

# JSD

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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# JSD

theme COLLABORATION

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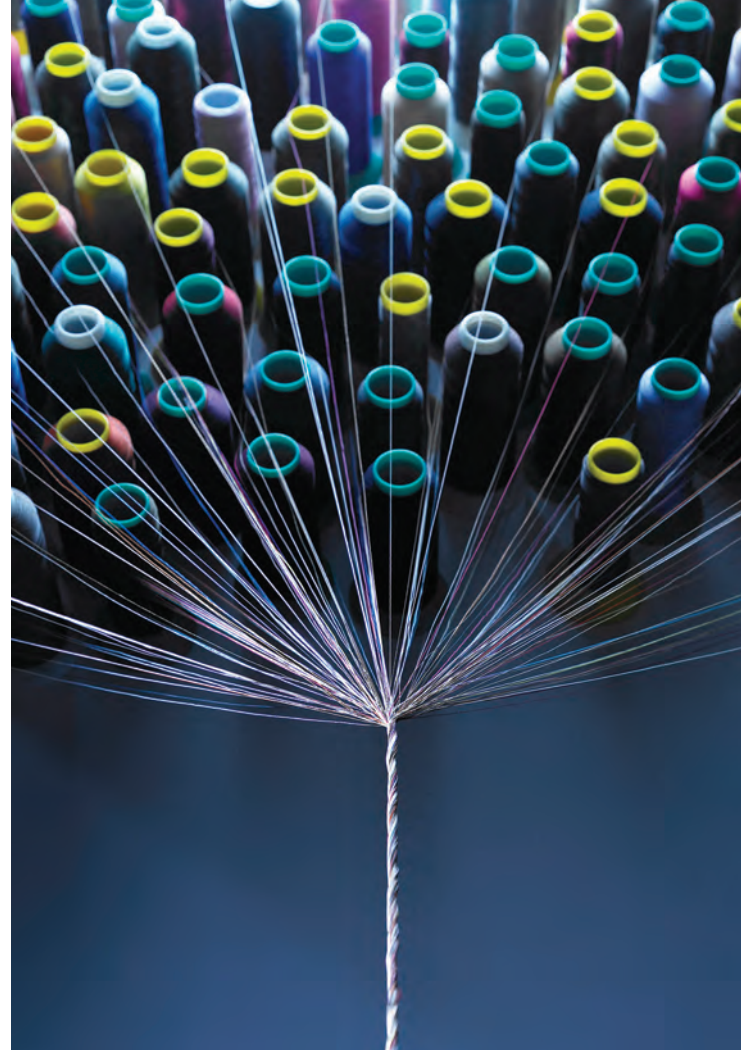
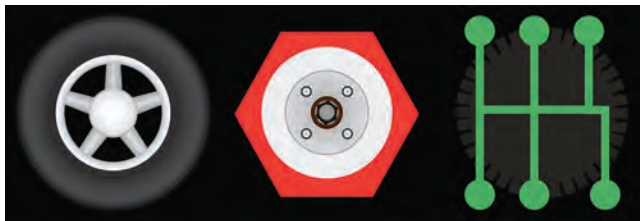
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## Time together is time well-spent only when educators know how to collaborate

Raise your hand if you've been in a workshop that included either of the following movie clips to illustrate what it means to really collaborate: the barn-raising scene in *Witness* or the scene in *Apollo 13* where Ed Harris dumps a box of miscellaneous parts on a table and tells a team to use those parts to solve a complex problem.

There's a reason many of you are familiar with these clips. Those are great scenes to lead into discussions about bringing together varied perspectives in high-stakes situations to solve pressing problems. Such clips help us understand why collaboration is absolutely critical and, at times, lifesaving. But I wonder what clips we'd use to illustrate how those teams got to that point. What made the scientists at NASA able to do that work together? Clearly, they had years of practice in communicating, challenging one another, listening, and making decisions quickly.

For groups to realize all of the benefits possible through collaboration, the people in those groups need to develop the knowledge and skills that support effective teamwork. That means that those who provide time and structures for group work also must

provide support in developing these skills.

If time to collaborate were the only resource necessary to create high-performing teams, then countless schools would be achieving at the higher levels that effective collaboration facilitates. But time for collaboration isn't enough. Knowledge and skills in how to use that time are equally essential.

Many of the learning designs that advance the goals of teams and individuals rely on these skills and more, whether the learning is face-to-face or incorporates technology and blended approaches.

Educators need expertise in several areas, including:

- **Group development:** Teams go through stages of development, and it's important for all members to recognize that.
- **Norms for working together:** Effective groups agree in advance that they will work together in certain ways.
- **Communication skills:** Teams need knowledge about how to talk and listen in ways that honor all members' perspectives and facilitate discussion and dialogue.
- **Conflict resolution:** Any group that hopes to solve trenchant challenges will need expertise in openly addressing disagreements to reach common understandings and solutions.
- **Decision making:** Groups may



be able to communicate well, but if they don't know what decisions to make and how to make them, they will not make progress toward goals.

- **Determining shared goals and visions:** When groups come together, their work can only be successful if they know what they hope to achieve.
- **Establishing trust:** Being open to frank discussion about individual beliefs and practices requires levels of relational trust that aren't necessarily typical in schools and school systems.

This issue of *JSD* explores collaboration's potential and the steps to take in developing group expertise. Effective teamwork is not something that comes naturally when people are given time to work together. If school and system leaders don't attend to this element of professional learning, their efforts to provide daily or weekly team time will be wasted, and stakeholders involved in supporting such time will justifiably lose faith in what we purport collaboration can achieve. ■

•  
**Tracy Crow (tracy.crow@learningforward.org) is director of communications for Learning Forward.**



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— 2012 Summer Conference attendee

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## DIGITAL LEARNING

### Blended Learning Implementation Guide

*Digital Learning Now!, February 2013*

This is the fifth in a series of interactive papers offering guidance on the adoption of Common Core State Standards and the shift to digital learning. The authors assert that by the end of the decade, most U.S. schools will fully incorporate instructional technology — extending the learning day, expanding the reach of effective teachers, and increasing personalized learning. The paper presents a series of decisions to guide implementation. The authors intend to capture and update best practices as schools make the shift. Education leaders and practitioners are encouraged to submit comments and engage with the authors through their websites, blogs, and social media.

[www.digitalllearningnow.com/dln-smart-series](http://www.digitalllearningnow.com/dln-smart-series)

## TEACHER LEADERS

### Finding a New Way: Leveraging Teacher Leadership to Meet Unprecedented Demands

*The Aspen Institute, February 2013*

School systems that provide their highest-performing teachers with leadership roles can elevate the profession and increase the impact of top talent. Developing teacher leadership means rethinking evaluation, compensation, distributed leadership, and even what we see as the role of teachers and the way we organize instruction. Author Rachel Curtis outlines a process for establishing shared purpose for teacher leadership and career pathways, designing and implementing systems and structures that support this work, and learning from teacher leadership efforts. The paper also includes profiles of school systems leading the effort to create teacher leadership and career pathways.



<http://bit.ly/Z8m0sd>

## MICHIGAN REPORT CARD

### The Public's Agenda for Public Education: How Michigan Citizens Want to Improve Student Learning

*The Center for Michigan, January 2013*

Michigan residents want expanded early childhood programs, better teacher preparation, and strong support for and greater accountability from educators. These are the priorities gleaned from statewide community conversations with 7,500 residents. The Center for Michigan, a nonprofit, nonpartisan organization, reports that Michigan citizens view the state's public school system as mediocre at best, with the majority giving the system a grade of C or lower. The report highlights seven ways citizens can work for change, including joining a policy task force, writing to legislators, and volunteering locally with education-focused organizations.

<http://bit.ly/14dDRQK>



## SCHOOL LEADER CHALLENGES

### The MetLife Survey of the American Teacher: Challenges for School Leadership

*MetLife, February 2013*

This 29th report in the MetLife series examines the views of teachers and principals on the responsibilities and challenges facing school leaders, including the changing roles of principals and teachers, budget and resources, professional satisfaction, and implementation of Common Core State Standards for college and career readiness. Among the key findings:

- The job of principal is becoming more complex and stressful.
- The biggest challenges leaders face are beyond the capacity of schools alone to address.
- Principals and teachers have similar views on academic challenges, but diverge somewhat on their priorities for leadership.
- Teacher satisfaction continues to decline.
- Educators are confident about implementing the Common Core, less so about its potential for increasing student success.

[www.metlife.com/teachersurvey](http://www.metlife.com/teachersurvey)







## URBAN PRINCIPALS

### Districts Matter: Cultivating the Principals Urban Schools Need

*The Wallace Foundation, February 2013*

This report distills insights from school leadership projects and major studies supported by the foundation to highlight key district actions to boost school leadership, including creating meaningful job descriptions and mentoring novice principals. Two chief areas of responsibility for districts are to build a large corps of well-qualified candidates for the principalship

and support school leaders on the job. Included are interviews and information about large school districts that already have put into place efforts to develop principals, such as New York City, Charlotte-Mecklenburg, N.C., and Hillsborough County, Fla.

<http://bit.ly/XYsb9j>

## TEACHER EVALUATION

### Using Teacher Evaluation Reform and Professional Development to Support Common Core Assessments

*Center for American Progress, February 2013*

Drawing on the notion of “standard of care” from the field of medicine, this report notes that advances in our understanding of subject matter, pedagogy, how students learn, and technology call for teachers to continually acquire new knowledge and to refine their instructional practices by participating in comprehensive professional development on a regular basis. Several new approaches to evaluating teachers hold promise for promoting this type of ongoing teacher learning and changes in instruction, including classroom observation protocols, student surveys, value-added models, and teacher performance assessments. The report details these approaches, explaining their potential to strongly support the enactment of Common Core standards and assessments as well as the challenges connected with implementing them.

<http://bit.ly/10mSG4f>



## IMPROVING FEEDBACK

### Feedback for Better Teaching:

#### Nine Principles for Using Measures of Effective Teaching

*Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, January 2013*

Based on three years of work by the Measures of Effective Teaching project, this brief outlines guiding principles for the design and implementation of high-quality teacher support and evaluation systems. The nine principles fall into three categories:

- **Measure effective teaching:** Set expectations, use multiple measures, and balance the weights of those measures.
- **Ensure high-quality data:** Monitor validity, ensure reliability, and assure accuracy.
- **Invest in improvement:** Make meaningful distinctions, prioritize support and feedback, and use data for decisions at all levels.

<http://bit.ly/13jYDxG>

## JSD STAFF

Editor: Tracy Crow

Managing editor: Sue Chevalier

Designer: Kitty Black

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**Courageous Conversations About Race: A Field Guide for Achieving Equity in Schools**

*By Glenn E. Singleton and Curtis Linton*

Selected as NSDC's book of the year in 2006, this book is written from a professional learning context in schools. Singleton and Linton offer a framework to encourage educators to examine their beliefs about race openly to reach solutions for offering all students equitable learning opportunities in schools. The authors build on a frame of educator passion, practice, and persistence and offer tools and rationale. (*Corwin Press, 2006*)

# WE NEED *to* TALK

**P**roductive conversations are a central element of collaborative learning, and, in many cases, those conversations are difficult because of disagreements and conflicts. Here are resources that tackle how to approach contentious conversations. Many include tools and protocols, and each offers a particular framework to guide how to handle this tough topic.

IN THIS ISSUE OF *JSD* **THE LEARNING STARTS HERE** ▼

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TWEETED BY @LEARNINGFORWARD:

**We're curious:** What collaboration skills do you find to be essential for your work in professional learning teams? How do you build them?

**@VaelHeidi says:** Nonjudgmental feedback, authentic listening, shared decision making, open communication, inclusion.

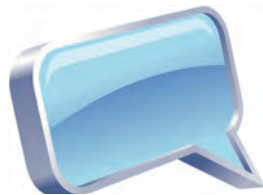
**@kindtwinsmom says:** Talking with teachers about the difference between inquiry and advocacy and the need to be explicit in what you are doing.



**Crucial Conversations:  
Tools for Talking  
When Stakes Are High,**  
2nd edition

By Kerry Patterson,  
Joseph Grenny,  
Ron McMillan,  
and Al Switzler

This communication model emerges from a corporate training context and emphasizes establishing skills to hold conversations when stakes and emotions are high and those conversing have different opinions. The framework helps those communicating create a safe environment for talking, stay in control of emotions while being open to other perspectives, and move toward mutually beneficial results. (McGraw-Hill, 2012)



**Difficult Conversations:  
How to Discuss What  
Matters Most,** 10th  
anniversary edition

By Douglas Stone, Bruce  
Patton, and Sheila Heen

From the Harvard Negotiation Project, the authors write about managing tough conversations, which happen in every organization or family, no matter how well-managed, effective, or seemingly happy. Among key points in the book are the need to avoid blame in conversations and the importance of acknowledging the emotions present in a difficult interaction so that they don't continue to create tensions. (Penguin Books, 2010)

**Fierce Conversations:  
Achieving Success  
at Work and in Life  
One Conversation  
at a Time**

By Susan Scott

As columnist for *JSD*, Scott and her colleagues explore what it means to make conversations fierce or "real" because conversations *are* the relationships between people. The fierce model is based on seven principles, including mastering the courage to interrogate reality, taking responsibility for your emotional wake, and letting silence do the heavy lifting. See the latest column on p. 58. (Berkley Trade, 2004)



**Having Hard  
Conversations**

By Jennifer Abrams

In moving from working with kids as a teacher to working with adults as a coach, Abrams realized that she hadn't developed the skills to have difficult conversations. This conversation model builds on a basic foundation of getting clear about why we aren't speaking up, crafting what we'll talk about, and communicating using the right words in the right time and place. (Corwin Press, 2009)

## TRUST

Trust is crucial to open and productive collaboration. Studies indicate a relationship between trusting relationships in schools and higher student achievement. In their work exploring trust in schools, Wayne Hoy and Megan Tschannen-Moran define five elements of trust:

### Benevolence

Confidence that one's well-being or something one cares about will be protected by the trusted party ... the assurance that others will not exploit one's vulnerability or take advantage even when the opportunity is available.

### Honesty

The trusted person's character, integrity, and authenticity ... acceptance of responsibility for one's actions and not distorting the truth in order to shift blame to another.

### Openness

The extent to which relevant information is shared ... openness signals reciprocal trust.

### Reliability

Consistency of behavior and knowing what to expect from others ... a sense of confidence that one's needs will be met in positive ways.

### Competency

The ability to perform as expected and according to standards appropriate to the task at hand.

Explore these ideas and related tools in a 2010 issue of *Tools for Schools*, available at <http://bit.ly/10VX870>.

**Source:** Hoy, W.K. & Tschannen-Moran, M. (2003). The conceptualization and measurement of faculty trust in schools. In W. Hoy & C. Miskel (Eds.), *Studies in leading and organizing schools* (pp. 181-208). Greenwich, CT: Information Age Publishing.

# THE COLLABORATIVE COMPACT

OPERATING PRINCIPLES LAY THE GROUNDWORK FOR SUCCESSFUL GROUP WORK

By Robert J. Garmston and Diane P. Zimmerman

**T**he meeting was finished, and some teachers lingered. We had just completed grade-level revisions on writing rubrics. One teacher said, “I wish all collaboration could be this effective. We got so much done!” From a collaborative standpoint, the meeting had been a success. The group stayed focused, all teachers had had a voice, they had accomplished what was expected and learned more about writing through conversation with peers. Most importantly, they left renewed and excited about working to improve learning.

In contrast, leaders often have common complaints about managing meetings and feel thwarted by attempts to collaborate. The list of complaints is exhaustive. They complain about the intrusion of technology, lack of focus, rudeness, conflicts, low engagement, and more. When teachers report on collaborative experiences, the list becomes the flipside of the same problem. Teachers feel that time spent on collaboration is often wasted because of poor meeting management. Many times, the agendas contain topics of low interest, a few people dominate the conversation, some become emotional or defensive, and often colleagues are off task.



Because time is the educator's most valuable asset, a moral imperative is that all leaders pay attention to and guarantee excellent facilitation (Garmston, 2012) and appropriate interventions (Garmston & Zimmerman, in press). When leaders know how to facilitate with elegance and intervene to maintain engagement, they teach by example and create smart collaborators. Accordingly, group members learn to be facilitative participants — to manage their own behavior and support their colleagues in thinking together. They are able to transfer these skills to collaboration with others in any context, including the classroom.

Leaders can accelerate collaboration by creating collaborative compacts. A collaborative compact is a set of accords about how a group will function. Collaborative compacts ought to focus on four areas of agreement: How we work together, how we think together, how we work with conflicts, and how we manage our own behavior. What follows here is an example of a collaborative compact that includes examples of what might be included. Leaders are encouraged to use this as a starting place and, over time, customize the compact based on issues that are pertinent to each group. This example includes a rationale and suggested interventions, but these would not be part of a final compact. A collaborative compact must be developed through collaboration, and we offer this extra information to start the dialogue.

#### GETTING STARTED

Begin with a conversation about collaborative work — what pleases or discourages the group — and how

★ **How we agree to work together, p. 12**

★ **How we agree to think together, p. 13**

★ **How we work with conflicts, p. 14**

★ **How we manage our own behavior, p. 16**

participants would like to agree to improve their level of collaboration. Suggest the group consider a collaborative compact, not as a set of rules, but as principles that might guide their work. Have pairs read and comment to one another about the ideas. Talk about the ideas as a full group, and determine what they would like in their own compact that can be committed to print.

Collaboration is not something that just happens. Collaboration is worth striving for. It is built out of the experience of humankind in our day-to-day push for honest, authentic interactions and a commitment to be responsible collaborators. When groups find this space, they experience dignity, power, and renewal.

**Robert J. Garmston (fabob@aol.com) is co-developer and founder of the Center for Cognitive Coaching and the Center for Adaptive Schools. Diane P. Zimmerman (dpzimmer@gmail.com) is director of Fusion Resolution, consulting in visual literacy, the linguistics of leadership, constructivist learning, and communities of practice.**

## HOW WE AGREE TO WORK TOGETHER

These agreements comprise a set of standards about how group members are going to interact with one other. These would take the place of a more formal compact, such as *Robert's Rules of Order*, useful for preventing chaos in formal meetings, but inappropriate to support creative thinking in collaborative work groups.

### Meeting standards:

- Group members discuss only one topic at a time.
- Members use only one process at a time.
- Participation in the meeting is balanced.
- Conflict about ideas is encouraged, but affective conflict is eliminated.
- Group members understand and agree on meeting roles — typically, facilitator, recorder, group member, and person with role or knowledge authority (Garmston & Wellman, 2009).

**Rationale:** In a seminal work, Michael Doyle and David Straus (1976) investigated the question: *What is the minimum number of meeting standards a group must follow to be on task, take minimum time to reach objectives, and achieve high levels of satisfaction?* They identified the above list, which is an appropriate starting place for all groups.

**Intervention:** Use this list for reflection about the success of the collaboration. Ask the group to evaluate each standard on a scale of 1 to 5 and use the data to improve collaborative practices (Garmston, 2012).

