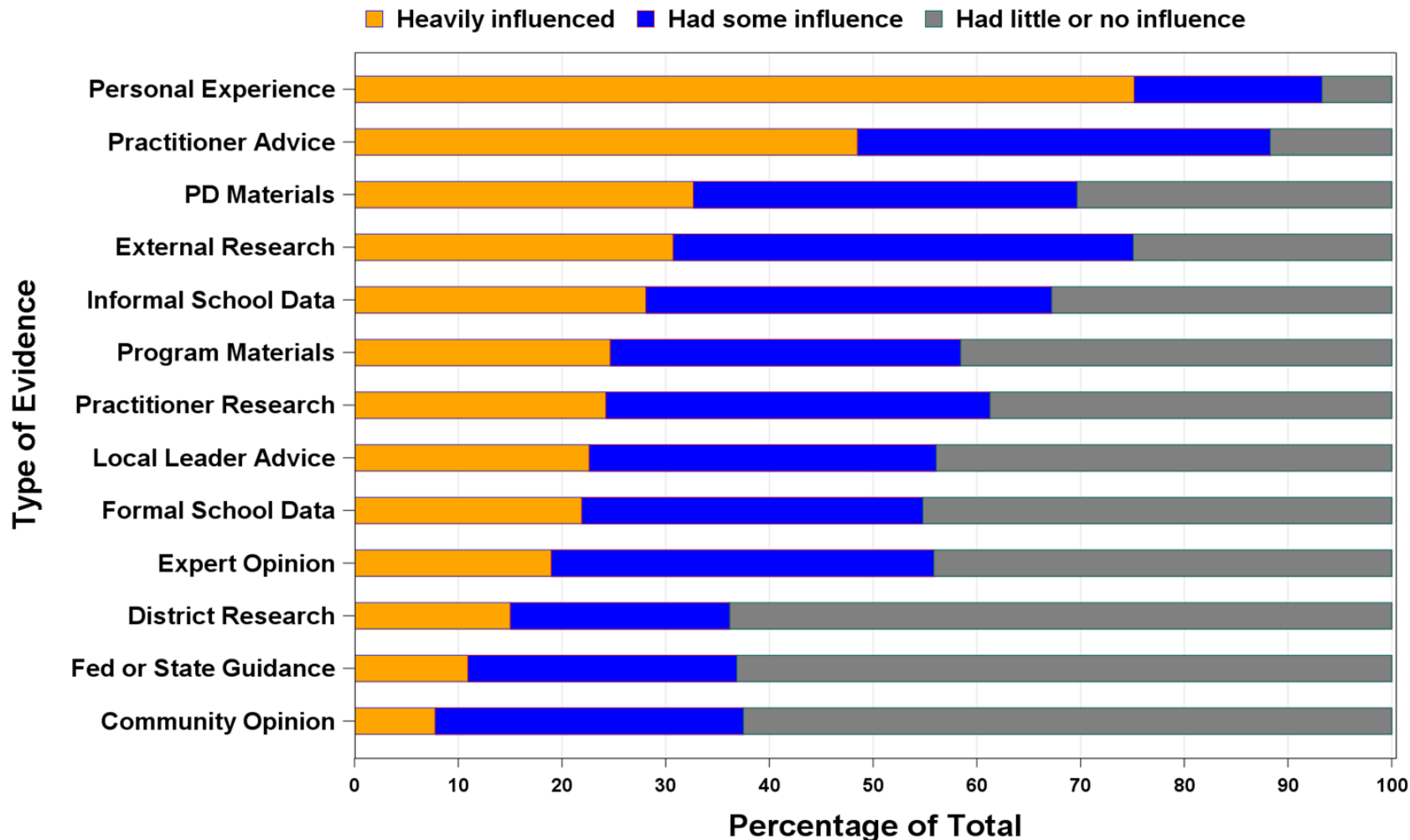
Influence on School-Wide Organizational Decisions by Type of Evidence



Research vs. other forms of evidence



Influence on Individual Educators' Strategy Selection by Type of Evidence



Audience Discussion #2

How does the nature of research use and the role of other forms of evidence shape the kinds of research we need to do?

What opportunities does this data present for us?

Pathways for research use

- How do education leaders access research?
- How do leaders rely on researchers?
- What forms of research end up being useful?
- How do organizational routines support or hinder research use?

