What are the specific district leadership behaviors that are associated with student achievement?

“In response to this question, we found five district-level leadership ‘responsibilities’ or ‘initiatives’ with a statistically significant correlation… Throughout this text, we will use the terms responsibilities and initiatives interchangeably to signify specific actions in which district leadership should engage. They are as follows…

**Ensuring Collaborative Goal Setting.** Effective district leaders include all relevant stakeholders, including central office staff, building-level administrators, and board members, in establishing nonnegotiable goals for their districts. In particular, they ensure that building-level administrators (principals) throughout the district are heavily involved in the goal-setting process since these are the individuals who, for all practical purposes, will implement articulated goals in schools. Involving principals and school board members in the goal-setting process does not imply that consensus must be reached among these stakeholders. However, it does imply that once stakeholders reach an acceptable level of agreement regarding district goals, all stakeholders agree to support the attainment of those goals.

**Establishing Nonnegotiable Goals for Achievement and Instruction.** Effective district leaders ensure that the collaborative goal-setting process results in nonnegotiable goals (goals that all staff members must act on) in at least two areas: (1) student achievement and (2) classroom instruction. This means that the district sets specific achievement targets for the district as a whole, for individual schools, and for subpopulations of students within the district. Once agree upon, the achievement goals are enacted in every school site. All staff members in each building are aware of the goals, and an action plan is created for those goals.

With respect to goals for classroom instruction, this responsibility does not mean that the district establishes a single instructional model that all teachers must employ. However, it does mean that the district adopts a broad but common framework for classroom instructional design and planning that guarantees the consistent use of research-based instructional strategies in each school.

Another characteristic of this responsibility is that all principals support district goals explicitly and implicitly. Explicit support means that school leaders engage in the behaviors in the preceding description. Implicit support means that building-level administrators do nothing to subvert the accomplishment of those goals such as criticizing district goals or subtly communicating that the goals the district has selected are inappropriate or unattainable.
**Creating Board Alignment With and Support of District Goals.** In effective districts, the local board of education is aligned with and supportive of the nonnegotiable goals for achievement and instruction. The board ensures that these goals remain the top priorities in the district and that no other initiatives deflect attention or resources from accomplishing these goals. Although other initiatives might be undertaken, they must directly relate to these two primary goals. Indeed, publicly adopting broad five-year goals for achievement and instruction and consistently supporting these goals, both publicly and privately, are precisely the board-level actions that are most directly related to student achievement.

It is not unusual that individual board members pursue their own interests and expectations for the districts they are elected to serve. Our findings suggest, however, that individual board members are not contributing to district success, but, in fact, may be working in opposition to that end when their interests and expectations distract attention from board-adopted achievement and instructional goals.

**Monitoring Achievement and Instructional Goals.** Effective superintendents continually monitor district progress toward achievement and instructional goals to ensure that these goals remain the driving force behind the district's actions. If not monitored continually, district goals can become little more than pithy refrains that are spoken at district and school events and highlighted in written reports. Effective superintendents ensure that each school regularly examines the extent to which it is meeting achievement targets. Discrepancies between articulated goals and current practices are interpreted as a need to change or to redouble efforts to enhance student achievement. In short, each school uses the achievement goals as the primary indicator of their success. The same can be said for instructional goals. Any discrepancies between expected teacher behavior in classrooms as articulated by agreed-upon instructional models and observed teacher behavior are taken as a call for corrective action.

**Allocating Resources to Support the Goals for Achievement and Instruction.** High-performing districts ensure that the necessary resources, including time, money, personnel, and materials, are allocated to accomplish the district's goals. This can mean cutting back on or dropping initiatives that are not aligned with district goals for achievement and instruction. Our analysis does not answer questions about the level of resources school districts must commit to supporting district achievement and instructional goals. However, it is clear from our analysis that a meaningful commitment of funding must be dedicated to professional development for teachers and principals. The professional development supported with this funding should be focused on building the requisite knowledge, skills, and competencies teachers and principals need to accomplish district goals. Furthermore, as professional development resources are deployed at the school level, they must be used in ways that align schools with district goals.”