### Working agreements:

- Demonstrate mutual respect: Be hard on ideas and soft on people.
- Listen to understand: Seek first to understand, then to be understood. Use paraphrases to communicate understanding and inquire before advocating. Paraphrasing is an essential attribute of smart groups, enabling them to solve complex problems (Losada & Heaphy, 2004).
- Be present: Eliminate personal distractions and participate.
- Check in with silence: When group members seem disengaged, check in with them by asking what they are thinking or feeling.

**Rationale:** These agreements are best developed in collaboration by asking group members to identify unproductive behaviors that they would like to eliminate from meetings. When participants start with their own problems and turn them into positive assets, the agreements become personal, meeting the unique needs of the group.

**Intervention:** Structure periodic self-reflection to allow group members to develop, refine, and make habitual their skills of self-observation and analysis. Because educators always have more tasks than time, many task-oriented groups resist this notion at first. Eventually they realize any group that is too busy to reflect on its work is too busy to improve.

## HOW WE AGREE TO THINK TOGETHER

The true work of collaboration is to enter the zone of deep thinking, where participants are engaged, thoughtful, and articulate in their commitment to learn together (Zimmerman, 2013).

- **Signal thinking time:** Set aside topics of administrative trivia and focus instead on students, curriculum, and assessment. Despite members' best efforts, the mundane creeps into meetings. Therefore, it is important to signal thinking time when participants put away distractions and focus on the topic.
- **Clear focus:** Individual group members need to monitor their own focus, and, when it starts to wane, consider options for intervention, such as changing their mental state, using a clarifying paraphrase or question, observing processes, or by noting that it might be time for a transition.
- **Develop sufficient consensus:** Work to understand all views, distinguish between dialogue and discussion, give each person an equal voice, and seek at least 75% agreement to constitute consensus.

**Rationale:** David Bohm (1990) distinguishes between discussion and dialogue. Bohm describes discussion like a Ping-Pong game in which ideas bounce around, never coalescing. When paraphrasing and questioning are used judiciously, the conversation slows down and shifts to dialogue, becoming a container for building shared understanding (Williamson & Zimmerman, 2009). According to Bohm, dialogue groups create a “stream of meaning” — a deeper understanding that creates a group identity around a shared vision or mission.

**Intervention:** When individuals simultaneously engage in dialogue and discussion — an unproductive time for participants — a member can call attention to the inconsistency, helping the group refocus. A member might say, “I notice that we are repeating ideas, and I think we are ready to make a transition. I am ready for the group to summarize where we think we are to see if we are ready to move on.”

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## HOW WE WORK WITH CONFLICTS

Groups cannot get to true collaboration unless they know how to tackle contentious issues and work with conflicts as a creative source. Some groups tend toward pseudo-community, in which conflicts are minimized or swept under the rug. These groups make poor decisions that are rarely carried out. Groups with healthy interchanges about conflicting ideas and perspectives make sound decisions that groups commit to. This is a hallmark of true collaboration.

- **Know your relationship to conflict:** When group members reflect on their reaction to conflict — going internal, joining the argument, or seeking creative tension — they begin to understand how their behavior can inadvertently contribute to or even escalate the conflict.
- **State the conflict:** Giving a hot button a name frames the conflict as a thing, allowing the group to be tough on ideas, not on people.
- **Summarize viewpoints:** Groups tend to overwork a conflict. Ask a few of the more silent participants to summarize viewpoints to allow the entire group to gain clarity and know what next steps to take.
- **Agree to disagree:** When members know where they disagree, they can more coherently communicate about issues and often are surprised to eventually find common ground.

**Rationale:** Chadwick (2010) found that groups work through conflicts when opposing sides state their issues and then create common statements on which they agree.

**Intervention:** Provide tightly structured processes that focus conversation and provide psychological safety, allowing members to articulate hard-to-talk-about topics. Even one enlightened group member can change the flow by saying something like, “There seem to be two camps on this debate. One group favors censoring student choice, the other favors free choice. I would like to pause and ask the group to summarize the key issues.”





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## HOW WE MANAGE OUR OWN BEHAVIOR

Each person in a meeting is responsible for his or her own behavior, while also being mindful how he or she responds in context. For example, one vociferous group member candidly stated, “I talk more because so many of you are silent. It makes me crazy when participants are silent.”

- **Honesty:** If a group member plans to go to the parking lot and complain, he or she needs to be honest with the group and speak up. This four-step complete messages sequence can help (McKay, Davis, & Fanning, 1983):

1. **Express observations.** “I notice that out of the group of 15, only three people are carrying on the conversation.”
2. **Express thoughts.** “I think this might be because some of us do not want to get into conflict.”
3. **Express feelings.** “I am concerned that we are wasting time and will leave here with a false sense of agreement.”
4. **Express needs.** “I suggest we stop the debate and summarize the various viewpoints, and then figure out what the group needs next.”

- **Care enough to stay focused:** If the agenda topic is not personally meaningful, commit to help the group with process interventions (Garmston & Zimmerman, in press). This can be a great gift to the group.

- **Personal commitment:** Successful collaboration inspires commitment. Each participant is responsible for making those commitments public so that the group is accountable.

**Rationale:** When participants speak from emotion, they often do not give enough information to help one another understand their state of mind. Stating observations, paired with the emotion, followed by stating needs, clears up many misunderstandings. Likewise, if participants really do not care about the topic, they sometimes choose the most expedient solution.

“Satisficing” is a strategy of expediency that works well for nonessential decisions but creates blind spots for more complex decisions. This strategy is more common than most of us would like to think. Many will adopt the first solution suggested by a group member to just get the job done. While this may be efficient in some circumstances, it is ineffective for groups that seek shared meanings and a common language. Satisficing short-circuits the conversation and assumes all agree, when, in reality, the only agreement was complicity to rush to a solution.

**Intervention:** When group members are honest about their own level of personal engagement, they can offer to play another role. For example, a teacher might say, “I do not have a lot of interest in the topic today. To keep me focused, I would like to offer to facilitate and use paraphrasing to summarize our ideas. Is that OK with the group?”



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# ALL ABOARD!

**IN ONE IOWA DISTRICT,  
ALL TEACHERS AND PRINCIPALS  
ARE ON THE SAME JOURNEY**

**By Deb Hansen,  
Colleen Anderson,  
Linda Munger,  
and Mitzi Chizek**

**C**ollaborative learning teams are improving teacher practice and student learning results in the Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District near Des Moines, Iowa.

Since 2009, all teachers and principals in the district have participated in collaborative learning teams to study a process known as assessment for learning, in which formative assessment practices provide students with clear learning targets, examples and models of strong and weak work, regular descriptive feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals (Iowa Department of Education & Iowa Area Education Agencies, 2011, p. 12).

Achievement results demonstrate the initiative's impact on students. The percentage of students rated proficient in reading, science, and social studies on the Iowa Assessments at the secondary level also showed growth. In 2012, more than

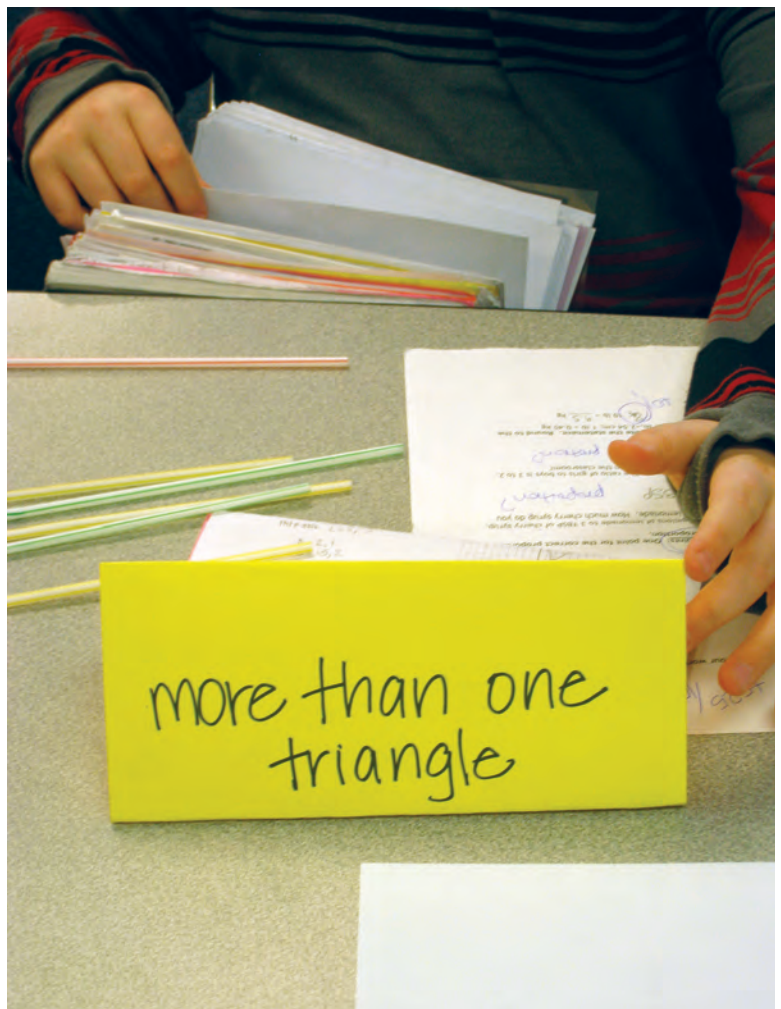


Photo by MITZI CHIZEK

**Teachers in Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District are learning to use formative assessment, such as this example for 7th-grade math students. Formative assessment provides students with clear learning targets, models, feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals.**

90% of students in grades 9-11 rated proficient in science and social studies and more than 87% in reading. In 2012, more than 80% of students in grades 3-11 rated proficient in all subtests of the Iowa Assessments for the first time. (See student results on p. 20.)

Mitzi Chizek, associate superintendent and director of professional growth for the Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District, leads the initiative, which uses collaboration along with an unrelenting focus on improving student learning through improved practices in curriculum, instruction, and assessment.

#### HOW THE INITIATIVE BEGAN

The Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District consists of one high school, two middle schools, three elementary schools, and a preschool center serving 2,560 students in rural Iowa. Each year, the district looks at the results of standardized tests along with other district data. Although the scores were good, they were stagnant in terms of growth.

To address this, the district chose formative assessment. A statement by W. James Popham in his book, *Transformative Assessment* (ASCD, 2008), resonated with district leaders: “Students who routinely experience the classroom benefits of less-than-perfect formative assessment will be better off educationally than will students whose teachers have discarded formative assessment because ‘it’s too darn much work’ ” (Popham, 2008, p. x).

The district also chose collaborative learning teams as the best way to integrate formative assessment into teachers’ everyday practice.

The professional development closely follows the assessment for learning approach established by a team of instructional designers from external assistance providers, including the Iowa Department of Education, Learning Forward, the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing, North Central Comprehensive Center, the Iowa Area Education Agencies, and local school districts. They worked together for two years to design a series of modules and supporting materials.



Mitzi Chizek

#### WHY LEARNING TEAMS WORK

Factors that contribute to a shared sense of responsibility and fully functioning learning teams at Dallas Center-Grimes include:

- A clearly articulated focus about which practices teachers need to learn to improve student learning;
- A common vision that being student-focused is the district’s priority, and everybody is individually and collectively responsible for student achievement;
- The expectation that all staff will engage in professional learning and use their professional development time to accomplish student learning goals;
- Protected time built into the workday for collaboration; and
- Leadership demonstrated at every level of the organization.

*Exploring the Iowa Core Facilitator’s Guide*, a resource prepared by the Iowa Department of Education and Iowa Area Education Agencies (2011), served as a road map for conducting effective collaborative learning teams. Learning Forward created Innovation Configuration maps for facilitating peer coaching. The instructional designers created a set of six practice profiles for educators to self-assess their level of implementation and learning of the formative assessment process and practices.

The Iowa Area Education Agencies and the Iowa Department of Education jointly developed the content, and the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing and the North Central Comprehensive Center provided feedback and peer reviews. Teachers and school administrators from several local school districts piloted the modules, offered refinements, and suggested ways to strengthen the training materials.

To ensure district leaders had the skills to support collaborative learning teams and building leadership teams, the Iowa Area Education Agencies provided professional development on how to structure, manage, and facilitate collaborative learning teams.

## STUDENT RESULTS

### 2011-12 Scholastic Math Inventory results

| Grade | Below proficiency |      | Advanced |      |
|-------|-------------------|------|----------|------|
|       | 2011              | 2012 | 2011     | 2012 |
| 6     | 31%               | 9%   | 12%      | 27%  |
| 7     | 19%               | 15%  | 9%       | 15%  |
| 8     | 27%               | 11%  | 8%       | 11%  |

### Scholastic Math Inventory

**D**allas Center-Grimes Community School District uses the Scholastic Math Inventory to assess all middle school students (grades 6-8) in math standards. This assessment aligns to the Iowa Common Core. In 2011-12, the percentage of students who scored below proficiency decreased, while the percentage of students ranked advanced increased in all three grades.

### Iowa Assessments

**O**n the Iowa Assessments, the number of students in grades 7-11 rated proficient in math increased from 2010 to 2012.

The percentage of students rated proficient in reading, science, and social studies on the Iowa Assessments at the secondary level also showed growth. In 2012, more than 90% of the students in grades 9-11 rated proficient in science and social studies and more than 87% in reading.

In 2012, more than 80% of students in grades 3-11 rated proficient in all subtests of the Iowa Assessments for the first time.

When the district first started using formative assessment practices in 2009, 7.5% of students were on Individualized Education Programs. By 2012, that number dropped to 6.6%. This is consistent with Dylan William and Paul Black's (2010) assertion that formative assessment has the greatest impact on struggling learners.

Percentage of students rated proficient in math on the Iowa Assessments

| Grade | 2010  | 2012  |
|-------|-------|-------|
| 7     | 90.4% | 92%   |
| 8     | 88.5% | 93.9% |
| 9     | 84%   | 91.3% |
| 10    | 81.9% | 89.4% |

Source: Iowa Testing Service.

## ASSESSMENT FOR LEARNING

The district's goal is for all teachers in the district to implement research-based assessment for learning practices. Chizek says that intentional, ongoing, and in-depth collaboration is key to getting teachers to implement newly learned knowledge and skills.

A team of facilitators, using methods specifically designed for assessment for learning, worked with principals and teachers, honing participants' skills to lead and engage in collaborative teams. Facilitator training, supported by the *Exploring the Iowa Core Facilitator's Guide*, helped administrators and teacher leaders learn how to form and maintain teams and use a comprehensive set of tools and protocols.

The training focuses on the collaborative skills needed to increase team effectiveness and productivity, such as establishing and monitoring norms, adopting roles (e.g. facilitator, time-keeper, recorder), setting goals, building trust, resolving disagreements, and analyzing data (Iowa Department of Education & Iowa Area Education Agencies, 2011; Killion & Roy, 2009).

Video clips of an effective collaborative learning team meeting demonstrated various roles and skills needed to lead and participate in team meetings. Teams used action plans to structure collaborative learning, establish the sequence for the modules, set timelines, and craft session agendas.

Each module includes practice activities and time to enable members to support each other's learning and practice. The assessment for learning training materials were explicitly designed to address NSDC's Standards for Staff Development (which

have since been revised as Standards for Professional Learning), particularly the Collaboration standard (NSDC, 2001).

## COLLABORATIVE LEARNING TEAMS

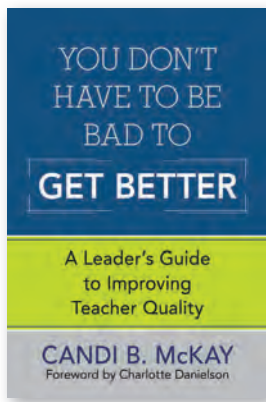
According to Chizek, the district's collaborative learning teams are highly productive, engaged in meaningful learning, and have contributed to significant improvements in teaching and assessment practices across the district.

She acknowledged that it has taken time and effort for teams to develop the skills to become fully productive. Brad Grout, an 8th-grade language arts teacher, and high school math teacher Rich Kloster agree that developing collaborative skills and maintaining a collaborative culture are important.

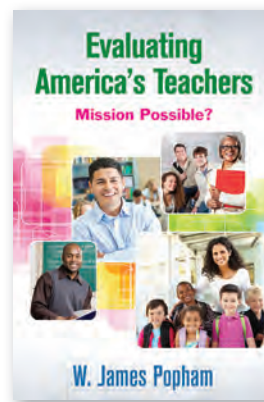
"Gone are the days you sit alone in your room," says Kloster. "Collaboration has focused my job as a teacher and has specifically defined what we want kids to learn. Collaboration provides a sense of direction and a sense of purpose that is strengthened by talking to other teachers."

Grout agrees. "We used to try to change minds by shoving things at people," he says. "Now we are getting teachers to talk about their practices and say how they feel about what they are learning. This is the only way to change teacher practice."

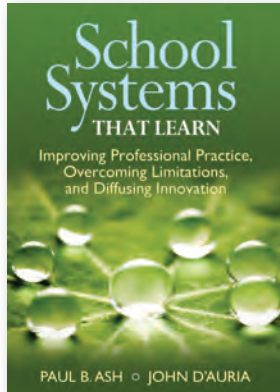
Both teachers and Chizek say the assessment for learning protocols and routines helped staff move from "collaboration lite," where interactions tended to be more convivial, to more purposeful interactions that engage teachers in reflective inquiry about student needs and squarely aim at improved classroom practice. Teachers appreciate having clearly defined roles, such



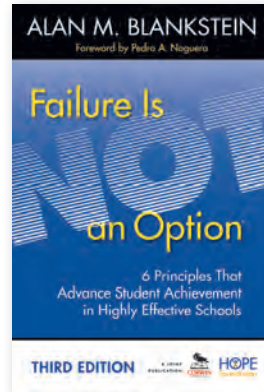
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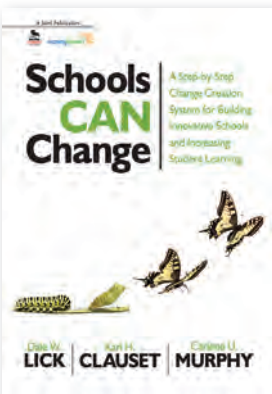
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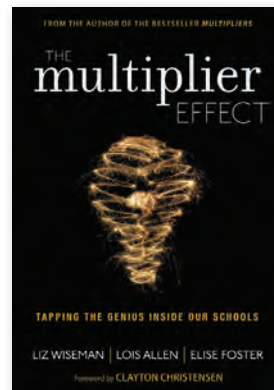
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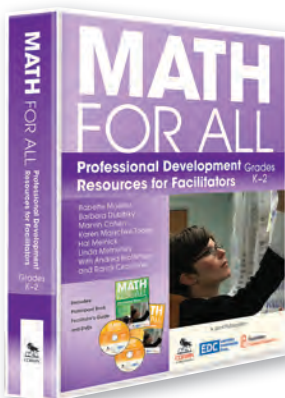
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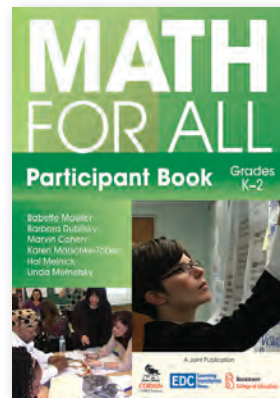
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as facilitator, agenda setter, recorder, and timekeeper, to sustain their team and are confident about assuming these roles during meetings.