How leaders access research

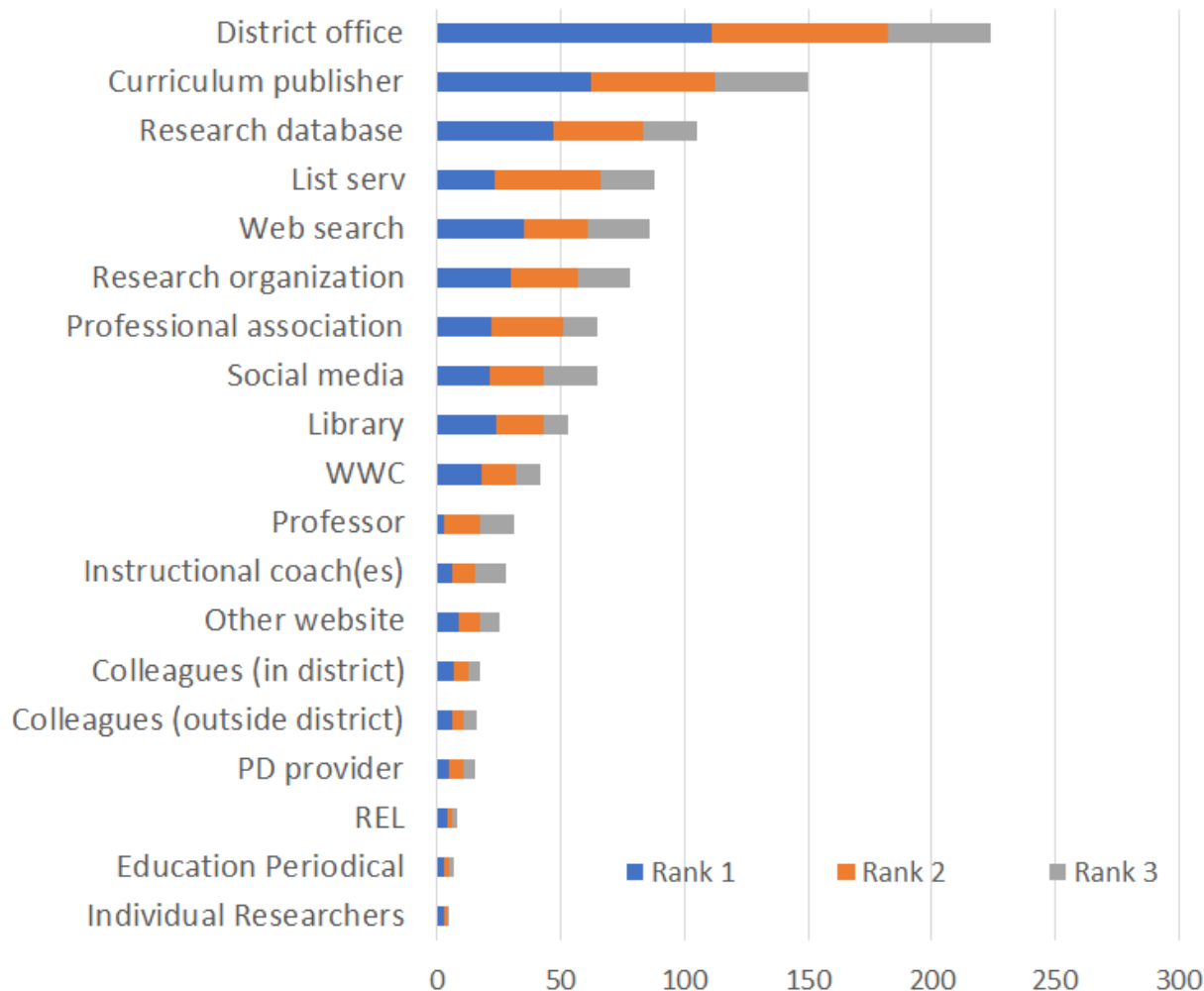
Leaders access research primarily through their own professional contacts.

TABLE 5
Sources Used to Access Research (in Percentages)

Scale: Source of research	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	All the time	Missing
Formal sources						
What Works Clearinghouse	36	20	24	13	4	3
University researchers	12	33	36	13	2	3
National Center for Education Statistics	28	27	29	11	2	3
Regional Education Laboratories	27	31	27	11	1	4
Professional networks						
Professional associations	2	5	36	40	13	3
Conferences	4	10	43	35	5	3
State department of education	10	16	38	26	7	3
People in other districts	5	15	38	29	10	3
County office of education	28	28	24	14	3	4
Translators of research						
Newspaper or magazine	16	24	39	14	3	3
Social media	38	25	21	9	3	3
Vendors	25	35	30	6	3	1
Wikipedia	61	25	9	2	0	4

How practitioners access research

School-Based Practitioners' Rankings of Research Sources Relied on Most





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How leaders rely on researchers

Leaders involved in RPPs turn to their partners for advice for design, resource, and scale up decisions.

