One of the most important sets of leadership behaviors involves problem-solving and action planning. Yet, collaborative problem-solving processes are seldom taught in principal preparation programs and are rarely evident in administrators’ professional development activities. This Summer Institute is designed to teach principals and their leadership teams an effective school improvement strategy while they simultaneously work to address persistent problems in their schools.

Logic of action for leadership professional development: Principals and their leadership teams will learn best when working productively on the problems they face in their schools. This professional development model is intended to teach leadership teams a strategy for school improvement while simultaneously engaging in school improvement efforts that will bear fruit in the academic year following the Summer Institute.

Logic of action for school improvement: Gaps between school aspirations and school performance can be explained with data—both quantitative and qualitative. Root causes of such problems must be understood before promising solutions can be identified. Solutions mitigate or eliminate root causes, thereby improving or eliminating the identified gap. Collaboration is critical to create common understanding, a coalition energized to solve the problem, and sufficient forward momentum to achieve success. Small, manageable projects are more likely to drive positive change than attempts to focus the entire school on one large, top-down reform.

Summer Institute
Principals are asked to identify a problem they wish to address before the Summer Institute and bring at least some evidence (data) of the problem with them when they attend. The outcome of the Summer Institute will be a feasible action plan principals and their leadership teams can implement the following fall.

Principals and no more than three additional leaders from their schools will attend five full days of professional development that address the following issues through brief presentations, problem-solving using school data, and discussion.

Day 1
• Defining research-informed leadership
• Basis for improvement model: organizational learning and instructional leadership
• Understanding basic components of the improvement model:
  ➢ Problem identification and articulation
  ➢ Root cause analysis
  ➢ Using research
  ➢ Action planning
  ➢ Evaluation
• Collaboration—being a leader of learning and a learning leader
  ➢ Creating teams
  ➢ Working with helpful others
  ➢ Using consensus decision making

Day 2
• Problem identification—What is going on in your school?
• Data collection—quantitative and qualitative
• Creating knowledge from data

Day 3
• Root cause analysis—why does this problem exist and persist?
  ➢ Mining local data and knowledge to understand why
  ➢ Using research to learn what schools like ours are experiencing
• Reading research as a vital leadership skill
• Practice reading research

Day 4
• Identifying potential solutions without jumping too fast
• Defining a logic of action
• Setting meaningful action objectives

Day 5
Action-planning
• Explaining the problem and its root causes
• Tying specific actions to specific root causes
• Creating an action plan that explains:
  ➢ Who does what and by when
  ➢ What success looks like in terms of:
    ✓ Process—Are we making progress toward our goals? How will course corrections be made?
    ✓ Outcomes—What will we see along the way and at some end-point if we are making progress?
➢ Budget—How will resources need to be shifted? What new resources will be required?
➢ Evaluation:
  ✓ How will success be measured and observed?
  ✓ Who will do this work and by when?
  ✓ What are the consequences (both intended and unintended) from the improvement effort?
  • Starting the cycle again

Summer Institute Facilitators
S. David Brazer (Ph.D. Stanford University) is Associate Professor and Director of Leadership Degree Programs in the Stanford University Graduate School of Education. A former high school principal, Brazer’s primary research interests include decision making in schools and districts, school improvement, instructional leadership and teacher collaborative teams, and leadership preparation. Recent theoretical and empirical publications have appeared in Educational Administration Quarterly, Leadership and Policy in Schools, and various edited volumes. He is the second author (with Scott Bauer) of Using Research to Lead School Improvement: Turning Evidence into Action (2012, Sage Publications).

Scott Bauer (Ph.D. Cornell University) is Professor and Director of the Education Leadership Division in the College of Education and Human Development at George Mason University. Bauer’s research interests involve the application of organizational theory to the improvement of schools, and the efficacy of various strategies used to develop school leaders at all levels. His most recent publications deal with the development of teacher and administrative leaders, the organizational design of collaborative leadership strategies, and the redesign of university-based leadership preparation programs. Prior to his academic career, Bauer advised schools and districts in New York and New Jersey on how to make meaningful and lasting improvements.