Grout and Kloster say that by the fourth year of the initiative, they felt a sense of mastery of assessment for learning practices as well as the skills to engage collaboratively with peers. Kloster notes that the application of collaborative skills has transferred to his classroom practice. For example, being intentional about norms in the adult group setting has helped him to be more purposeful about setting up norms in his classroom.

Collaborative learning teams have enabled district faculty to demonstrate a collective sense of responsibility for ensuring that students succeed. There is an expectation that dialogue in team

meetings is about the students. If discussion drifts to complaining or is off task, a team member will redirect the group to stay on topic and bring the group back to focusing on student needs. Grout’s team has an agreement that members will never leave a discussion about a student without resolving what they will do to help.

### HOW THE PROCESS WORKS

This assessment for learning approach uses Moodle, a virtual learning environment, to facilitate the process. The Moodle course provides the building leadership team and the collaborative learning teams with tools and resources to coordinate learning in their school.

Resources include sample agendas, team guidelines, reading materials, video presentations, social networking options, and demonstrations. Chizek says the Moodle technology made access to training materials and resources easy and enhanced her ability to conduct professional learning.

All teams begin with an introductory course to learn shared vocabulary and background for successful completion of the other modules, which include learning intentions, eliciting evidence/instructional modifications, descriptive feedback, self- and peer assessment, collaborative classroom climate, and putting it into practice. Each collaborative learning team uses a self-assessment tool called practice profiles to compile data needed to design a sequence that best meets the team’s needs.

Completing all seven modules can take up to three years. The district’s design balances expert presentations to larger groups with collaborative teams of two to six teachers. While schedules vary from building to building, every team meets on a regular

basis during the contracted workday. All teams convene at least weekly, and some teams meet daily to engage in professional learning, collaborative lesson design, and problem solving.

Peer observations build trust and contribute to transparency of practice. Teachers observe each other in the classroom trying out assessment for learning strategies, then give each other feedback and share ideas for future lessons. For selected observations, teachers use a protocol to gather data that is used by the building leadership team for analysis. These implementation data are then used to plan subsequent professional learning.

Teachers routinely use technology in collaborative learning team meetings. For example, teams use Google Docs to organize and share team resources. Teachers demonstrate for each other various technology applications for implementing assessment strategies and managing data.

### THINKING ABOUT THINKING

For Chizek, one of the most powerful aspects of the assessment for learning design is the way professional growth for adults mirrors the learning they want students to engage in. Teachers learn in concert with their peers. They discuss, read, listen, share, collaboratively design lessons and assessments, and practice new skills in the workshop and in their classrooms. They observe each other’s teaching, share feedback, and reflect on learning using metacognition — “thinking about thinking” — a powerful tool for advancing learning. Sometimes this is as simple as giving everyone in the collaborative learning team an index card with a specific question relating to the meeting’s topic, then asking team members to respond to the question throughout the meeting and share at the end.

Collaborative learning teams apply formative assessment practices they are learning for use with students to assess their own knowledge and to inform the professional learning design. For example, practice profiles guide teachers’ self-assessment to formatively assess their learning, monitor their implementation, determine team learning needs, and plan team meetings.

Teams use Innovation Configuration maps to structure formative peer observations and enable educators to receive descriptive feedback on what they do well, where they could improve, and suggestions on how to improve.

### CHALLENGES

Implementing this level of collaboration did not happen without challenges. The opening of new buildings and staff turnover necessitates bringing new teachers up to speed with learning content and skills and learning how to collaborate. Chizek says the district is doing a better job of inducting new staff by creating time for initial orientation, revisiting the vision in team meetings, sharing team norms, and using collaborative learning team structures to enable peers to help new teachers acquire knowledge and skills to implement district priorities.

Some teams found it difficult to establish a sense of trust

#### Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District

Dallas Center, Iowa

Number of schools: **7**

Enrollment: **2,537**

Staff: **153 teachers**

Racial/ethnic mix:

|                         |            |
|-------------------------|------------|
| White:                  | <b>93%</b> |
| Black:                  | <b>1%</b>  |
| Hispanic:               | <b>3%</b>  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander: | <b>1%</b>  |
| Native American:        | <b>1%</b>  |
| Other:                  | <b>1%</b>  |

Limited English proficient: **3.5%**

Free/reduced lunch: **16.7%**

Special education: **6%**

Contact: **Mitzi Chizek**, associate superintendent

Email: **mchizek@dc-grimes.k12.ia.us**



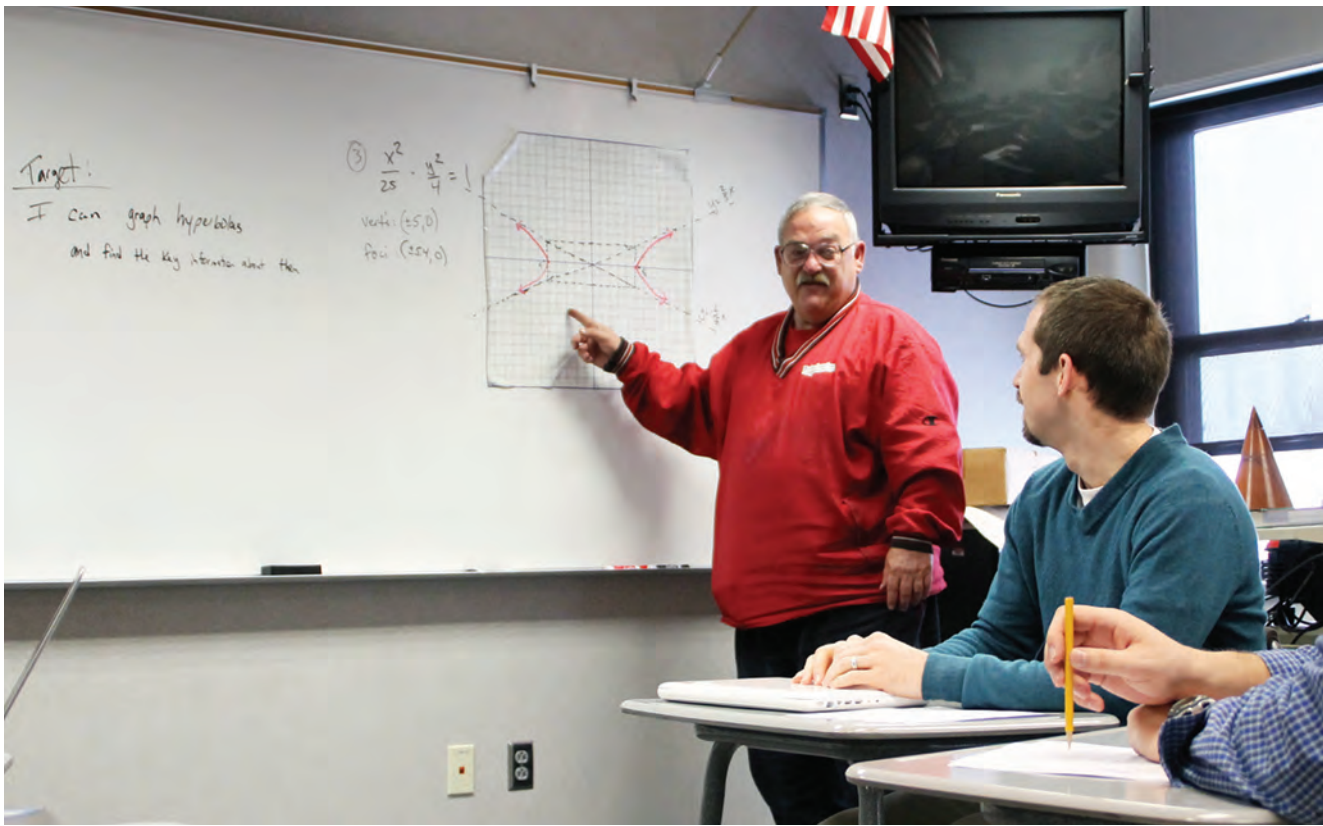


Photo by MIKE BURGHER

Assessment for learning protocols engage teachers in reflective inquiry about student needs and improved classroom practice. High school math teacher Mark Heithoff, standing, demonstrates how he teaches a concept to other members of the math team.

and confidence among team members, making it a challenge to build a safe environment for teachers to share results suggesting that students are not performing as expected. Chizek says she noticed that a few teachers appeared defensive and worried about what their peers would think if they didn't get the desired results in their classroom.

According to 2nd-grade teacher Stacy Heidemann, "Teams that have not established positive relationships and trust have the most difficulty feeling comfortable in sharing concerns and asking for help. The lack of positive relationships leads to a fear of being treated in a condescending manner. If I'm putting myself out there by asking for help, I need to know that my questions and concerns are valued and don't make me a 'bad' teacher just because my students are struggling. A way my team helped alleviate this is by building relationships outside of work and starting our professional learning community meetings with a celebration from each of us."

Chizek added that teams work more effectively when there is an unrelenting focus on student learning. The building leadership team strives to create this sense of trust by giving teams time to practice discussing and analyzing student data, encouraging teachers to discuss questions about students' progress, and emphasizing throughout the process that everyone is a learner.

## BENEFITS

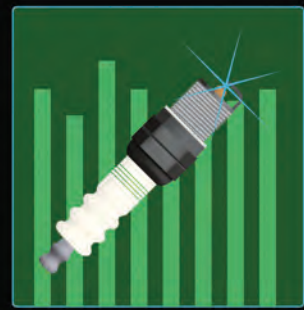
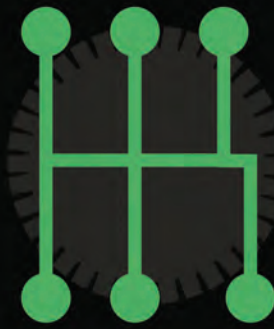
The building leadership team learned that its analysis of data contributed to rich discussions. In the future, the team plans to include all collaborative learning teams in the analysis and discussion of the practice profiles and implementation data.

Teachers discovered the benefits of being observed by peers. Not only did they learn a lot from each other, but also became comfortable with the practice of observation.

This professional development design is an example of teachers engaging in collaborative learning teams involved in a cycle of continuous improvement. This improvement is a result of analyzing data, designing joint lessons and assessments, engaging in coaching through observations and feedback to improve instruction and assessments, and assessing how teacher learning and teamwork affects student achievement (Hirsh, 2009).

"Teachers have always formatively assessed students," Chizek says. "The teachers have progressed from unplanned formative assessment done primarily on the fly sporadically to having planned formative assessments in addition to on the fly; from not always being able to identify students that 'didn't learn' to knowing the students that didn't learn AND responding to it; from the teacher doing all the assessment to having students self- and peer-assess;

*Continued on p. 26*



theme COLLABORATION

# A TUNE-UP *for* STYMIED TEAMS

**WHEN A GROUP'S FOCUS FALTERS,  
TAKE STEPS TO GET BACK ON TRACK**

**By Renee Hesson**

**B**y spring break, the common thread that bound together the team of middle school teachers with whom I worked as a professional development coach and planning team facilitator was unraveling at a rapid pace. The team's students had presented to my colleagues a series of learning and behavioral challenges. When these challenges were added to daily managerial and instructional tasks, the once-motivated group was now creatively stymied. Our common planning time lacked instructional focus, and enthusiasm for this important work was flagging.

As coach, my role is to foster collaboration among the team's grade-level teachers during common planning time

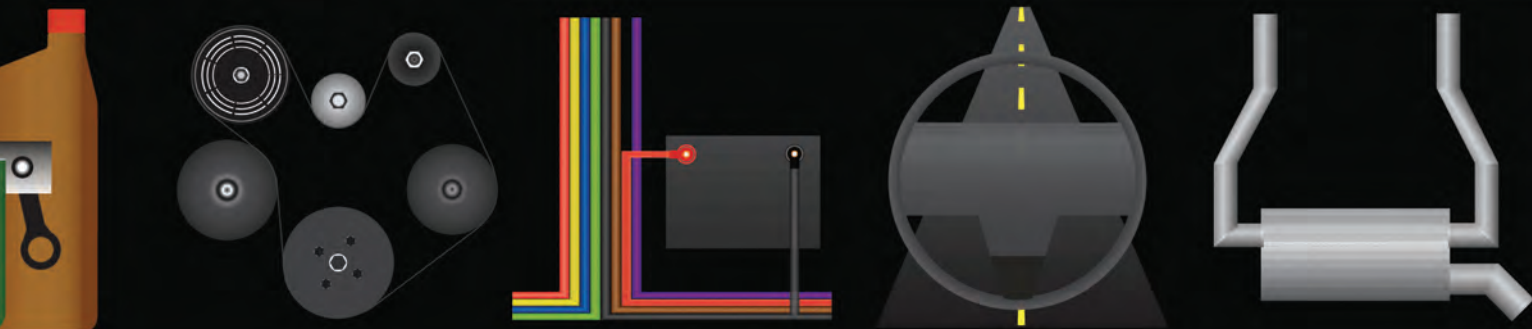


The keys to refocusing a committed team on the instructional goals originally established by the group are through reality, relationships, and reflection, coach Renee Hesson says.

and encourage the team's use of a learning cycle in which collaborative teams analyze student achievement data from multiple sources to create a specific action plan to address the gaps in students' understanding. This approach requires teacher teams to examine student performance on one or more indicators to determine what misunderstandings have occurred, which students are impacted by the disparity, why one or more teaching strategies may not have worked, and how to approach teaching the same material in a manner to reach all students.

Now that the year was well under way, the group's focus had begun to falter. Though team members were aware of the dysfunction and committed to improve, they were unclear how to proceed in a way that would benefit students.

After examining why the team's progress had stalled,



I soon zeroed in on three key components that would get the wayward team on track: reality, relationships, and reflection. Focusing on these components soon increased the group's productivity. My experience demonstrates that the team member who assumes the role of facilitator may successfully maximize a team's on-task behavior by focusing on these key components.

Even the most efficient team of teachers can become ineffective. Conversely, even the most ineffective team can be made more efficient and productive. The keys to refocusing a committed team on the instructional goals originally established by the group are through reality, relationships, and reflection. These critical components of effective collaboration guide a renewed commitment to assist students to achieve desired learning outcomes.

Using these components, collaborative teams assess current reality, establish committed relationships, and conduct a thorough reflection to promote positive change. These steps can be applied independently or successively as needed to most collaborative team situations and will help establish, enhance, or engage a team in a collaborative culture, inclusive of any professional learning team, any task, and any time of the school year.

#### **ASSESS CURRENT REALITY**

The team's first step is to conduct a thorough assessment of current reality to establish need and set timely goals for student learning. Although team members may think they know the current reality of students' understanding of a topic or skill, the facilitator must guide the team to move beyond anecdotal evidence to determine a student-centered plan of action.

To accomplish this, the team synthesizes results from multiple available data sources and analyzes student work samples. Data can include state and district assessment re-

sults and formal classroom assessments. The team should also document trend data to analyze growth or lack of growth toward student achievement targets over time. Because student feedback and perceptions are as important as their achievement output, the team should also administer one or more informal student surveys to monitor student satisfaction with teachers' expectations and instructional practices.

Evidence from multiple traditional and nontraditional data sources clearly illustrates the instructional challenges that need to be addressed before the end of the year. A group of teaching professionals who engage actively in setting student learning goals will be more likely to sustain momentum through the final weeks of school planning to achieve these outcomes.

Through a detailed root cause analysis, team members dissect achievement data to determine what is and what is not working instructionally for students. This information can be used to establish a plan of action to develop student groups or to provide remediation or enrichment opportunities.

#### **ESTABLISH COMMITTED RELATIONSHIPS**

The second component, relationships, is related to a needs-based assessment and action plan development. However, this component respects the need to examine both team dynamics and established member roles to reinforce a culture of sharing in a climate of change for the purpose of growth. Team members must feel supported throughout the process and encouraged to equally contrib-

**A group of teaching professionals who engage actively in setting student learning goals will be more likely to sustain momentum through the final weeks of school planning to achieve these outcomes.**

ute their time, effort, and ideas that are closely aligned to team goals and student learning objectives.

Relationships are important, and team-building exercises strengthen existing working relationships. Prompt team members to reflect on and share honest feedback by stating their thoughts, feelings, and professional opinions through a time of uncertainty and redirection.

The facilitator begins this exercise by writing “I can live with/I cannot live without” statements. For example, the facilitator might write, “I can live with silence during the time the team needs to process new information. I’ve been uncomfortable with the long silences, but I need to stop interjecting while others are still trying to grapple with the information.” Another statement might read, “I cannot live without adhering to the set agenda. Too often, the team is engaging in off-topic talk, and I feel like a lot of time is wasted when we do that.”

Individual team members then complete these statements to share with the rest of the group. Additionally, the group may include more personalized feedback to each team member by completing this statement: “When you contributed X to this team, I found it helpful because ...” The sharing can be anonymous, but the team needs to ensure that anonymous sharing remains constructive and positive and does not single out one team member as weak or wrong.

The facilitator assists team members as they re-establish commitments and build trust in each other that the team will firmly adhere to the new student learning outcomes. Regardless of the process, the desired result should initiate a group’s progress toward true collaboration.

### CONDUCT A THOROUGH REFLECTION

The practices of examining current reality and building pro-

fessional relationships lend themselves to the third component of collaboration — reflection. In this component, the team revisits established team norms and the administration’s expectations for the team’s use of the collaborative time. Additionally, the team updates the timeline of team tasks to reflect accomplishments.

Reflection also examines areas of challenge, including unfinished tasks. The facilitator prompts team members to question time on task and to identify factors that impede or inhibit progress. At this point, the team may elect to modify existing practice to reflect this critical evaluation. Once refined, the team’s collaborative process will more closely align with its desired levels of productivity.

The reward of working as a team of teachers on behalf of students outweighs the risk of critically evaluating the team’s process and products. Reflection renews and refocuses the team’s creative energy and aligns the group’s strategic efforts to achieve common goals.

### BUILD CAPACITY TO SERVE STUDENTS

The components of reality, relationships, and reflection lead to a focused effort to control the quality of a group’s output through the end of the school year. Using these components, the facilitator builds the team’s capacity to use its time constructively and with a common purpose. Led by a facilitator, the collaborative team examines current reality, builds relationships, and evaluates progress to adjust the team’s practices to best serve students as a functional group year-round.

**Renee Hesson (renee.hesson@comcast.net) is a middle and high school professional development coach for Wicomico County Public Schools in Salisbury, Md. ■**

All aboard!

*Continued from p. 23*

from not always having the learning target clearly identified or visible to clearly identifying what students are to know and be able to do and being visible in the classroom.”