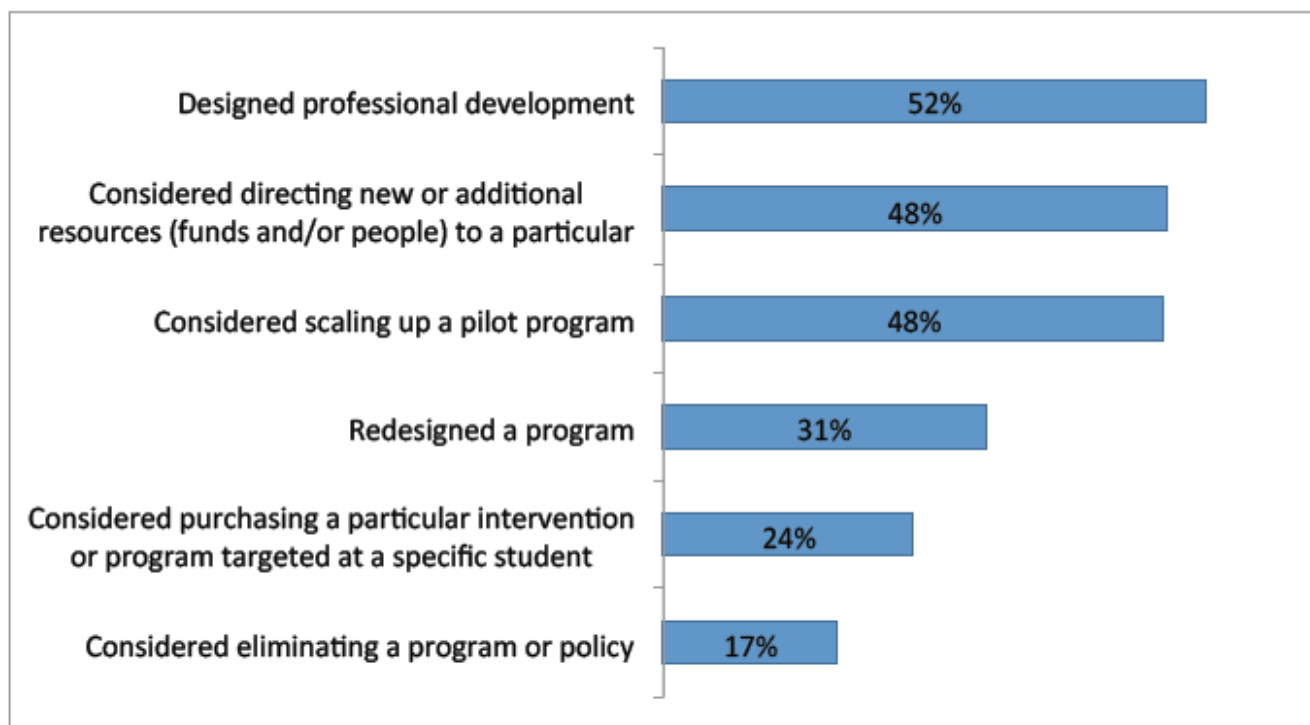


Figure 2. Involvement in organizational activities by RPP research partners, as reported by at least one practitioner. 28>n>23 partnerships.



Practitioner/researcher interactions

When asked about their connections with researchers over the past two years, practitioners noted the infrequency of interaction:

- Few practitioners indicated that a researcher had contacted them to ask for input on a study (5%, N=450)
- Similarly few responded that a researcher had contacted them to inquire about problems or challenges they were facing at their school (2%, N=449)



Forms of research leaders use

Leaders turned to books most frequently and least frequently to peer reviewed journal articles.

Table 5. Format of Research Leaders Cited as Useful

	Book	Research/Policy Report	Peer-reviewed Journal Article	All Other
Deputy/Associate/ Network Superintendents	64%	12%	12%	12%
Curriculum & Instruction	59%	12%	11%	18%
Special Education	57%	17%	15%	11%
Assessment	42%	26%	19%	14%
Principals	73%	6%	10%	11%
Federal Programs	35%	30%	17%	17%
Multi-Role	63%	19%	13%	4%
All Respondents	58%	17%	14%	12%

