



## Innovation can help us overcome persistent challenges in professional learning

Some educators pause with anxiety when they hear the word “innovation.” They have been involved in too many pilot projects or worked with people who were innovation magnets embracing new ideas for the love of change itself. As a result, many educators are innovation phobic, believing about the latest innovation that “this too shall pass.”

Today, we have an important opportunity to embrace innovation. The world is changing, the students we serve have different needs and

expectations, and education must adapt or schools, as we know them today, risk becoming obsolete. As leaders of professional learning, we have a responsibility to guide people successfully

through the transformation that innovation will support. We need to focus conversations about innovation on important issues, such as impact, scale, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Here are some persistent challenges in professional learning and ways innovation can help us overcome

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them and whet appetites for further exploration.

**It is too expensive for teachers to capture their own teaching to support deep reflection on their classrooms.** Video cameras are increasingly affordable and can be used effectively to support video capture to support individual reflection or team-based learning.

**We can’t afford mentors who give every teacher the time and attention they really need to perfect their craft and solidify their commitments to teaching as a career.** Online coaching and mentoring technologies can provide new teachers with real-time coaching and support and reduce isolation many experience.

**Assessments don’t provide the information teachers need when they need it to adjust instruction and help students perform better.** Tools that integrate assessment into the learning environment are evolving such that teachers and students can gauge where they stand in relation to what they need to continue learning.

**We do not have money for “fancy new technology.”** Does every student need every textbook? Reallocate textbook or other supplementary materials dollars toward resources that increase access to resources students need to go deeper in their subjects.

**K-12 schools and other schools and organizations do not always collaborate well.** There are too many examples of successful partnerships to cling to this belief. Consider colleges

(local and online) as partners for instruction. What can they offer to move your students on the pathway to college? Consider how their teachers contribute to your staffing and vice versa. View the entire community as your classroom. Operate from the assumption that everyone is vested in the success of your students.

**Contracts get in the way of anything we want to do.** We see a range of models that counter this conventional wisdom. Rewrite contracts to give you what you want to accomplish. Write memorandums of understanding between employees and employers. Be flexible — and ask for flexibility — as you stay focused on what is great for both students and adults.

This list is just a starting point to show how innovation can propel us forward. It is grounded in several critical assumptions:

- Our focus remains on student success and educator effectiveness.
- Learning must impact action at the individual, team, school, and system levels.
- Effectiveness of innovations must be measured by impact, replicability, scalability, efficiency, and cost.
- Innovation is not always a thing — it can be a structure, process, or product.

I welcome hearing your innovation stories, the barriers you have encountered and those you overcame, and other ways you have moved forward. ■