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**Deb Hansen (deb@westwinded.com) is senior policy analyst at West Wind Education Policy in Iowa City, Iowa. Colleen Anderson (colleen.anderson@iowa.gov) is student assessment consultant for the Iowa Department of Education Bureau of Standards and Curriculum. Linda Munger (linda@mungeredu.com) is senior consultant for Learning Forward’s Center for Results. Mitzi Chizek (mchizek@dc-grimes.k12.ia.us) is associate superintendent of the Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District in Dallas Center, Iowa. ■**



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# STRONG TEAMS, STRONG SCHOOLS

TEACHER-TO-TEACHER COLLABORATION CREATES SYNERGY THAT BENEFITS STUDENTS

By Dennis Sparks

*If you want to go quickly, go alone; if you want to go far, go together.* — African proverb

*You must undertake something so great that you cannot accomplish it unaided.* — Phillips Brooks

Schools rise and fall based on the quality of the teamwork that occurs within their walls. Well-functioning leadership and teaching teams are essential to the continuous improvement of teaching and learning. That is particularly true when schools have clearly articulated, stretching aspirations for the learning of all their students. Effective teams strengthen leadership, improve teaching and learning, nurture relationships, increase job satisfaction, and provide a means for mentoring and supporting new teachers and administrators.

Schools will improve for the benefit of every student only when every leader and every teacher is a member of



one or more strong teams that create synergy in problem solving, provide emotional and practical support, distribute leadership to better tap the talents of members of the school community, and promote the interpersonal accountability that is necessary for continuous improvement. Such teamwork not only benefits students, it also creates the “supportive leadership” and the process and time for meaningful collaboration that enable teachers to thrive and are better able to address the complex challenges of their work.

In *Leading for Results* (Sparks, 2007), I wrote: “A widely held view of instructional improvement is that good teaching is primarily an individual affair and that principals who view themselves as instructional leaders promote it by interacting one-on-one with each teacher to strengthen his or her efforts in the classroom. The principal is like the hub of a wheel with teachers at the end of each spoke. Communication about instruction moves back and forth along the spoke to the hub but not around the circumference of the wheel.”

Such a form of instructional leadership, however, fails to tap the most important source of instructional improve-



ment in schools — teacher-to-teacher professional learning and collaboration. “[S]ome of the most important forms of professional learning,” I observed in *Leading for Results*, “occur in daily interactions among teachers in which they assist one another in improving lessons, deepening understanding of the content they teach, analyzing student work, examining various types of data on student performance, and solving the myriad of problems they face each day.”

#### DEFINING EFFECTIVE TEAMWORK

Simply labeling a group of people a team (or a professional learning community) rather than a committee or task force does not, however, make it a genuine team. To address this issue, the Rush-Henrietta Central School District near Rochester, N.Y., developed a rubric based on Patrick Lencioni’s *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team* (2002) (see box above) to enable it to better understand teamwork and to chart the district’s progress in developing effective teams. (See “Key characteristics of effective teams” on p. 30.)

The Rush-Henrietta rubric lists four key characteristics: clarity of purpose, accountability, team structure, and trust.

Each key characteristic is defined by a number of indicators. For instance, indicators of effective team structures include “uses protocols to help guide the group work and provide a consistent framework” and “has agreements in place that are clear, purposeful, and understood.” Accountability asks team members to be “committed to decisions and plans of actions” and asks them to “hold one another accountable for delivering against the plans agreed to and feel a sense of obligation to the team for its progress.”

A starting point for teams is to assess the quality of teamwork in your setting using the Rush-Henrietta rubric, the team assessment provided by Patrick Lencioni in *The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, or other tools you may have available to you. Better yet, to stimulate professional learning and teamwork, develop a rubric with your team using the Rush-Henrietta document as a starting point. You may want to make separate assessments for the leadership team of which you are a part and teacher instructional teams, which may go by other names like “professional learning community.”

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**Dennis Sparks (thinkingpartner@gmail.com) serves as a thinking partner to educators and learning teams and is the emeritus executive director of NSDC (now Learning Forward). This article was previously published as a blog post at <http://dennisparks.wordpress.com>, where Sparks writes regularly about transforming teaching, learning, and relationships. ■**

#### Lencioni’s 5 dysfunctions of a team

- Inattention to results.
- Avoidance of accountability.
- Lack of commitment.
- Fear of conflict.
- Absence of trust.

**Source:** Lencioni, 2002.

## Key characteristics of effective teams

|  |  |  |  |
|--|--|--|--|
| <b>Starting out</b><br>Acquiring information and beginning to use ideas. | <b>Developing</b><br>Experimenting with strategies and building on initial commitment. | <b>Deepening</b><br>Well on the way, having achieved a degree of mastery and feeling the benefits. | <b>Sustaining</b><br>Introducing new developments and re-evaluating quality have become a way of life. |
|--|--|--|--|

| KEY CHARACTERISTICS OF EFFECTIVE TEAMS  | Starting out | Developing | Deepening | Sustaining |
|---|--------------|------------|-----------|------------|
| <b>CLARITY OF PURPOSE</b>   |              |            |           |            |
| <b>In a team with clarity of purpose:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are clearly defined, transparent goals aligned with the mission and vision of the district.</li> <li>• All team members are committed to these goals and to a clearly articulated plan of action.</li> <li>• Goals are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic, and timely (SMART).</li> <li>• There is shared clarity about how the work of the team will affect student achievement.</li> </ul>  |              |            |           |            |
| <b>ACCOUNTABILITY</b>   |              |            |           |            |
| <b>A team focused on accountability:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Is committed to decisions and plans of action.</li> <li>• Holds one another accountable for delivering against the plans agreed to and feels a sense of obligation to the team for its progress.</li> <li>• Focuses on the achievement of collective results for student learning.</li> <li>• Reviews, studies, interprets, and acts on data.</li> <li>• Willingly reviews its progress, can describe its work to others, and welcomes feedback and suggestions.</li> <li>• Identifies potential problems quickly by questioning one another's approaches without hesitation.</li> <li>• Engages in formal monitoring of progress on SMART goals.</li> </ul>  |              |            |           |            |
| <b>TEAM STRUCTURE</b>   |              |            |           |            |
| <b>A team with effective team structures:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Has observable processes in action when the team is working and meeting.</li> <li>• Has defined roles and responsibilities for members; however, the roles and responsibilities can and should be shared.</li> <li>• Uses protocols to help guide group work and provide a consistent framework.</li> <li>• Has agreements in place that are clear, purposeful, and understood. These agreements drive meetings, the intent being to maximize time and efficiency.</li> <li>• Has an identified facilitator, as well as secondary facilitators, who keep the team focused on the goals. Meetings have a start and end time, as well as an agenda.</li> <li>• Has an understanding of how decisions will be made.</li> <li>• Engages regularly in reflection on the content and process of team meetings and celebrates progress.</li> </ul>  |              |            |           |            |
| <b>TRUST</b>  |              |            |           |            |
| <b>Members of trusting teams:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Have discussions, with the encouragement of different viewpoints, about how to reach goals. Team members have the courage to share their viewpoint, even if it varies from the majority of the group. Team members are open-minded, listen, and give colleagues a chance to speak. Respectful dialogue is the norm.</li> <li>• Are able to engage in "unfiltered conflict" around ideas.</li> <li>• Admit weaknesses and mistakes and ask for help.</li> <li>• Accept questions and input about their areas of responsibility.</li> <li>• Give one another the benefit of the doubt before arriving at a negative conclusion.</li> <li>• Take risks in offering feedback and assistance.</li> <li>• Appreciate and tap into one another's skills and experiences.</li> <li>• Offer and accept apologies without hesitation.</li> <li>• Look forward to meetings and opportunities to work as a group.</li> </ul> |              |            |           |            |

Portions adapted from: Lencioni, P. (2002). *The five dysfunctions of a team: A leadership fable*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.

Source: Rush-Henrietta Central School District.



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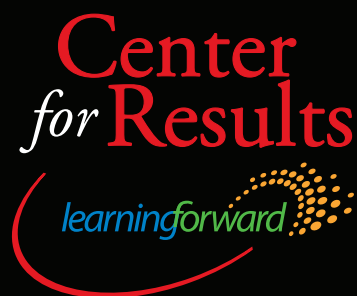
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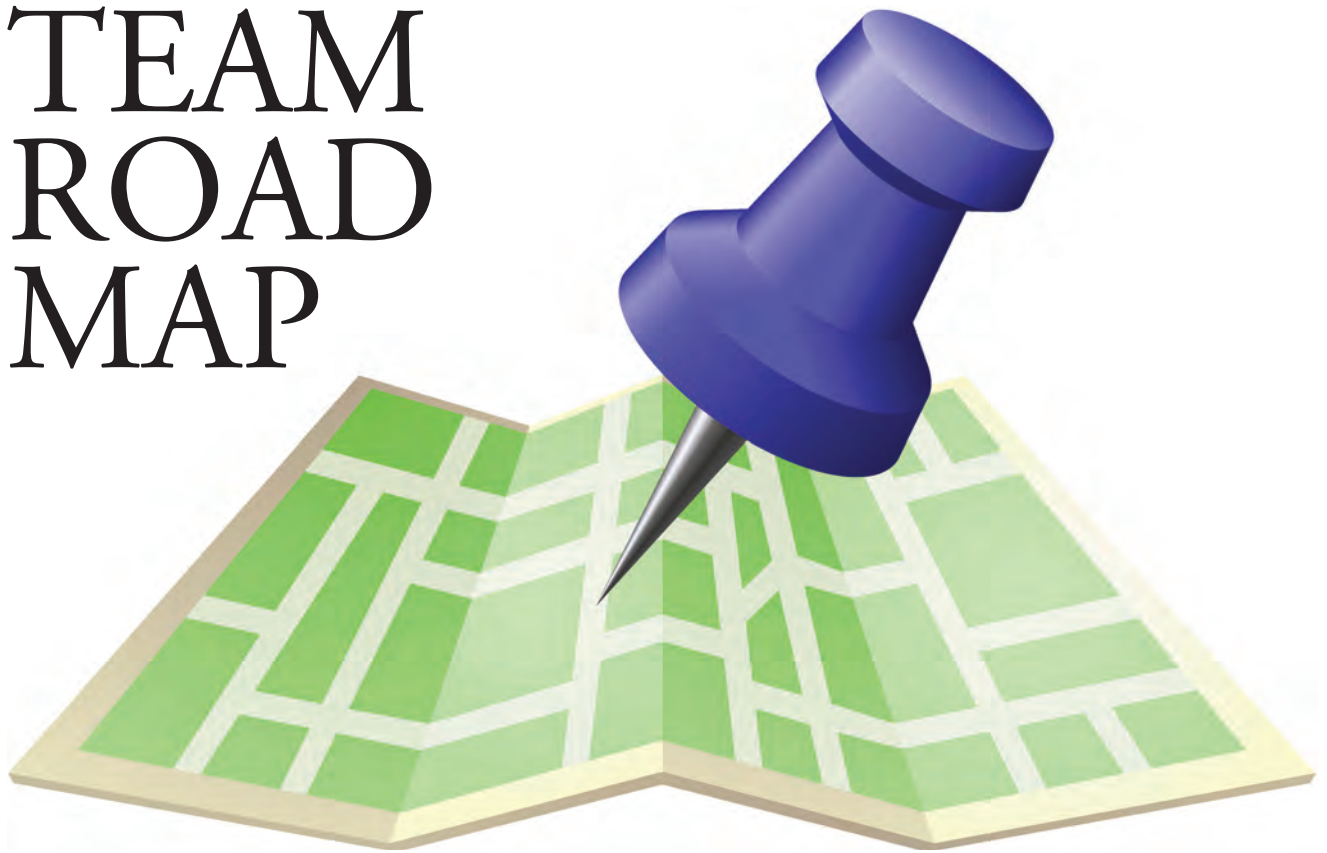
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# CREATE *a* LEARNING TEAM ROAD MAP



## A WELL-DESIGNED PLAN IS FLEXIBLE AND FOCUSED ON THE TEAM'S GOAL

By Anne Jolly

**L**earning teams must take many steps in making their time together meaningful and productive. In addition to knowing who is meeting, what student needs they'll address, what norms they'll set for their work, how they'll find time, and how they'll evaluate their work, they also need to carefully plan the steps they'll take along the way. Otherwise, their meetings may be filled with fascinating activ-

ity and well-designed learning that doesn't accomplish the goals they've established.

Once teams know what they are setting out to accomplish through careful data analysis, their next step is to create a plan to guide their journey. Through this planning process, collaborative teams make clear their assumptions and beliefs about the work they're doing and keep their top priorities in mind.

Throughout the planning process, keep in mind that professional learning teams address student needs by focusing on increasing teachers' learning and expertise. Each

team will likely take a different path to reach its goal.

Consider this example of two schools that each chose a goal of increasing student reading comprehension across all content areas.

In one school, learning team members addressed the goal by increasing teachers' knowledge and use of research-based strategies to help struggling readers. Teams began by studying a book on effective strategies for increasing reading comprehension and applying the strategies across classes.

During the year, team members planned to work together to strengthen their use of promising strategies, to monitor results, and to compile a tool kit of reading practices that were effective with students.

An initial plan for a team in this school might include early milestones — desired accomplishments — such as increased teacher understanding of a reading strategy and use of that strategy in the classroom. Student milestones might include increased student success in using a strategy to understand written text. Milestones for the learning team might include productive use of team time, shared responsibilities, and participation from all members.

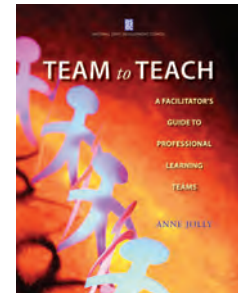
A team in this school might decide to study a book chapter, select a strategy to try in class, videotape a team member using that strategy, and analyze the videotape during a team meeting.

Initially, the team does not make yearlong plans. Members develop short-term plans with achievable milestones that help them feel successful in their first few meetings. As they continue to meet, they will see new possibilities and add activities and approaches to help students become stronger readers.

Faculty members at the second school also agreed on a goal of addressing students' needs in reading comprehension. In this school, teachers decided to let individual teams decide their own approach for reaching the goal.

Like the first school, some teams began by studying a book on research-based reading strategies and applying the strategies. Other teams planned to first determine student learning styles and then to study information on using

This article is adapted from *Team to Teach: A Facilitator's Guide to Professional Learning Teams* (NSDC, 2008). The book outlines the steps a learning team takes in its quest to improve the knowledge, skills, and practices of its members so they in turn are best equipped to reach and teach all students. The book is available through the Learning Forward Bookstore at <http://store.learningforward.org>.



learning styles to improve student reading.

One team planned to examine student work and develop quality reading assignments targeting areas where students needed more support. Still others planned to increase their skill at creating formative assessments to diagnose and develop solutions for students' reading difficulties. Each team spelled out specific, achievable milestones for teachers, students, and the learning team and decided on specific activities to accomplish these milestones.

These two schools are typical in their approaches to a common goal. In other schools, individual learning teams set their own goals. Each team within the school uses data to determine its own goal. Whichever approach a school uses, the teams' plans will reflect decisions teams make about organizing to reach their goal.

### PREPARE TO DEVELOP A TEAM PLAN

The team plan is the beginning route that team members agree to follow to reach the team goal. The plan is a starting point for learning teams' work and also can help teachers get to know one another as professionals and build relationships.

Developing a good plan requires thoughtful reflection and discussion. Team members must spend time exploring ideas, examining different strategies for reaching the goal, and deliberating on which approaches they will use.

Sometimes teams shortcut this portion of the process, but avoiding planning hampers some team members' ability to contribute, limits teachers' opportunities to know one another at a deeper level, and results in team members feeling less committed to the team's work.

Reaching the goal requires that you guide teams in working together reflectively to develop a plan. Involve team members in discussions and interactions that will help them do the following:

**Discuss beliefs and assumptions.** The first step is to have teachers examine and discuss their underlying assumptions about students, teaching, and learning as related to the team's goal.

#### Team planning tools

Use the tools on pp. 35-37 to draft the team plan, outlining milestones and timelines to take the team where it needs to go. The team growth plan highlights specific indicators in 10 important areas for teams to keep track of how well their work and processes are progressing.

Everyone has unexamined assumptions about teaching and learning (see box at right). In fact, the practice of teaching is driven by underlying assumptions, values, and beliefs that have been passed down for decades.

For example, the practice of tracking students is rooted in the belief that students learn best when they are grouped with others of similar ability. If teachers use just one teaching style, such as a lecture approach, the underlying assumption is that all students learn in the same way.

Teaching can be unconsciously influenced by erroneous assumptions such as, “Some children are unable to learn because of poverty,” “Children of some races are smarter,” “Intelligence is fixed at birth,” or “Not all children can learn at higher levels.”

Verbalizing assumptions will help team members better understand one another and can lay the groundwork for more productive team dialogue. And when teachers become aware of assumptions driving their own teaching, they often are willing and even eager to learn new ways of instructing students.

**Examine current reality.** Teachers next need to look at what knowledge and experience they bring to the team; they will have opportunities throughout the year to share their skills. They then examine any gaps between their current knowledge and what they need to know to successfully reach the goal. With this information, they can begin to identify areas for research and study.

**Reflect on priorities and actions.** Now the team can begin to consider priorities and an initial time frame for the process. What must be accomplished first? What tasks and activities are teachers likely to need to do?

Team members should identify significant accomplishments or milestones to use to indicate progress in at least three areas: teacher learning, student learning, and team learning. Limit these initial milestones to no more than three in each area so teachers can reach the milestones, helping maintain their energy and enthusiasm. They may add milestones as they reach their early markers and gain deeper understanding about their work.

Teams also need to indicate in the plan what evidence members will collect to determine whether they are successfully moving toward their goal. Teams might plan to document periodic changes in:

- Teacher classroom practices;
- Student performance (classroom and standardized scores);
- Student attitudes and motivation;
- Teacher attitudes about working together; and
- Team functioning.

### DEVELOP AN INITIAL TEAM PLAN

After thoughtful reflection, teams are ready to begin writing the plan.

Writing a long-term plan at the beginning of the learning team process can be difficult because members may not understand the team’s work well enough to make informed decisions

### What do we believe?

Here are questions for teams to consider as they openly share assumptions about teaching as part of their planning process.

- What specific needs do our students have?
- What do we believe high-quality teaching in this area looks like? What would teachers and students be doing?
- What do our current instructional practices look like in this area?
- What do our current practices imply about how we believe our students learn?
- What beliefs about our students do we want our teaching to reflect?
- Is there a gap between what we believe about teaching and learning and what we actually do? If so, why?

about what they need to learn, what milestones to establish, and how to prioritize tasks.

Initial plans need to be general rather than detailed. Early plans should focus on short-term milestones. Don’t spend too much time and energy on a detailed, yearlong plan since the plan will evolve and change as teamwork gets underway.

If a team has difficulty beginning to map out a plan, teachers might need to expand their knowledge base about the team’s goal area. They might decide to read journal articles and books, observe other teachers, attend workshops, watch videos, or invite an expert in the goal area to work with them.

As teachers learn more about their goal area, they can revisit and complete the plan. Revisiting the plan frequently is a good idea, both to keep teams focused and to refine the plan as teachers’ knowledge and insight increase.

