

## Abstract

School leaders have a significant role in driving school improvement, particularly through their effective use of evidence. Yet, the literature is thin regarding how school leaders engage with evidence and the extent to which that evidence influences their decisions. Leveraging survey data from over 50 school leaders, we examine the influence of various sources of evidence on school leaders' decisions around supporting teachers and factors associated with the degree to which evidence influences those decisions. Findings suggest that **school leaders' decisions were influenced by multiple sources of evidence to varying degrees, school leaders fall into three evidence use profiles, and that individual and organizational factors influence being a strong evidence-integrator.**

## Research Questions

1. What **sources of evidence**— research, data, colleague's opinions or personal expertise— influence school leaders' decisions around supporting teachers? Does this vary by the type of decision?
2. What **profiles emerge** across decisions and sources of evidence?
3. What **individual and organizational factors** are associated with patterns of integrated evidence use across school leaders' decisions around supporting teachers?

## Method

Data for this study come from a larger national study on 12 professional learning partnerships in large, urban school districts that serve 50% or more students of color. Here, we leverage responses from a school leader survey (n=55) conducted during the 2020-2021 academic year.

We include three analytic approaches: (1) **descriptive analyses** to examine patterns of evidence influence, (2) **latent class analysis (LCA)** to identify school leader profiles based on their reported evidence influence, and (3) **OLS regression** using individual and organizational factors to explain variation in the probability of a school leader being classified as a strong evidence-integrator.

## Limitations

- We used a non-representative modest sample of 55 school leaders.
- We relied solely on survey data.
- We only examined school leader evidence use in the domain of teacher support and instruction.

## Results

### RQ (1)

- Each source of evidence had at least a small influence on school leader's decisions around supporting teachers.
- School leaders were more heavily influenced by data and their own expertise than by research and colleagues' opinions
- School leaders varied in the extent to which all sources of evidence influenced their decisions.

### RQ (2)

- LCA revealed a three-class model, that we labeled using differences in survey responses:
  - **Strong evidence-integrator** (45%) who used all sources at high rates
  - **Moderate evidence-integrator** (40%), who used all sources at moderate rates
  - **Expertise-non-integrator** (15%), who used their own expertise the most.

### RQ (3)

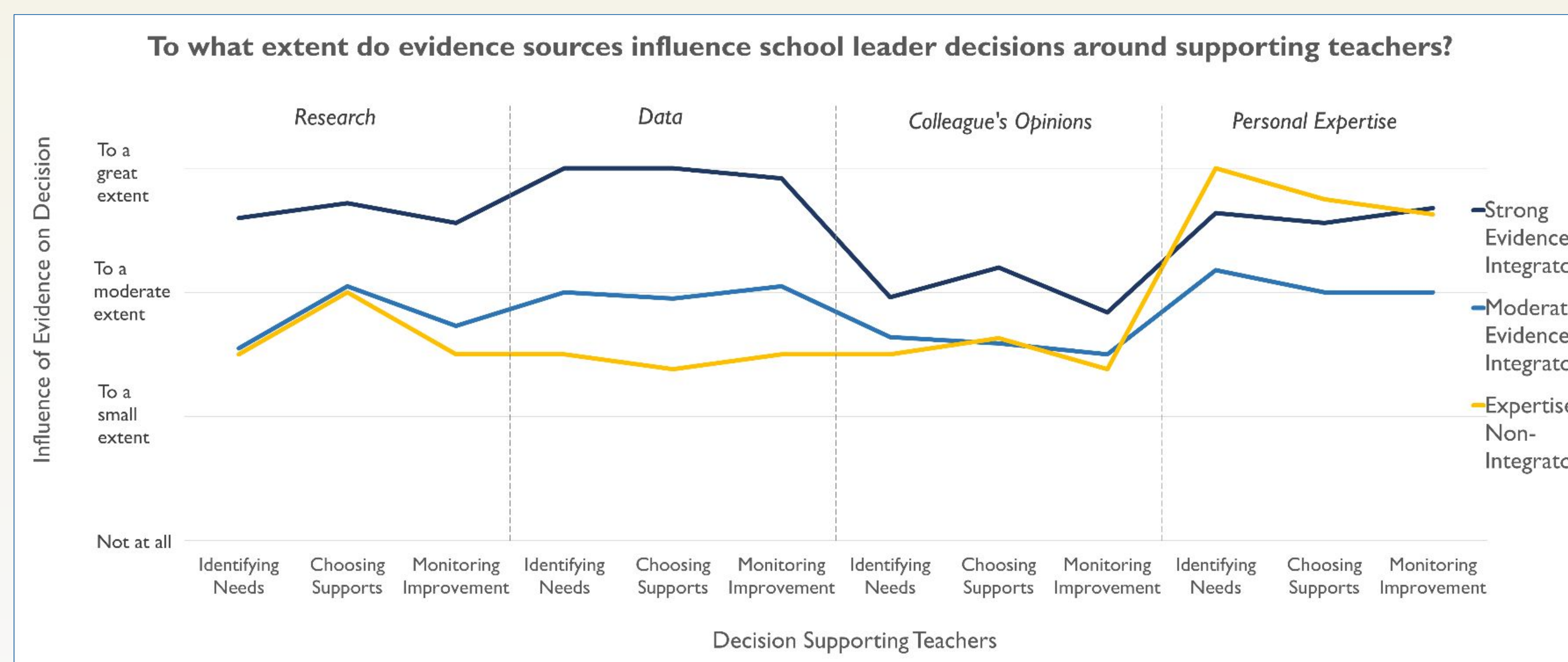
- Significant predictor of the probability of being a strong evidence-integrator were:
- Focus on instructional leadership (+)
  - District structures and processes (+)
  - Contextual challenges (-)
  - Support challenges (+)

## Conclusions

**Evidence use varies by school leader and by decision type.** School leaders varied in the extent to which research, data, colleague's opinions and personal expertise influenced their decisions, and the degree of influence differed based on the decision being made. In most cases, school leaders reported data and personal expertise as most influential across all three decisions. Yet, they reported the highest levels of research influence when choosing supports for teachers. School leaders reported that research was only moderately influential in their decisions compared to other sources of evidence.

**School leaders' evidence use fits into 3 profiles.** We found three distinct groups of evidence users among school leaders in our sample, indicating not all school leaders approach decision making in the same way, even when faced with the same types of decisions.

**Individual and organizational factors matter.** Increased focus on instructional leadership tasks, stronger district structures and processes surrounding evidence use, and increased support challenges (e.g., lack of professional learning opportunities) were associated with a higher probability that a school leader would be a strong evidence-integrator. Additionally, an increase in contextual challenges (e.g., turnover, changes in priorities) was associated with a lower probability that a school leader would be a strong evidence-integrator.



## Team

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