n=379

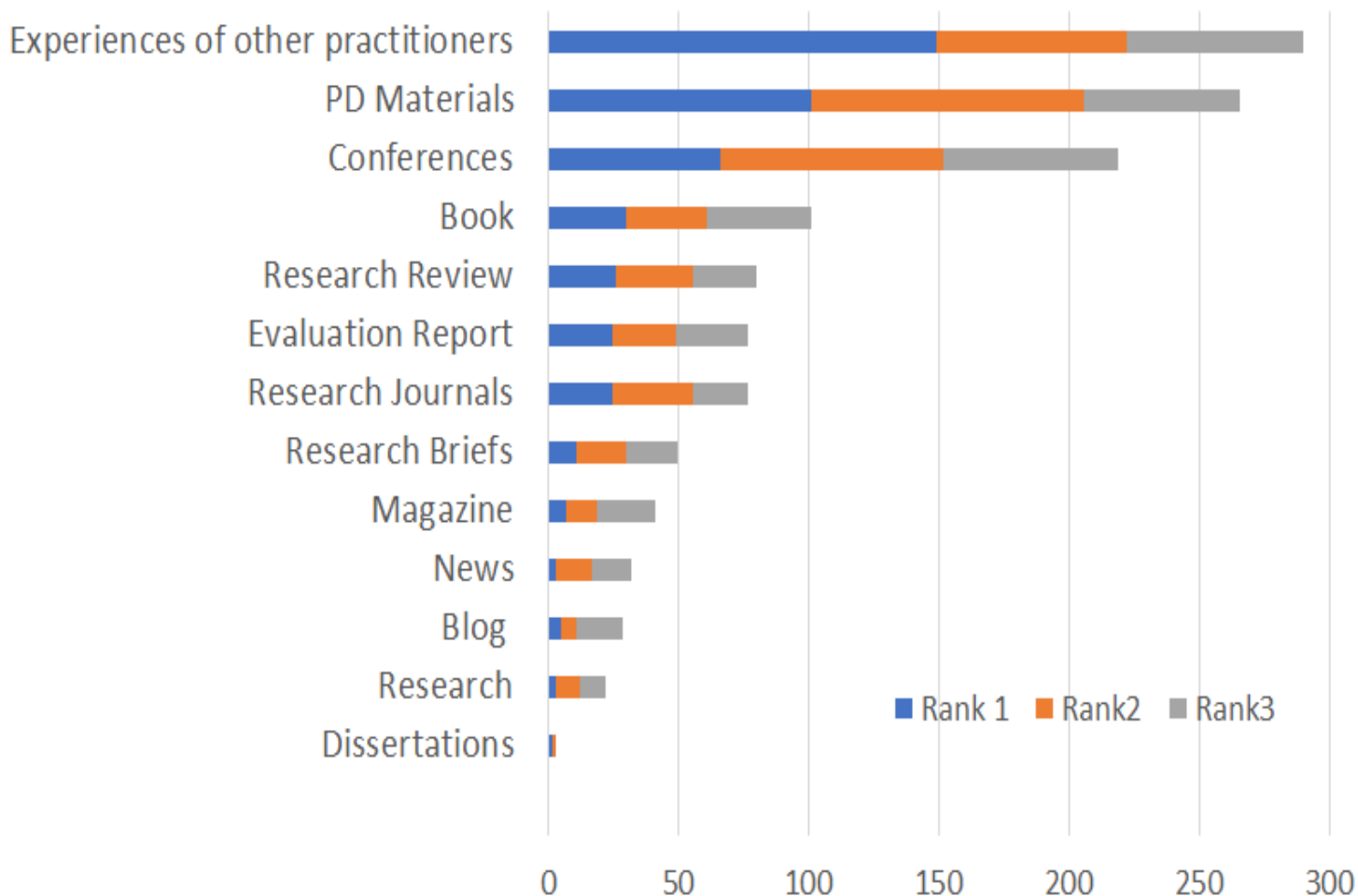
Forms of research leaders use

Education leaders in research-practice partnerships appear to come from a different population of users of research.

- Overall, RPP practitioners most frequently named journal articles (46%) as useful whereas national survey respondents most often named books (58%).
- In a professional association of state science leaders with a strong RPP, research reports or policy briefs made up 35% of named pieces, while peer-reviewed journal articles made up 27%.

Forms of evidence practitioners use

School-Based Practitioners' Rankings of Research Format Relied on Most





Organizational routines at schools

When asked about school structures that support research use, respondents noted the importance of routines over other supports:

- PLCs, instructional leadership teams, and instructional coaching as most frequent supports (n=250-300)
- Other types of supports, like PD for research use and staff or consultants with research use expertise were reported less than half as often (n=60-100).
- RPPs and district research offices were least likely to be reported as available supports (n=<25)

Organizational routines in district central offices



- Designing professional development, curricular materials, assessments
- School instructional walk-throughs
- Observation, coaching, evaluation cycles

Audience Discussion #3

What relationships do you have with educators at different levels of the system?

How, if at all, do these relationships shape your research?

What strategies do you use to engage educators with ideas or findings from your research?

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