If a team stalls while designing a plan, help reignite members’ thinking by asking:

- What do you want students to be successful in doing by the end of the year?
- What do you want students to be able to do by the end of this quarter?
- What deeper understandings and improved instructional practices might you need to help students meet these milestones?
- What can you accomplish during your first few learning team meetings to begin to move you toward your goal?
- What activities will help you reach this goal?
- What relevant and reliable resources would help you accomplish your goal?

### A FINAL REMINDER ON TEAM PLANNING

Finally, keep in mind that teachers’ natural enthusiasm for students and their learning sometimes prompts team members

## Team long-term planning guide

**Directions:** After discussing, reflecting, and making notes, team members are ready to begin to develop a plan. This plan will likely change as the team continues to meet and learn together, so think in terms of a monthly plan until all feel ready to develop a long-term plan.

Decide as a team on milestones for the month, and then work together to determine activities, resources, and responsibilities to accomplish these milestones. Be certain that activities you select focus on teacher learning and growth.

**Team goal:** \_\_\_\_\_

### MILESTONES: WHAT WE PLAN TO ACHIEVE THIS MONTH THROUGH OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TEAM WORK.

| Achievement area      | Milestones/accomplishments<br>(Keep realistic and achievable) | By when? |
|-----------------------|---|----------|
| For students          |   |          |
| For teachers          |   |          |
| For our learning team |   |          |

### ACTIVITIES: WHAT WE PLAN TO DO TO HELP US ACHIEVE OUR MILESTONES AND MOVE TOWARD OUR GOAL.

| Activity | Tasks to complete activity | Person(s) responsible |
|----------|----------------------------|-----------------------|
|          |                            |                       |
|          |                            |                       |
|          |                            |                       |
|          |                            |                       |

to make overly ambitious plans. When this happens, teachers may later feel overwhelmed and become discouraged when they aren't successful in reaching milestones. To maintain energy and confidence, teams should plan realistically and set short-term milestones that they can accomplish.

Remember that teams should continually re-evaluate their direction. Team members must be flexible, willing to reflect on their progress toward the goal, and willing to change course if

needed. There are many ways to reach a destination.

• **Anne Jolly ([ajolly@bellsouth.net](mailto:ajolly@bellsouth.net)) works with schools and districts throughout the Southeast to implement professional learning teams and writes STEM curriculum for Engaging Youth through Engineering (EYE). She blogs about STEM at MiddleWeb. ■**

**RESOURCES:** BOOKS, MATERIALS, AND OTHER RESOURCES WE WILL NEED.

Blank area for listing resources, featuring alternating light green and light yellow horizontal bands.

**ADDITIONAL PLANS:**

Blank area for listing additional plans, featuring alternating light green and light yellow horizontal bands.

**Source:** Jolly, A. (2008). *Team to teach: A facilitator's guide to professional learning teams*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

## Plan for team growth

**Directions:** Begin now to plan for success as a productive team. Use this tool to track how well your team is modeling these 10 important characteristics. Discuss each characteristic together, and fill in the column at right. Complete a chart at regular intervals — monthly or quarterly.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

### TEAM GROWTH INDICATORS

### What might someone observing us see or hear that would indicate we're growing in this direction?

|  |  |
|--|--|
| Maintain a focus on teacher professional growth.           |  |
| Abide by norms that guide team interactions and behaviors. |  |
| Learn new and relevant information about teaching.         |  |
| Share leadership and responsibility.                       |  |
| Communicate to others what we are learning and doing.      |  |
| Meet regularly and on schedule.                            |  |
| Practice trusting behaviors.                               |  |
| Work productively as a team.                               |  |
| Apply new knowledge and skills in the classroom.           |  |
| Monitor student learning and success.                      |  |

**Source:** Jolly, A. (2008). *Team to teach: A facilitator's guide to professional learning teams*. Oxford, OH: NSDC.

# YOU'VE BEEN EVALUATED.

## NOW WHAT?

USE RESULTS  
TO PUMP UP  
PROFESSIONAL  
LEARNING'S  
POTENTIAL



**By Stephanie Hirsh**

*"I've just had my first evaluation in our new system. Now what do I do?"*

**T**his school year, countless teachers are participating in new evaluation systems. Many have invested deeply in gaining new knowledge and skills associated with their new evaluation frameworks. And as much as these new systems may

cause anxiety, educators who participate in them expect feedback and support that will assist them in improving their performance and gaining better outcomes with students.

Individual teachers working on their own examining evaluation feedback will have valuable information to inform individual improvement. However, teacher evaluations have the potential to achieve more, and to do it more quickly, when they are part of a comprehensive professional learning system tied to a school district's and a school's improvement goals for students. At the foundation of such a professional learning system is collaboration



— at every juncture where a teacher, team, school, and system leader work with information to examine, reflect upon, learn about, and improve practice.

The individual teacher’s continuous improvement journey will be significantly enhanced when he or she is engaged in a continuous improvement process that prioritizes learning, problem solving, and reflection with colleagues within the school and beyond.

The process outlined here is based on the assumption that teachers feel comfortable sharing needs and goals and will look to their colleagues to assist in addressing them. They have assumed responsibility for the success of their students as well as those of their learning team colleagues. Collectively, their goals may not differ much. Everyone’s bottom line is that all students achieve at high levels. The best way to do that is to ensure that best practices are spread from classroom to classroom and school to school.

So, to answer the baffled teacher’s question, here are steps teachers can take in using evaluation results for improvement.

### **1. Reflect on your evaluation data and gather feedback from colleagues to identify your student learning and professional learning needs.**

In Learning Forward’s definition of professional learning (see box at right), the improvement cycle begins with an examination of data. Your evaluation data comes from many sources to determine strengths and opportunities for growth. You can begin your process of improvement by digging deep into data to assist you in identifying your student and professional learning goals and needs.

Compare your evaluation results to required student learning outcomes and educator performance standards. Examine the multiple measures of student performance collected in your school system to determine where your students excelled and where you want to see improvement. Review system and schoolwide goals and priorities. Identify any new programs you are expected to implement, such as Common Core standards or new assessments.

Knowing all that you have to take into consideration, you can then draft your professional learning goals and needs. Share your goals and needs with key individuals, including learning team colleagues, coaches, and supervisors. Gather their insights and suggestions.

Look for areas where goals and needs overlap with your team members. This will be your opportunity to collec-

## **Learning Forward’s definition of professional learning**

**T**he term “professional learning” means a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers’ and principals’ effectiveness in raising student achievement.

Professional learning fosters collective responsibility for improved student performance and must be comprised of professional learning that:

- Is aligned with rigorous state student academic achievement standards as well as related local educational agency and school improvement goals;
- Is conducted among educators at the school and facilitated by well-prepared school principals and/or school-based professional development coaches, mentors, master teachers, or other teacher leaders;
- Primarily occurs several times per week among established teams of teachers, principals, and other instructional staff members where the teams of educators engage in a continuous cycle of improvement that:
  - Evaluates student, teacher, and school learning needs through a thorough review of data on teacher and student performance;
  - Defines a clear set of educator learning goals based on the rigorous analysis of the data;
  - Achieves the educator learning goals identified above by implementing coherent, sustained, and evidenced-based learning strategies, such as lesson study and the development of formative assessments, that improve instructional effectiveness and student achievement;
  - Provides job-embedded coaching or other forms of assistance to support the transfer of new knowledge and skills to the classroom;
  - Regularly assesses the effectiveness of the professional development in achieving identified learning goals, improving teaching, and assisting all students in meeting challenging state academic achievement standards;
  - Informs ongoing improvements in teaching and student learning; and
  - May be supported by external assistance.

**T**he process outlined above may be supported by activities such as courses, workshops, institutes, networks, and conferences that:

- Must address the learning goals and objectives established for professional development by educators at the school level;
- Advance the ongoing school-based professional development; and
- Are provided by for-profit and nonprofit entities outside the school, such as universities, education service agencies, technical assistance providers, networks of content-area specialists, and other education organizations and associations.

tively commit to improving in areas that meet the needs of many students in the school. Finalize your goals for your professional learning plan or commit to one set of goals developed by the team.

## 2. Collaborate with your colleagues to personalize your professional learning plan.

Begin by considering how you will organize and manage your learning agenda. Hopefully, your school system has invested in a professional learning management system for you to maintain your plans. If not, consider establishing an electronic portfolio and template or protocol for capturing your learning journey.

While there will be countless professional resources and learning opportunities available, the key is to build a personal professional learning plan that leads you directly to the outcomes you seek to achieve.

Ideally, you'll begin planning with a learning team and focus on some initial shared goals. However, limit your first steps to immediate priorities, recognizing that the continuous improvement process means that you will identify new learning priorities as other needs emerge.

As part of a team involved in a continuous learning cycle, you'll continue to assess progress and how well your learning steps are advancing you toward your goals. Each time you are confronted with a new need, your team will again determine if it is identifying the most powerful professional learning that will lead to the results it seeks.

In addition, seek input about your individual learning priorities. With input and other resources in hand, you will finish your personalized plan by identifying the learning strategies you'll choose to address your individual goals and needs.

As you collaborate or work independently to complete the initial steps of your plan, take into account these factors to

structure your learning agenda:

- **Expertise:** Identify expertise within your learning team, school, or system to address your priorities. If expertise doesn't exist within the school or system, consider strategies for finding external support.
- **Design:** Select the learning design best suited to the intended goals. Decide if you need formal learning opportunities, peer collaborative learning, structured coaching or supervision, or individualized or independent learning.
- **Alignment:** Verify evidence that the content and programming you have identified is aligned with your precise goals and needs and that it has potential to lead to the desired outcomes. Find out where it has been effective.
- **Support:** Seek, as appropriate, additional coaching and support for successful implementation of desired changes.
- **Strategies:** Engage in learning processes that replicate the precise strategies you seek to incorporate in your practice with students.
- **Data:** Determine the data that will be collected to assess the impact of the professional learning.
- **Fit:** Consider the best fit for your individual and team preferred learning styles, schedules, and available resources.

After reviewing all your options and considering your goals, you will be prepared to formally commit to your plan with confidence that it will lead you toward the outcomes you seek.

## 3. Engage in appropriate learning designs.

Once the plan is finished, the work begins. You have selected a number of initial strategies to support your goals while recognizing that ongoing analysis of data may require alterations or additions to the plan. With members of your learning team, you have agreed to engage in several different learning designs to increase your individual and collective effectiveness.

How can this integration of team and individual needs work in practice? Let's look at a plan that includes several learning purposes and strategies.

**Collaborative team-based learning and support.** Your learning team has agreed to begin the year focusing on new literacy standards. Everyone has written at least one learning goal related to this area. You have divided up the new standards, and everyone has agreed to develop deeper expertise in assigned areas.

You will use your six-week improvement cycles to go deeper into the standards. Each member of the team will take responsibility for facilitating one six-week cycle of improvement around a problem of practice related to his or her standard. One of the school's instructional coaches has agreed to participate as a critical friend in the first round.

**Schoolwide learning.** Your school leadership team is also focusing on literacy across the curriculum. It is planning professional learning for six early release days. You have volunteered to facilitate one of the vertical learning teams for these sessions

### Collaboration support teachers need

What support is required for teachers to integrate collaboration throughout their individual and collective improvement cycles?

1. **System and school recognition** that collaborative contexts provide the most enduring and meaningful support for individual and collective improvement.
2. **School climates** that allow safe and free discussion of individual challenges and needs for support, as well as selfless sharing of expertise so that effective practices move from room to room.
3. **Structures** that provide time and resources in the workday for teams to study, learn, experiment, and reflect.
4. **Support** to learn the specific collaboration skills that ensure teams work together well.

and look forward to the powerful lessons you'll gain as you hone your leadership skills and further the development of new resources to assist you in the classroom.

**Formal learning.** For areas where you need deeper content understanding, you have chosen to enroll in formal learning programs offered by the school system professional development department. The courses combine face-to-face sessions in the summer and blended learning follow-up throughout the school year. Every member of your team has committed to one course with a colleague and agreed to share what he or she has learned with other members throughout the school year.

**Networking with other peers.** Through the district learning community, you found several teachers working on similar goals, and you have joined a learning team focused on the particular goal that interests you most. You will begin meeting in the summer and plan to meet through the year.

You are pleased that several teachers of the year from other schools have indicated a desire to participate. They will bring great perspectives to the conversation. Everyone has agreed to start by viewing and cataloguing videos from the district library and other national sources that demonstrate the new standards in practice in classrooms. Some colleagues have suggested following up by posting and reflecting on videos of your classrooms.

**Individualized job-embedded coaching and support.** You still have particular areas identified in your evaluation that you want to improve. To improve your individual competencies, you commit to using a new district service that allows you to upload classroom videos and receive feedback from a certified evaluator.

You look forward to what you will gain from the perspectives of recognized excellent teachers. You have reviewed your goals and the evaluation rubric with your instructional coach and principal and determined focus areas for their early walk-throughs and formative and summative conferences.

#### **4. Use continuous feedback to deepen expertise, monitor implementation, assess progress, and improve performance and outcomes.**

Both planned and spontaneous feedback will assist you as you acquire, reflect, and improve application of new and refined areas of expertise. There are many sources of data that can provide the just-in-time information teachers want to determine the impact of their instruction.

Much of this data is even more valuable when examined by a learning team to identify what is working and where challenges exist. The data can be used to refine the continuous improvement process. Consider which to collect for personal and group reflection and set a schedule to support the completion of the process.

**Students.** Collect student performance data at six-week benchmarks. This will let you know whether your professional learning is helping you to address your students' learning needs.

Collect additional student and parent feedback on behavioral and attitudinal indicators. This will help you to refine the instructional strategies where you are focusing your improvement efforts. Record your reflections in your electronic portfolio.

**Peers.** Use your district or school learning team to gather feedback on lessons and classroom instruction. Bring student work to sessions, and use them as a basis for gaining insights into the impact of your new strategies on student learning. Share your benchmark results with your learning team, and use the results to refine the next six-week cycle of improvement.

**Experts.** Schedule the instructional coach to conduct walk-throughs every three weeks. Meet in pre-observation conversations to outline areas where you seek feedback. Schedule post-observation conferences soon after the walk-throughs to gain the coach's perspective and clarify areas for future focus. Discuss classroom-captured videos for additional feedback and the input of the district evaluation specialist who views and responds to a video from you each quarter.

**Supervisors.** Collect data and feedback to prepare for formative and summative conferences with your principal. Plan to present your reflections on the progress you have made on your goals and the impact on your practice and student learning.

Share evidence of collective impact of your team. Indicate where you need additional support and what you expect from your evaluation that year. Prepared this way, you not only own your professional learning, you have evidence to own your evaluation. Your principal will be impressed and appreciative.

#### **POWERFUL RESULTS**

This individual and collective approach to improvement will produce powerful results for more educators and their students. While individual teacher evaluation is a requirement in more and more systems, teacher improvement doesn't have to be accomplished in isolation from other teachers.

We want all teachers to have the opportunity to improve their individual performances. Yet students benefit most when teachers see their improvement as a shared responsibility to increase the collective impact for all students. Only then will we be able to say we are building systems that ensure great teaching for every child every day.

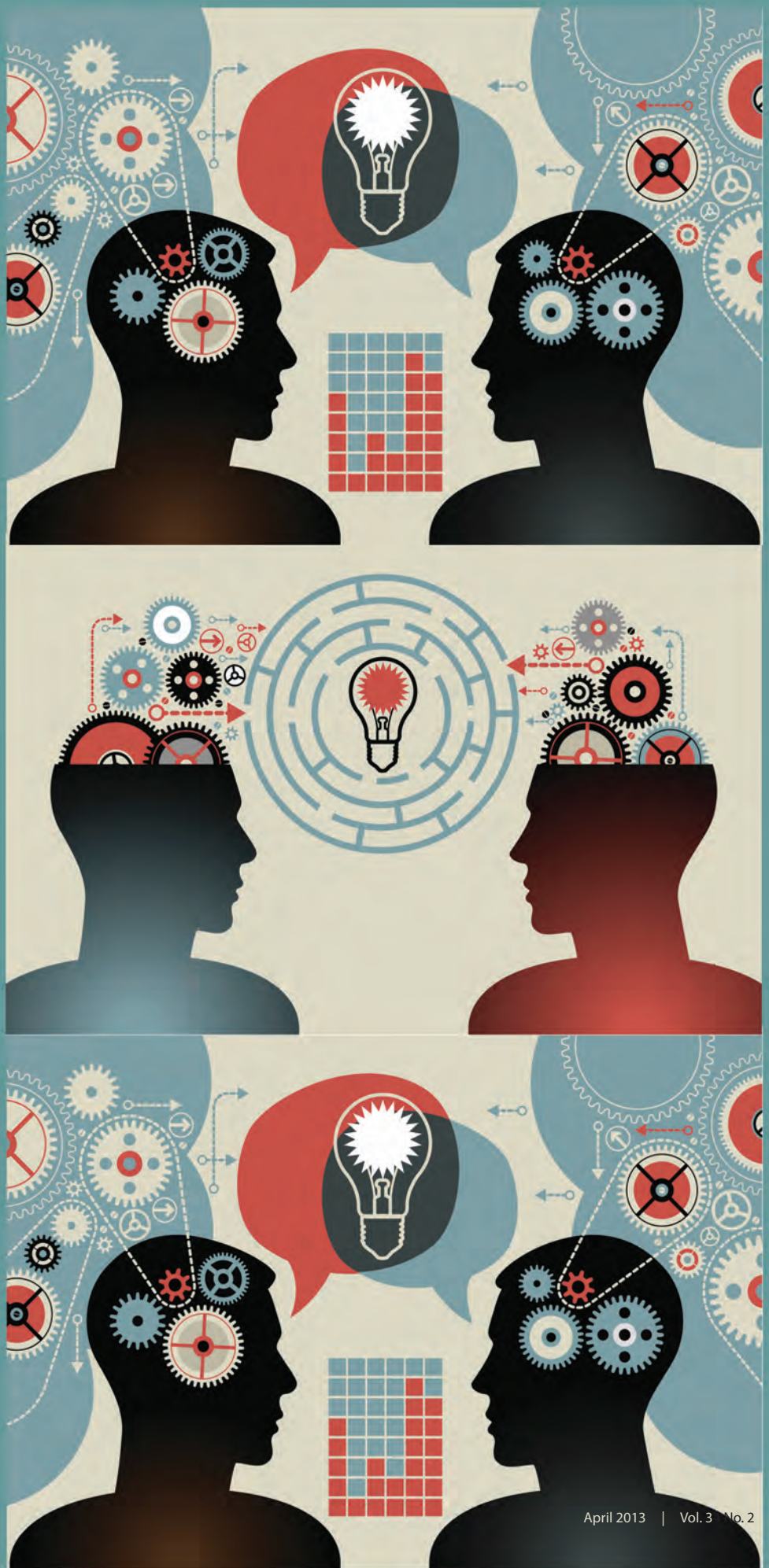
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**Stephanie Hirsh ([stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org](mailto:stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org)) is executive director of Learning Forward. ■**

**This individual and collective approach to improvement will produce powerful results for more educators and their students. While individual teacher evaluation is a requirement in more and more systems, teacher improvement doesn't have to be accomplished in isolation from other teachers.**

## HOW EDUCATORS BENEFIT

Specified and tested implementation models of learning communities that feature methods to improve instruction are key to educators realizing a broad spectrum of benefits, including:

- Focus and continuity across meetings;
- Cause-effect analyses of teaching-learning connections;
- Dedicated attention to core classroom instruction for addressing common learning needs;
- Attention to formative assessment, including classroom interactions and artifacts, to gauge instructional effectiveness and guide refinements;
- Routine and productive questioning of existing instructional practices;
- Increased interest in alternative instructional approaches; and
- Reliance on evidence to drive instructional planning and decisions.



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# LEARNING TO BE *a* COMMUNITY

SCHOOLS NEED ADAPTABLE MODELS TO CREATE SUCCESSFUL PROGRAMS

By Bradley A. Ermeling and Ronald Gallimore

**M**aking schools learning places for teachers as well as students is a timeless and appealing vision. The growing number of professional learning communities is a hopeful sign that profound change is on the way (Lieberman & Miller, 2011).

By now, most schools or districts have participated in professional learning community training or implemented some form of collaborative learning program. While this is good news, our observations in 40 districts across 20 states illustrate that the learning communities movement has reached a critical stage in its development. How schools and districts choose to proceed will determine whether learning communities realize their promise or lose their appeal as a driver of improved teaching and learning.

This is the challenge learning communities face: Schools and districts need implementation models flexible

enough to adapt to local conditions but sufficiently specific that educators aren't reinventing the wheel. The search for an implementation model prompted 40 districts to invite us to present our research on inquiry-based teacher teams recognized by Learning Forward for the 2010 Best Research Award (Ermeling, 2012; Gallimore & Ermeling 2010; Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009; Saunders, Goldenberg, & Gallimore, 2009). Although the 40 districts we visited are a self-selected sample, the consistency of reports across diverse communities and states make our observations more than a collection of anecdotes.

## TYPES OF COMMUNITIES

What we observed in the 40 districts fell into two categories, each following a different approach to learning communities: compliance-driven and workshop-inspired.

**Compliance-driven.** At least a dozen of the 40 districts used the term "learning communities" to describe meetings where teachers were expected to work on mandated district initiatives. These included training on new curriculum ma-

materials, analysis of district assessments, accreditation planning, technology training, or high-stakes test preparations. A high school mathematics teacher described his experience as “mandatory district meetings where we are given a math lesson and instructed to make it work.” Some districts simply renamed as learning communities their faculty or district meetings covering textbooks, field trips, policy changes, or upcoming deadlines. Activities labeled professional learning communities focused on accountability and compliance rather than collaborative learning opportunities for teachers. These instances confirm what others have concluded: What constitutes a professional learning community is so loosely specified that the label is in danger of losing all meaning (DuFour, 2004; Vescio, Ross, & Adams, 2008).

**Workshop-inspired.** About 25 other districts we visited intended to support collaborative learning, mirroring goals identified by learning community experts. In these cases, some teachers and more than two-thirds of administrators had attended a locally or nationally organized workshop or seminar where they were inspired by compelling cases of high-performing schools that had established exemplary practices. Experts at the workshops emphasized these themes: Focus on student learning, embrace high expectations for all, become a community of learners, and focus on results.

**Learning community time was seldom used for studying and improving instruction.**

Energized by these inspiring ideas and ambitious goals, attendees were apprehensive about the daunting challenge of replicating workshop exemplars. Within a few weeks, the appeal of professional learning communities was more than matched by a realization that making them work as intended was going to be difficult. Teachers and administrators quickly recognized that they lacked an implementation model specifying structures, protocols, and supports necessary for translating ambitious goals into effective reality. Workshops had vividly illustrated how learning communities functioned once they were up and running well. What they lacked was enough detail on where to start the journey and how to keep moving forward.

As a result, school leaders were left to devise their own implementation plans. One principal organized a book study on becoming a data-driven school, others tried to establish a tiered intervention system, some asked instructional coaches to provide professional learning, and others encouraged sharing and testing out best practices as teachers saw fit. One district leader, particularly inspired by workshop presenters, shared frustration with the lack of nuts-and-bolts guidance for implementing learning communities. “If this is research-based, shouldn’t there be a clear perspective on what works and how it should be implemented?” he asked.

A few strong principals, working long hours to design their own implementation models, were exhausted or frustrated by

lack of specific implementation guidelines. In other schools with less ambitious principals, teachers expressed dissatisfaction with wasted time better used for individual grading and planning.

A caveat: Self-selection likely filtered into our sample mostly districts dissatisfied with their attempts to replicate workshop exemplars of professional learning communities. How representative these are of the national ratio of satisfied to unsatisfied is unknown. However, something we witnessed in these 40 districts gives cause for concern: an absence of talk about teaching and its improvement during learning community time.

### THE MISSING ELEMENT

Whether a district adopted a compliance-oriented or workshop-inspired approach, learning community time was seldom used for studying and improving instruction. Some districts expressed uncertainty about whether learning communities should even deal with instruction. At a district training session, one educator commented, “We’ve always been told this is not about teaching; it’s about student learning.” During the same session, an administrator asked, “Are you focused on teaching or student learning? Because we’ve decided to focus on student learning.”

For many districts we visited, the message that professional learning communities are about assessment must have been the prevailing workshop take-away. For example, a group of teacher leaders in a charter school vented frustration that their learning community time was spent on creating and reviewing assessments and identifying student weaknesses. “We never have an opportunity to work on instruction related to our daily classroom teaching,” they said.

A district of 40 schools invited us to visit five sites they identified as high-functioning learning communities. In four of those schools, the majority of learning community time focused on developing common assessments, reviewing assessment results, identifying struggling students, and assigning them to an intervention group and reading or math expert. Only one of these schools discussed what intervention strategies might be most effective for the struggling students they identified. None of the five schools devoted time to identifying and planning core classroom instruction that might minimize the need for more intensive intervention.

Workshop presenters’ well-intended messages to “focus on student learning” and “dig deeply into assessment results” had inadvertently de-emphasized instructional planning and inquiry. As a result, learning communities in these 40 districts rarely provided collaborative time to work on all facets of the basic teaching cycle of planning, teaching, assessing, and reflecting.

### IMPLEMENTATION MODELS

What we learned from these 40 districts — and what we know from published research (Gallimore et al., 2009; Vescio

et al., 2008) — suggests that providers of next-generation training for professional learning communities need to develop and offer fully specified implementation models that emphasize instruction. Too many busy educators struggle to craft successful implementations entirely on their own, and a surprising percentage leave instruction out of the picture altogether.

Specified and tested implementation models of learning communities that feature methods to improve instruction are key to educators realizing a broad spectrum of benefits. (See box on p. 42.)

An implementation model that produced these benefits was deployed in a five-year study of teacher learning teams in nine Title I elementary schools (Saunders et al., 2009) and in subsequent scaling efforts (Gallimore et al., 2009). The model tested included an instructional improvement protocol that gave every team a standard structure and common language for investigating and addressing student learning needs. The model also provided teachers substantial latitude in applying the protocol to their team's context, beginning with guidelines for identifying a pressing student need to work on together. Next, teams formulated a clear objective for assessment, identified a promising instructional approach, developed and implemented detailed instructional plans, analyzed student work to gauge effects, and reassessed progress to determine next steps. The nine Title I elementary schools using this fully specified but adaptable implementation model registered achievement gains of 41% above demographically matched comparison schools and 54% gains for Hispanic students. One assistant superintendent from a large urban school district said, "It's been encouraging to watch the change. ... Teachers are really talking about instruction. They're having detailed conversations about pedagogy and how to meet the needs of all students."

In contrast, learning community meetings in the 40 districts we visited typically focused on important tasks (unpacking standards, analyzing student work or assessments, sharing practices), but each in isolation rather than integrated into a cycle of inquiry and improvement. Standards are critical, but studying them in isolation has little impact unless connected to planning, implementing, and analyzing instruction for student outcomes defined by those standards. Examining student work or other assessments is also critical, but has limited impact unless systematically connected to cycles of planning and teaching related to specific learning needs. In most of the reported cases, assessment or analysis of student work was treated as an end in itself, leaving teachers to figure out instructional approaches on their own rather than in their learning communities.

## THE NEXT PHASE

Some districts and schools are struggling to translate inspiring case stories into successful programs at their own schools. Dozens in our self-selected sample said professional learning community workshops provided too little guidance for turn-

ing intentions into reality. We were especially concerned by the number of educators influenced by their training to de-emphasize instructional inquiry and improvement as key drivers of change.

The learning communities movement is at a crossroads, in danger of relying too much on inspirational examples and overly general implementation models. We believe there is a middle ground between leaving educators to work out their own approach and offering an educator-proof recipe antithetical to a learning community.

This middle ground is to develop and share tested implementation models that are detailed enough to guide yet flexible enough to sustain effective learning communities. Despite a limited evidence base (Vescio et al., 2008), there are enough successes to know that this is possible. In the meantime, identifying, validating, and sharing tested implementation models represents a clear and important call to action for the next generation of professional learning communities.

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**Bradley A. Ermeling (brad.ermeling@gmail.com) is senior research scientist with the Pearson Research and Innovation Network and member of a research team from UCLA and Stanford. Ronald Gallimore (ronaldg@ucla.edu) is distinguished professor emeritus at University of California, Los Angeles. ■**

# WHAT THE RIGHT DATA CAN DO

**FIND SOURCES THAT CAN HELP TAILOR LEARNING TO EACH EDUCATOR'S NEEDS**

By Edie Holcomb

**L**earning Forward's Data standard advocates using data from a variety of sources and types — including student, educator, and system data — to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

This presents several challenges, beginning with the emphasis on a variety of sources and types. The pressures of No Child Left Behind have focused American educators on academic student data from large-scale, high-stakes tests — usually connected to school improvement plans that must be developed where Adequate Yearly Progress is not met.

Rarely are those data connected directly to plans for professional learning.

A second area of challenge relates to what I knew and articulated forcefully about my students, but was slow to discover about my staff when I became a principal: They don't all need the same thing, and they don't all learn the same way.

This article describes other kinds and sources of data that contribute to sound planning of professional learning and ways to use those multiple data sources to customize professional learning.

## TYPES OF DATA



### Student

**ACADEMIC:** Large-scale, common, formative.  
**NONACADEMIC:** Attendance, discipline.  
**PERCEPTUAL:** Surveys, focus groups.

## USING DATA FROM A VARIETY OF SOURCES AND TYPES

### Student data

Three types of student data are useful for identifying professional learning needs: academic, nonacademic, and perceptual data.

**Student academic data** represent both the starting point and the bottom line. It's common practice to have an annual data retreat, look for peaks and valleys in the test scores, and identify skills and concepts that remain a challenge for many students. But time and money for professional learning are scarce, and it would be a mistake to determine their use directly from those findings. Priorities based on large-scale assessment data must be confirmed or questioned by more specific, real-time data gained from collaborative discussion of formative assessment results. Teachers in disciplines that do not have high-stakes tests are even more dependent on common assessments to identify the student learning needs that then prompt examination of possible teacher learning needs.

**Nonacademic student data** include attendance and behavior referrals. Examining absenteeism by time of day and year and by student groups may reveal trends that suggest needs for staff awareness and action. Categorizing





### Educator

Preparation, experience, certification, participation, perceptual.



### System

Professional learning records, school improvement plans.

discipline referrals by time and type and student group may surface patterns that raise questions about equity and cultural differences. These are areas of professional work that may also require new learning and collegial support.

**Perceptual data:** Another important source of student data is from their own voices and perceptions. Issues and clues for solutions related to school and classroom climate, learning styles, and classroom management can be identified through simple surveys and focus groups that address two basic questions:

- What is one thing that would make our school a better place?
- What is one thing the teachers could do to better help students learn?

In focus groups I conducted with 9th graders (Holcomb, 2012), participants gave the following responses: “Tell the [teachers] to use hands-on materials and projects and group activities.” “The teacher should be active and be with the class.” “Teach us the way we understand — use objects like blocks, basketballs, visuals, etc.” Students on opposite sides of the continent gave the same two suggestions that help in math: Break it down step by step, going into detail, and ask students to go to the board to work problems so they know right away if they understand it. Both struggling students and successful students reinforced

the tenets of chunking instruction and providing immediate feedback (Marzano, 2007).

For struggling learners, the key to improving math teaching lies in the teacher’s relationship with students. As one student said, “I am not always a good student or a bad student. I’ve been both. It depends on who is teaching me.” Professional learning needs related to the learning environment and the importance of relationship building merit attention as empowering factors that impact student performance.

### Educator data

Before rushing to decision on the adult action steps to address student learning needs, teachers and administrators must conduct a root cause analysis using a tool such as a fishbone diagram (Holcomb, 2007) to explore the reasons those student needs might be ongoing challenges. As an example, one district noted many factors that could be related to middle school students’ difficulty with the more demanding mathematics standards. One factor was a possible lack of teacher content knowledge and confidence teaching these concepts — a theory that would only have surfaced in a climate of trust. Educator data on original certifications and teaching background revealed that almost all of the middle school math teachers had elementary experience, were li-

censed K-8, and had taken many classes on effective instruction but no master's level mathematics courses. A new math program, new math assessments, or introduction of whiteboard technology would not match their underlying needs. Math teachers needed to learn and understand more math.

The connection between teacher preparation for their current assignments and student success is both intuitive and well-documented. Charles Clotfelter, Helen Ladd, and Jacob Vigdor (2007) conducted a large-scale study of high school teachers in North Carolina. They found that when teachers are certified in their subject, have higher scores on licensing tests, have more than two years' experience, and are National Board-certified, the combined effects of these qualifications on student achievement exceed the effects of race and parent education.

Basic data about teacher preparation that should be available include the degrees a teacher has been awarded and state licenses that are current. Critical data about preparation also include majors and minors within those degrees. Teachers cannot teach what they don't know, and, as Richard Ingersoll (2008) reported, out-of-field teaching has a disproportionate effect on high-poverty schools. In core academic classes nationally, 17.2% of teachers in grades 7-12 and 42% of teachers in grades 5-8 were teaching out of field. For all grade levels combined, 27.1% of teachers in high-poverty schools were teaching out of field, compared to 13.9% in low-poverty schools.

Without knowing colleagues well, leaders may make assumptions that limit effectiveness or, worse, create conflict and confusion. Whenever a teacher changes schools, changes grade levels or course assignments, or encounters a newly adopted curriculum approach, information about education and experience is critical to providing appropriate support — neither assuming the teacher is already prepared nor automatically assigning the teacher to a one-size-fits-all orientation training.

New teacher evaluation systems that replace “satisfactory or not” ratings with four-point rubrics describe paths for growth through ascending levels of performance. Compiling voluntary, anonymous data from teachers' self-assessments can help leadership teams spot common needs for schoolwide professional learning. Individualized professional learning can be designed when the principal and teacher collaborate to select areas of focus and identify the resources and support the teacher will need.

As with student data, educator data should include both objective and perceptual sources. For example, after the first full year of implementation of a new program or practice, questions drawn from the Concerns-Based Adoption Model Stages of Concern (Hall & Hord, 2001) can identify whether next steps should continue to focus on basic orientation and preparation, management of time and materials, or accommodations to student needs. Gathering this data in one school district revealed common needs across the district by grade level, but these differed from one grade level to the next — leading logically to differentiated professional learning.

### System data

A bigger challenge may be availability of system data. Districts can typically describe dates and venues such as inservice days, workshops, and stipends or salary increases for graduate work. When asked for data about participation, they may have total numbers who attended, and, for a given training initiative, they may produce attendance lists. It is unusual to have such information compiled teacher by teacher as a record of continuous learning. Yet these data are critical for diagnosing needs and planning support. Perhaps training was provided for all staff in 2008-09. Are all those staff still in place? Who has joined the staff since that training? Did they gain the knowledge somewhere else or is it a missing piece? Have their teaching assignments changed? Did they receive follow-up and feedback?

In large districts, school improvement plans also provide system data. Synthesizing professional development plans outlined by individual schools can help central office leaders conserve resources by coordinating common efforts at scale. This information can also help the system avoid overplanning districtwide initiatives that compete for the same time, energy, and funds.

### USING DATA TO CUSTOMIZE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Examination of those data should result in a list of who needs what by individual or group/team. Every staff member in the school should be included. An additional column might indicate preferred or possible learning modes, such as online course, book study, or peer observations. That information can then be used to customize planning for professional learning.

Four aspects of professional learning should be differentiated: what, how much, what kind, and where and when:

**What:** The topics of professional development will change as student performance data identify skills of greatest need and teacher preparation data identify gaps in education and experience to meet those needs. Some teachers are already experts and don't need more professional development, except to learn how to develop others.

**How much:** The amount or degree of professional development varies by experiential factors such as how long it's been, if ever, since a teacher taught that content and how much the academic rigor of the relevant standards may have changed in the meantime.

**What kind:** The type or level of professional development needed depends on whether the knowledge or skill is new and the teacher needs to start with the introductory theory, research, and examples, or whether the concepts are familiar and it's time to engage in practice with feedback through peer observation or coaching.

Professional learning for implementation must include the levels of follow-through necessary to result in classroom application. Overview-level training during the rush of August is useful to create momentum and signal the focus of the year but won't ensure that students throughout the school benefit from

the new strategies. Professional development must be ongoing and include multiple exposures with content-specific examples and practice with feedback through arrangements such as use of video, coaching, or professional learning communities.

Marzano (2010) asserts that “school systems can develop expert teachers if they are willing to devise comprehensive models of effective teaching and provide time for teachers to engage in deliberate practice relative to the skills articulated in the comprehensive model” (p. 3). A five-year study conducted in California (Bush, 1984) examined data on the impact of various approaches to professional development, based on whether teachers used the new teaching practices. Researchers found that when teachers were given only a description of new instructional skills, 10% used the skills in the classroom. When modeling, practice, and feedback were added to the training, teachers’ implementation of the teaching practices increased by 2% to 3% each time. When coaching was added to the staff development, however, 95% of the teachers implemented the new skills in their classrooms.

**Where and when:** Decisions about the most effective setting and timing will emerge once the need and goal have been established through the earlier discussions. Educator data can assist in customized planning by identifying:

- Who are our resident experts?
- Who needs basic training versus advanced review?
- In what areas do we need external assistance and support?
- How will we maximize use of our opportunities (for example, district events, internal experts, time, and money)?
- What will we not do this year to make space for customized collaborative learning?

Based on the data and consideration of the four aspects described above, planners of professional learning should:

- **Identify all the possible venues** for professional learning. The possible venues include all opportunities (times and places) that are already available — for example, staff meetings, common planning times, grade/department meetings, early/late dismissals.
- **Decide which of the possible times and places** best fit the purpose of introducing new knowledge (training) and which opportunities make it possible to coordinate practice with feedback and coaching. For example, a 20-minute segment of a staff meeting can accommodate a minilesson or video clip of a concept or teaching behavior. But for real-time coaching to occur, students should be in session, and the coach or observer should be available.
- **Doublecheck the overall professional development plan** for the year to ensure that adequate time is dedicated to practice with feedback.

## CONTINUOUS CYCLES OF IMPROVEMENT

Stephanie Hirsh (2009) says that Learning Forward’s theory of change “stands on the assumption that students achieve more

when teams of educators within a school and across a district engage in continuous cycles of improvement that focus their attention on their learning needs, as defined by student learning needs, refining their practice and accessing district and external assistance providers to support their efforts (p. 5).”

By using student, educator, and system data that provide critical information to customize planning, every educator is learning — not just attending the same events as everyone else. As professional learning stimulates even more effective instruction and interaction, increases in student success will follow and the vision of high achievement for all will be in view.

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**Edie Holcomb (elholcomb@aol.com) is a consultant and author of *Data Dynamics: Aligning Teacher Team, School, and District Efforts* (Solution Tree, 2012).** ■

## WAYS TO DIFFERENTIATE

- What.
- How much.
- What kind.
- Where and when.
- Who presents and coaches.



# A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP

PRINCIPAL AND EXTERNAL PROVIDER LEAD THE TURNAROUND AT A LOW-PERFORMING URBAN SCHOOL

By Maryann Marrapodi and Ora Beard

**I**n September 2009, the Detroit public school now known as Dixon Educational Learning Academy was best described by terms too often used to characterize persistently low-performing urban schools — frequent leadership turnover, demoralized staff, student violence, poor attendance, a physical plant in horrendous shape, episodic and irrelevant professional learning, and unacceptably low levels of student achievement.

At the end of the 2009-10 school year, Detroit district leaders removed the school's principal and asked Ora Beard, an experienced principal, to partner with Teachscape as Dixon's new external provider to take on the challenges of turning the school around.

Today, Dixon is a different school. Dixon staff and Teachscape partners employ a data-informed instructional improvement process to guide coherent, job-embedded, and ongoing professional learning and to drive, support, monitor, and sustain rigorous, standards-based teaching in every content area and every classroom.

Data, in multiple forms and from multiple perspectives, have reshaped the way Dixon operates. Faculty, school leaders, and students use a wide range of data to identify focus areas, inform interventions, monitor implementation of the interventions, and measure their impact, fueling a continuous improvement cycle that has had clear and measurable impact on instruction and achievement.

Dixon is not a high-performing school today — at least not yet. But, while there is much work to be done, Dixon has been removed from the state of Michigan’s list of low-performing schools.

### **SUPERMAN ISN'T COMING**

Beard recognized the difficult task ahead of her. “I had to stand back, take a long look, and realize the hard fact that Superman was not coming. Turning around this school was up to the faculty, the parents, the students, our Teachscape partners, and me. I knew it would not be easy. In fact, I knew it would be hard. But, somehow, I also knew we could make it happen,” she said.

The first step in Beard’s turnaround strategy was to recruit and build a faculty of professionals with a shared passion for ensuring success for every child and to provide each faculty member with the specific knowledge and skills he or she needed to make this happen. Beard spent the summer of 2010 observing Dixon’s existing faculty teaching summer school, invited some of them to join her in transforming teaching and learning at Dixon, and completed her faculty rosters with professionals who wanted to be part of the work.

Recognizing that dedication and passion are necessary but not sufficient in transforming a school, Beard knew the faculty would need a clear and systematic way to identify the individual learning interests and needs of each student as well as the professional learning necessary to proceed. The school had to find a way to equip teachers with the knowledge and skills to guide their practice and address



Photos by KITTY BLACK

Principal Ora Beard greets students at Dixon Educational Learning Academy, above and on p. 50, on a rainy spring day. The exterior, at left, gives a preview of the bright colors and decorations inside.



student learning needs (Halverson, Grigg, Prichett, & Thomas, 2007; Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010).

### THE RIGHT DATA, THE RIGHT WAY

The Dixon faculty started with data walls. Public and private data walls, displaying standardized test data, benchmark data, diagnostic assessment data, formative assessment data, progress monitoring data, attendance data, and demographic data are ubiquitous in schools today. But these data present only half the picture.

To create a deeper understanding of student achievement as well as the school and classroom practices and conditions that shaped the achievement, staff routinely collect and integrate classroom walk-through and informal observation data with the student achievement data. Beard sums up the approach by saying, “For us, data is everything. It guides what we do, tells us if we are successful, and then points us to the next set of improvements to be made.”

The practice of focusing on data became a team effort involving representatives of each grade, school-based specialists, instructional coaches, and the school principal, convened as an instructional leadership team (Learning Points Associates, 2004). Beard saw the team as the lever for instructional change at Dixon.

Dixon’s instructional leadership team is charged with collaboratively leading, scaling, and supporting instructional improvement throughout the school. Teachscape provides coaching and the use of two technology-based

tools: Teachscape Walk, a handheld-based data collection tool, to gather, analyze, and apply instructional data in consistent ways; and Teachscape’s Professional Learning Suite, which offers Internet-based and differentiated professional learning at times and in places convenient for teachers.

Supported by these resources, the instructional leadership team uses integrated achievement and instructional data to explore five broad discussion questions (see box on p. 53) that guide team members to:

- Identify improvement areas;
- Define differentiated professional learning to support the identified improvement areas; and
- Monitor the implementation and impact of the improvement strategies.

“The data-informed instructional leadership team process is critical to our success at Dixon,” Beard says. “It promotes buy-in for the instructional improvements, provides a structure for examining the right data in the right way, and, with the help of our partner provider, strengthens our internal capacity to sustain the efforts.”

### IDENTIFY IMPROVEMENT AREAS

Before each instructional leadership team meeting, the team gathers and organizes a range of student achievement and instructional data that are focused on a problem of practice (Bambrick-Santoyo, 2010; Schmoker, 1999). The team begins each of its regularly scheduled meetings by reviewing the data and engaging in data-focused discussions, guided by the five data analysis and application questions, to identify a specific instructional improvement area, aligned with the overall school improvement plan, to focus on for four to six weeks.

“It’s so easy to stop with using the data to simply label a problem,” Beard says. “But this process takes us beyond just collecting, analyzing, and labeling. Our partners support us in developing concrete plans to address the identified improvement areas.”

The instructional leadership team’s action plans may vary in scope and content, but they always include four essential elements: SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound) goals, specific implementation responsibilities for each team member, milestones, and evidence of success. With these elements determined, the team turns its attention to the next step in the process: ensuring all teachers have access to data-informed, job-embedded, and relevant professional learning to support them in the instructional improvement process (Supovitz & Klein, 2003).

### DEFINE DIFFERENTIATED LEARNING

Professional learning is not something teachers “do” at Dixon, nor is it viewed as a way to “fix” struggling teachers. Instead, it is a dynamic, central, data-informed, and highly personalized component of the continuous improvement work of every professional at the school (Schmoker, 1999).

Walk-through (instructional) data, coaches’ assessments, and teacher input help identify the professional learning needed to enable all teachers to successfully address improvement areas defined by the instructional leadership team. Professional learning takes multiple forms, such as facilitated group learning, book groups, coaching, and independent professional studies guided by the online Professional Learning Suite. To build capacity and support sustainability, Teachscape instructional coaches model effective professional learning strategies and practices for the team, gradually overseeing coaching by team members themselves.

The approach is working. Beard says, “Teachers have become learners once again and are constantly improving their

#### Dixon Educational Learning Academy

Detroit, Mich.

Grades: **Pre-K-8**

Enrollment: **763**

Staff: **42**

Racial/ethnic mix:

|                         |       |
|-------------------------|-------|
| White:                  | 1.7%  |
| Black:                  | 96.7% |
| Hispanic:               | 1.4%  |
| Asian/Pacific Islander: | 0.1%  |
| Native American:        | 0%    |
| Other:                  | 0%    |

Limited English proficient: **1.4%**

Languages spoken: **English,**

**Spanish**

Free/reduced lunch: **92.5%**

Special education: **17%**

Contact: **Ora Beard**, principal

Email: **ora.beard@detroitk12.org**

**org**

## ANALYZING AND APPLYING DATA

Once the instructional learning team has collected the walk-through data and integrated it with student achievement data, the team analyzes the combined data to better understand instructional practices at Dixon, their impact on student achievement, and how to improve instruction in every classroom by posing five key questions and guiding the discussion with prompts such as those that follow:

| What do we see in these data?  | What can we do about it?  | What evidence will tell us our interventions are working?  | What professional learning do we need to support this improvement?   | What other questions do we have about these data?   |
|--|---|--|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the patterns?</li> <li>• Is there a difference among and/or between grades?</li> <li>• What are the month-to-month and year-to-year changes?</li> <li>• What do these data tell us about individual student learning?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What improvement areas do these data define?</li> <li>• What is already in place and working in these areas?</li> <li>• What are we lacking?</li> <li>• What specific actions can we take to address the improvement areas identified?</li> <li>• How do we allocate time and human resources to instructional improvement?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What will the data show?</li> <li>• How will we collect these data?</li> <li>• How do we incorporate the faculty's professional voice?</li> <li>• What will be the impact of the improved practice?</li> <li>• How will we know?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What knowledge and skills are needed to implement the identified improvements?</li> <li>• Who, among our faculty, already possess these?</li> <li>• How can we scale that person's expertise?</li> <li>• What resources — human and technological — will support the professional learning?</li> <li>• How will we determine success of the professional learning efforts?</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree do these interventions support the Common Core standards?</li> <li>• How can we use evaluations to promote effective professional learning?</li> <li>• What children are successful with which type of intervention?</li> <li>• What else can we do?</li> </ul> |

instructional practice through the professional learning and tools we provide. It is the work we do.”

### DOING THE WORK

Concerned that students were not authentically engaged with read-alouds, early childhood (pre-K-2) teachers at Dixon initiated a study of what children were actually doing during the read-aloud portion of the 90-minute literacy block. The teachers asked Ed Greene, instructional coach for grades pre-K-2 at Dixon, to help them analyze students' actions and interactions and craft an intervention to re-engage them.

Through a combination of focused walk-throughs, coach observations, and teacher observations, the early childhood team discovered that the children were not actively listening during the read-alouds and, as a result, were not able to engage effectively in the discussions of the text that followed.

Together, the teachers determined that they would need

to model and support the active listening, questioning, and text-focused discussions they expected, continuously reviewing and refining their efforts until the children were authentically engaged in the read-aloud process.

After several weeks, the group found that walk-throughs and coach observations confirmed their own assessments: Students were more engaged in actively listening to the stories and engaging in discussions of the text. Then the MEAP scores (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) arrived.

The 3rd-grade MEAP reading scores showed that Dixon students were very successful with test items that required them to demonstrate their ability to recall facts, but fared poorly on items that required higher-order thinking skills, such as predictions, comparisons, and applications of knowledge.

As the early childhood team discussed the implications, they realized that, as one kindergarten teacher stated, they were not “off the hook” just because their students were too young for

the testing program. The team decided to take another look at the read-aloud component of the literacy block, focusing not just on what the children were doing, but on what they were learning.

This iterative process of continuous improvement was not native to Dixon. We had to learn it. Now, it is the work we do.

### MONITOR IMPLEMENTATION AND IMPACT

The continuous improvement cycle requires the team to monitor the identified interventions and measure their impact. Teachscape Walk, which is customized to reflect the components of the identified intervention, provides data the school needs to refine its efforts. The data show when milestones have been met, when goals are achieved, and what is the next step in the cycle of continuous improvement.

To ensure that the read-alouds and text-based discussions were both rigorous and effective in early childhood grades, for example, the early childhood team focused on three aspects of effective instructional practice: Ensuring that the lesson objectives were evident to the students; ensuring all lessons addressed higher-order thinking skills as well as rote recall; and providing a range of instructional activities appropriate to the age and stage of each child.

The data showed improvement in all three areas:

- 32% of students in early childhood classrooms could describe the learning objectives in October. This number increased to 67% in May.
- 2% of lessons observed showed evidence of higher-order thinking skills in October. This number increased to 29% in May.
- 18% of lessons provided differentiation that addressed age and developmental appropriateness in October. In May, 71% of lessons observed provided this differentiation.

The goal of 100% improvement in the rigor and impact of the read-alouds was not met in the first year of the partnership,

but the trajectory of success is clear.

As one faculty member stated, “We finally have a systematic way to approach improved instruction. All that we do is data-informed, relevant, and, most importantly, making an impact.”

### ACHIEVEMENT-FOCUSED CULTURE

Data-informed interventions and professional learning are working. Evidence collected through Teachscape Walk shows implementation of research-based, effective teaching strategies and practices in most Dixon classrooms. Teachers seek and expect high-quality, job-embedded, and differentiated professional learning as part of their professional practice. Violent incidents are almost nonexistent as shown by the fact that the police department no longer stations officers at Dixon. The overall school climate supports teaching and learning, and an achievement-focused culture creates a school where kids want to come, and everyone — students, teachers, leaders, parents, and external partner — is a learner.

Dixon is not yet the high-performing school Ora Beard and her faculty envision. Dixon’s staff and external partner are still working on it because they know sustained success doesn’t happen overnight. But Dixon is definitely turned in the right direction, and the school has the data to prove it.

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### Coalition cites Dixon as a top school in Detroit

**A** Detroit organization dedicated to ensuring excellence in education has cited Dixon Educational Learning Academy as one of the top K-8 schools in the city.

Excellent Schools Detroit, a coalition of Detroit leaders focused on making sure every child in the city attends a quality school, released the results of its 2013 School Quality Review this month. The report identifies the top 20 K-8 schools in the city, including Dixon Educational Learning Academy, recommending parents send their children to these schools in the coming year.

To determine the rankings, the coalition reviewed this year’s MEAP (Michigan Educational Assessment Program) performance and year over year MEAP performance of 126 K-8 schools.

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**Maryann Marrapodi (mmarrapodi@hitn.org) is the chief operating officer of the Hispanic Information & Telecommunications Network and the former chief learning officer of Teachscape. Ora Beard (ora.beard@detroitk12.org) is principal of Dixon Educational Learning Academy in Detroit, Mich. ■**





Photo by JULIE DAHLKE

Karla McAdam, right, works with 3rd-grade teachers Amanda McCoy, left, and Melissa Scholl in their monthly job-embedded professional learning at Hope Academy in Decatur, Ill. McAdam is an instructional coach in the Professional Development Institute of Decatur Public Schools.

# DEEP IMPACT

**A LEARNING FORWARD  
ACADEMY GRADUATE  
INSPIRES LEARNING IN HER  
DISTRICT**

**By Shirley Hord, Janice Bradley,  
and Patricia Roy**

**I**magine the opportunity to invest in 2½ years of thoughtful and stimulating interaction and learning with colleagues from around the nation and beyond. In 2010, Karla McAdam was the winner of a competitive Learning Forward Foundation scholarship that allowed her to do just that.

McAdam, then a district resource reading specialist for Decatur (Ill.) Public Schools, was the recipient of one of two Chidley Scholarships awarded each year — one given to a school-based educator and one to an educator at the district level — as well as the

Hochman Scholarship, which provides tuition for Learning Forward Academy, Learning Forward's multiyear learning experience. The Learning Forward Foundation solicits, awards, and manages funds for seven opportunities, one of which is the Academy.

### PROBLEM OF PRACTICE

At their first Academy meeting, participants bring a problem of practice statement focused on adult and student learning in their district. This statement provides the problem-solving focus for 2½ years of concentrated learning and work.

McAdam brought this problem of practice statement: "How is the district ensuring that teachers provide quality core reading instruction with fidelity and efficacy of practice?"

McAdam's district, Decatur Public Schools, is a high-poverty, low-performing district serving more than 8,800 students. The district's two high schools, two middle schools, and five of its elementary schools are in Academic Watch Status, and another eight elementary schools are in Academic Early Warning Status. Disaggregated data show that underperforming students are consistently African-American males and

special education students.

McAdam maintained a focus on reading throughout job changes within the district, though her problem evolved to include an in-depth inquiry into school culture and leadership.

Academy staff includes two coaches to support and assist the Academy learners. In addition, participants are organized into small teams of five to eight members, based on the nature of the members' problems. Because her interest was in ensuring high-quality reading instruction for her district's students, McAdam joined a school improvement team.

"The coaches inundated us with information," McAdam says. "They were knowledge disseminators of the highest order. They provided the structure for rich conversation, posed questions that required deeper thinking — about one's problem statement, how knowledge shared related to the problem, how the information might influence the problem — and invited the identification of changes or next steps that might be taken as a result of powerful

**This special feature** highlights the impact of the Learning Forward Academy on Karla McAdam, a member of the Academy's Class of 2012, and her subsequent influence on the principals, teachers, and students in her district. For more information about the Academy, visit [www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/academy](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/academy).

**"Academy interactions helped me to realize how important continuous learning is in a system and how it influences all efforts to move educator and student learning forward."**

— Karla McAdam

thinking and deeply intellectual conversations."

The team structure was an important facet in McAdam's learning. "My team was, indisputably, a wealthy source of information and support," she says. "We bonded very quickly on common inquiries, delved into problem-based learning, and felt quite comfortable having critical conversations around learning.

"While there were many aspects of Academy that contributed to my growth and change, the experiences afforded by the coaches and my team clarified for me the role that professional learning plays in all that we educators do," McAdam says. "I knew this was true for myself — I have an insatiable quest to learn more. But Academy interactions helped me to realize how important continuous learning is in a system and how it influences all efforts to move educator and student learning forward."

### GETTING AN INSIDE LOOK

As part of their Academy experience, participants attend sessions of their choice at Learning Forward's Annual and Summer Conferences, which follow Academy sessions.

At the 2011 Annual Conference, McAdam attended a session that discussed the book *Tattoos on the Heart* (Free Press, 2011) by Gregory Boyle, a Jesuit priest who runs Homeboy Industries, a gang-intervention program in the Boyle Heights neighborhood of Los Angeles. McAdam was drawn to this session because of the increasing presence of gang activities in her home city and the consequent concerns raised in the schools.

"I wonder if we lose sight of compassion as we struggle to meet the demands of federal and state guidelines," McAdam says. "I wonder how the school can aid youngsters in making appropriate behavior choices when some live among dire circumstances." McAdam reflected on these ideas as she reviewed her Academy teachings and her experience in the book study.

The session focused on the book, its deeply engaging discussion of Boyle's unconditional acceptance of the young men and women, and his use of their language in order to communicate effectively with them. McAdam was moved by his unrestricted compassion for the youths in the community.

"In order to understand the depth of this boundless compassion and to observe its successes, it made sense to go see it for myself," she says.

McAdam and two Academy colleagues rented a car and drove to the inner city of Los Angeles. "We talked briefly be-

**K**arla McAdam's participation in Learning Forward Academy was made possible by scholarships from the Learning Forward Foundation. For more information about the foundation, visit [www.learningforward.org/foundation](http://www.learningforward.org/foundation).

fore we arrived about exit strategies if, for any reason, we did not feel safe in our surroundings, but these strategies were not needed, nor given a second thought," she says. "We visited with the young individuals as they worked in various settings, had lunch in the Homeboy Café, and observed in awe one man's vision and creation of a community where former gang members found new self-worth."

McAdam says this experience relates directly to what she has learned at the Academy. "It reminds us yet again, and very forcibly, that all children are in our care and concern, and that we have much to do to meet the needs of all children. I had this very valuable opportunity to visit a piece of Homeboy Industries because I was at Learning Forward's Annual Conference by virtue of my acceptance into Academy. I continue to share this book and my experience with my peers and key stakeholders in central administration, as well as sharing of Boyle's successful outcomes with these hard-to-to-reach young people."

### IMPACT ON PRINCIPALS

As a result of her Academy experience, McAdam changed her approach to the work that she does with schools.

Having gained a clear understanding about the power and influence of job-embedded professional learning, she worked with principals in three schools to set aside time and money for monthly one-hour learning sessions for all teachers.

Since then, more schools across the district are embedding professional learning opportunities within their day.

The focus is on building knowledge and applying that knowledge in classrooms to have greatest impact on student learning.

McAdam's efforts didn't stop there. She talked with principals about how best to use staff and professional learning community meetings, and the meetings have changed from informational to settings for real professional learning.

Another goal for McAdam is to get underneath the school culture to discover the assumptions and beliefs that drive instructional practices. Her work at the Academy stimulated McAdam's thinking and brought attention to many issues as she started looking at things in a new way.

She was curious to take a closer look at the beliefs and assumptions of principals and how the principal leadership factor influences a school's culture. How is it, she wondered, that the principal in one building leads staff to make bigger gains in student achievement than other principals?

To explore this issue, McAdam launched an informal action research project using tools and resources she acquired through the Academy, such as the Standards Assessment Inventory, Innovation Configuration maps, and various protocols. Her goal was to uncover beliefs and assumptions that influence teachers' and principals' instructional decisions. From her research, she is able to draw general conclusions to help guide her work in schools.



Photo by JULIE DAHLKE

Karla McAdam, right, meets with kindergarten teachers Mindy Parks, left, and Erin Roe at Hope Academy in Decatur, Ill.

### INFLUENCE ON TEACHERS

McAdam hopes to develop teachers' deep thinking and reflective practices around the outcomes of high-poverty students in her district. While many teachers are beginning to question their instructional practices, conversations and collaborative work revealed that not all teachers believed the students could learn to high levels.

However, before McAdam's work with teachers could bear fruit, her assignment in the district changed. During her first Academy summer, McAdam became a school improvement specialist for the district. Two years later, she became an instructional coach. Thus, she is beginning anew to interact with one targeted building and principal to ensure that time is set aside for professional learning; that professional learning communities should focus on the learning of the professionals; that teachers gain an understanding of children of poverty and their needs; and that teachers become more effective as they uncover their beliefs and learning expectations about children of poverty.

The work by this committed, knowledgeable, and experienced professional continues.

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**Shirley Hord** ([shirley.hord@learningforward.org](mailto:shirley.hord@learningforward.org)) is Learning Forward's scholar laureate. **Janice Bradley** ([jbradley@nmsu.edu](mailto:jbradley@nmsu.edu)) is an assistant professor at New Mexico State University. **Patricia Roy** ([cooppat@cox.net](mailto:cooppat@cox.net)) is a senior consultant with Learning Forward's Center for Results. ■



### Ask questions, rather than dispense advice, to transform conversations into teachable moments

*Albert Einstein said, “We should take care not to make the intellect our god; it has, of course, powerful muscles, but no personality. It cannot lead. It can only serve.”*

*Why can't the intellect lead? Because we make decisions first for emotional reasons, second for rational reasons. If someone attempts to engage our heads, but fails to engage our hearts as well, they will lose both.*

*We see this in business all the time. A brilliant new leader with good intentions and a great plan begins issuing directives. She eventually leaves because no one will follow her. Yes, she was smart, but we didn't feel seen or valued by her. The messaging was all one way — from her to us.*

*This happens in organizations, families, and schools that cling to the old view of “I teach, you listen.” Social and emotional learning can change that, creating a passion for learning in students and adults.*

— Susan Scott

**By Deli Moussavi-Bock, Janet Hagstrom Irving, and Lisa Bresnehan**

Educators understand that schools with socially and emotionally sound learning and working environments help ensure positive short- and long-term outcomes for students and staff.

learning as the process for helping children and adults develop the fundamental skills for life effectiveness. These skills include developing empathy, recognizing and managing emotions, establishing positive relationships, making responsible decisions, and learning to resolve conflicts respectfully.

How can administrators, principals, teachers, and staff create an environment that is conducive to learning and maintaining these skills? Through skilled conversations, educators create a culture of trust and a culture that can interrogate reality, provoke learning, and resolve tough challenges. The goal is always to enrich relationships as we listen and have the opportunity to learn from each other.

### RELATIONSHIPS ARE FUNDAMENTAL TO SUCCESS

Our relationships with one another and our sense of self are fundamental and managed through conversation — not just a single conversation, but a series of exchanges that happen over time. Students who are engaged in learning — students who ask questions and take part in dialogue with peers, teachers, and parents — are more likely to learn and retain that information.

When we can safely open up in a conversation, trust is nourished. Relationships and learning grow. Research shows that students who had more developed social and emotional skills exhibited greater leadership skills, received higher grades, and demonstrated a better ability to persist in challenging situations (Scales & Leffert, 2004).



Moussavi-Bock



Hagstrom Irving



Bresnehan

The Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) describes social and emotional

In each issue of *JSD*, Susan Scott ([susan@fierceinc.com](mailto:susan@fierceinc.com)) explores aspects of communication that encourage meaningful collaboration. Scott, author of *Fierce Conversations: Achieving Success At Work & In Life, One Conversation at a Time* (Penguin, 2002) and *Fierce Leadership: A Bold Alternative to the Worst “Best” Practices of Business Today* (Broadway Business, 2009), leads Fierce Inc. ([www.fierceinc.com](http://www.fierceinc.com)), which helps companies around the world transform the conversations that are central to their success. Fierce in the Schools carries this work into schools and higher education. Columns are available at [www.learningforward.org](http://www.learningforward.org). © Copyright, Fierce Inc., 2013.

Maurice Elias, a psychology professor at Rutgers University, writes, “Research, observation, experience, and common sense have converged to suggest that student success, which includes but is not limited to academic learning, depends a great deal on the other side of the report card. Students who are actively engaged in class and come prepared, who cooperate with their peers, who resolve conflicts peacefully, who complete their work, who attend school often and are not tardy, and who demonstrate initiative are more likely to succeed in school and, ultimately, in life” (Elias, 2008).

Using a framework established by the Partnership for 21st Century Skills, students can learn how to become good communicators, cooperative members of a team, effective leaders, and caring, concerned members of their communities. Through continual dialogue, students learn how to set and achieve goals and how to persist in the face of challenges. These are the skills employers consider important (Partnership for 21st Century Skills, 2011).

In order for students to gain these skills, it is imperative that adults in schools model these behaviors with one another and with students. Nothing is as powerful as teaching by example. Administrators ask us, “How can we give our students a socially and emotionally rich environment if we don’t have the skills to embody it ourselves?” The answer is to invest time and resources to provide these skills to adults. Social and emotional learning, as well as building relationships among students and teachers and among adults at school, happens one conversation at a time.

### MODEL EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS FOR STUDENTS

The principles and practices of effective conversations are critical in the classroom. Our careers, our relationships, and our lives succeed or fail one conversation at a time. Teachers

have the responsibility of modeling for students the kinds of conversations that lead students towards a series of positive outcomes with teachers and classmates, friends and family, future employers, and themselves.

Helping teachers build this skill is critical to a young person’s education, where lack of engagement can lead to students on the honor roll who don’t finish high school because they are bored or at-risk students who may not learn foundational reading and math skills because their classroom fails to engage them. While most teachers have the desire to engage students in lively conversations and back-and-forth exchange that drives deeper understanding of a subject matter, many simply don’t know how.

In a *New Yorker* article titled “Most likely to succeed,” Malcolm Gladwell says what makes for a good teacher are things like creating a “holding space” for lively interaction, flexibility in how students become engaged in a topic, a regard for student perspective, and providing high-quality feedback “where there is a back-and-forth exchange to get a deeper understanding” (Gladwell, 2008).

This back-and-forth exchange to reach a deeper understanding is at the heart of conversation. The Latin derivation of the word “conversation” means “to associate with,” implying an exchange of sentiments and ideas. “Con” in Spanish means “with.” The notion of “with” is central to a conversation. Yet many students often feel the sense of being included is absent.

### USE AN INQUIRY-BASED APPROACH

When adults and teachers begin to ask questions, rather than dispense advice, even typical punitive conversations transform to teachable moments. Teachers give more ownership to students by helping them dig deeper, evolve their critical thinking skills, problem solve, and collaborate with one another.

An inquiry-based approach

allows students to come up with and embrace their own solutions, gives them confidence, and helps them gain an ability to name their emotions so they can get ahead of them. Teachers tell us that they use these skills in the classroom to improve emotional competency for themselves and their students, engage students, and strengthen their resiliency in and out of school. In doing so, classroom management becomes a nonissue.

When administrators and principals gain social and emotional skills, they model them for teachers, who, in turn, teach their students by example. When teachers and students engage their collective curiosity, provoke learning, tackle tough challenges, and enrich relationships with one another, students connect with their own passion to learn.

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•  
**Deli Moussavi-Bock (deli@fierceinc.com) is director of training, and Janet Hagstrom Irving (janet@fierceinc.com) and Lisa Bresnehan (lisa@fierceinc.com) are directors of education partnerships for Fierce in the Schools. ■**

## **THE COLLABORATIVE COMPACT:**

Operating principles lay the groundwork for successful group work.

*By Robert J. Garmston and Diane P. Zimmerman*

When leaders know how to facilitate with elegance and intervene to maintain engagement, they teach by example and create smart collaborators. Accordingly, group members learn to manage their own behavior and support their colleagues in thinking together. Leaders can accelerate collaboration by creating collaborative compacts — a set of agreements on how group members work together, think together, work with conflicts, and manage their own behavior.

## **ALL ABOARD!:**

In one Iowa district, all teachers and principals are on the same journey.

*By Deb Hansen, Colleen Anderson, Linda Munger, and Mitzi Chizek*

Every teacher and principal in the Dallas Center-Grimes Community School District near Des Moines, Iowa, participates in collaborative learning teams to study a process known as assessment for learning, in which formative assessment practices provide students with clear learning targets, examples and models of strong and weak work, regular descriptive feedback, and the ability to self-assess, track learning, and set goals. Teacher practice has improved, and achievement results demonstrate the initiative's impact on students.

## **A TUNE-UP FOR STYMIED TEAMS:**

When a group's focus falters, take steps to get back on track.

*By Renee Hesson*

Even the most efficient team of teachers can become ineffective. Conversely, even the most ineffective team can be made more efficient and productive. The keys to refocusing a committed team on the instructional goals originally established by the group are through reality, relationships, and reflection. These critical components of effective collaboration guide a renewed commitment to assist students to achieve desired learning outcomes.

## **STRONG TEAMS, STRONG SCHOOLS:**

Teacher-to-teacher collaboration creates synergy that benefits students.

*By Dennis Sparks*

Schools will improve for the benefit of every student only when every leader and every teacher is a member

of one or more strong teams that create synergy in problem solving, provide emotional and practical support, distribute leadership to better tap the talents of members of the school community, and promote the interpersonal accountability that is necessary for continuous improvement. Such teamwork not only benefits students, it also enables teachers to thrive and address the complex challenges of their work.

## **CREATE A LEARNING TEAM ROAD MAP:**

A well-designed plan is flexible and focused on the team's goal.

*By Anne Jolly*

A team plan is the beginning route that team members agree to follow to reach a shared goal. As a starting point for learning teams' work, the plan can help teachers get to know one another as professionals and build relationships. Developing a good plan requires thoughtful reflection and discussion. Team members must spend time exploring ideas, examining different strategies for reaching the goal, and deliberating on which approaches they will use.

## **YOU'VE BEEN EVALUATED. NOW WHAT?:**

Use results to pump up professional learning's potential.

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

Individual teachers working on their own examining evaluation feedback will have valuable information to inform individual improvement. However, teacher evaluations have the potential to achieve more, and to do it more quickly, when they are part of a comprehensive professional learning system tied to a school district's and a school's improvement goals for students. A four-step process outlines how teachers can use evaluation results for improvement.

## **LEARNING TO BE A COMMUNITY:**

Schools need adaptable models to create successful programs.

*By Bradley A. Ermeling and Ronald Gallimore*

Some districts and schools are struggling to translate inspiring case stories into successful programs in their own contexts. The learning communities movement is at a crossroads, in danger of relying too much on inspirational examples and overly general implementation models. The next generation of professional learning communities needs implementation plans flexible enough to adapt to local conditions but sufficiently specific that educators aren't reinventing the wheel.

**coming up**  
in June 2013 *JSD*:  
**INTERNATIONAL TRENDS**

## features

### USING DATA

#### **WHAT THE RIGHT DATA CAN DO:**

Find sources that can help tailor learning to each educator’s needs.

*By Edie Holcomb*

Learning Forward’s Data standard advocates using data from a variety of sources and types — including student, educator, and system data — to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning. But rarely are the data gathered connected directly to plans for professional learning, nor does it necessarily meet educators’ needs. By using student, educator, and system data that provide critical information to customize planning, every educator is *learning* — not just attending the same events as everyone else.

### SCHOOL TURNAROUND

#### **A POWERFUL PARTNERSHIP:**

Principal and external provider lead the turnaround at a low-performing urban school.

*By Maryann Marrapodi and Ora Beard*

Dixon Educational Learning Academy in Detroit, Mich., was a low-performing urban school with frequent leadership turnover, demoralized staff, and episodic and irrelevant professional learning. Led by an experienced principal and an external partner, the school is turning the corner using a data-informed instructional improvement process to guide professional learning and support rigorous, standards-based teaching in every content area and every classroom.

### LEARNING FORWARD ACADEMY

#### **DEEP IMPACT:**

A Learning Forward Academy graduate inspires learning in her district.

*By Shirley Hord, Janice Bradley, and Patricia Roy*

Karla McAdam was the winner of a Learning Forward Foundation scholarship that allowed her to attend Learning Forward Academy, where she invested in 2½ years of thoughtful and stimulating interaction and learning with colleagues around the nation and beyond. As a result of her experience, McAdam changed her approach to the work she does with schools — and influenced learning for the principals, teachers, and students in her district.

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## columns

#### **Collaborative culture:**

Ask questions, rather than dispense advice, to transform conversations into teachable moments.

*By Susan Scott, Deli Moussavi-Bock, Janet Hagstrom Irving, and Lisa Bresnehan*

An inquiry-based approach allows students to come up with and embrace their own solutions, gives them confidence, and helps them gain an ability to name their emotions so they can get ahead of them.

#### **From the director:**

Raise expectations as well as support for the time we set aside for collaboration.

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

Ensuring education leaders have collaboration skills to facilitate the ongoing development of social capital is essential to ongoing improvements and lasting success.

## Writing for JSD

- Themes for the 2014 publication year will be posted soon at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes).
- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure ([christy.colclasure@learningforward.org](mailto:christy.colclasure@learningforward.org)).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines).

## Workbook examines time for collaboration

**F**inding time for job-embedded professional learning is one of the most frequently cited challenges with implementing the Common Core State Standards.

*Establishing Time for Professional Learning* is a workbook designed to guide districts and schools as they develop, assess, and implement recommendations for increasing collaborative learning time for educators. The processes and tools in this workbook, published by Learning Forward, will provide educators, parents, and community leaders with resources to increase or refine the use of time for educator collaboration to achieve goals associated with any key initiative.

With *Establishing Time for Professional Learning*, practitioners and education leaders use tools to identify current allocations of time for professional learning, analyze how that time is being used and what results are associated with it, and increase the effectiveness of the existing time before seeking additional time.

“A schedule is a ‘thing’ that can be — and should be — manipulated in ways that are best for student learning. Collaborative professional learning does not begin with plans for a schedule change, but with commitment to a cultural change,” said Jack Linton, assistant superin-

Download the report at [www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/implementing-common-core).

tendent of the Petal (Miss.) School District.

*Establishing Time for Professional Learning* is part of Learning Forward’s ongoing initiative, Transforming Professional Learning to Prepare College- and Career-Ready Students: Implementing the Common Core, which is supported by Sandler Foundation, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, and MetLife Foundation.

The workbook is organized into seven sections, outlining a process for studying, designing, implementing time for educator collaboration, and evaluating its success.

“Innovation in any industry requires time for re-tooling existing practices, equipment, procedures, and facilities,” said Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh. “In order to use the Common Core standards and other college- and career-ready standards most effectively, educators must find the time to revise practices and continuously engage in standards-based, collaborative professional learning.”

### book club

#### IMPLEMENTING CHANGE THROUGH LEARNING

Concerns-Based Concepts, Tools, and Strategies for Guiding Change

By **Shirley M. Hord and James L. Roussin**

Foreword and finale by Gene E. Hall

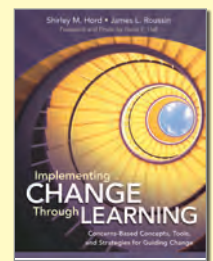
**R**eal educational reform happens one school at a time, one classroom at a time. No matter what change a school or district is facing, this book shows how to involve teachers and staff as partners every step of the way.

Shirley Hord and Gene Hall’s Concerns-Based Adoption Model, a rigorously field-tested approach to change management, has benefited schools and districts for more than two decades. Now Hord and Hall, joined by co-author James Roussin, share their hands-on techniques. Readers using this complete change management program will learn to:

- Understand, predict, and address educator concerns and reactions that may arise during the change process;

- Use a series of learning map activities to guide and support individuals and teams to navigate their own change efforts successfully;
- Promote collaboration and learning throughout a change initiative, transforming skeptics into supporters; and
- Experience the Concerns-Based Adoption Model in action through a running case study.

*Implementing Change Through Learning* offers realistic, people-centered strategies to develop trust and credibility with all teachers and staff, setting a foundation for reform that lasts. Through a partnership with Corwin Press, Learning Forward members can add the Book Club to their membership at any time and receive four books a year for \$69 (for U.S. mailing addresses). To receive this book, add the Book Club to your membership before June 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email [office@learningforward.org](mailto:office@learningforward.org).







## Climb out of that crab bucket — aspire to be remarkable

I had a moment of pause and reflection while reading entrepreneur Seth Godin's blog, where he challenged leaders by stating, "Our task, then, is to find people we can encourage and nurture until they're as impatient with average as we are" (Godin, 2010).

John Maxwell, a well-known author on leadership, shares a related sentiment: "Average people do not want others to go beyond average" (Maxwell, 2004).

In our society, there often seems to be a push for people to fit in and strive for the middle. Jennifer York-Barr, a mentor of mine at the University of Minnesota, refers to this as "crab-bucket culture." Crab buckets don't need lids because, as one crab attempts to escape, it is pulled down by the others. Too often, educators feel a need to hide their excellence from colleagues or friends. An aspiration for average is far too pervasive in our society and our schools.

Shifting this culture requires collaboration by a team whose members push and support one another. It requires a team working to foster a culture in which each school staff member sees excellence as an aspiration.

I believe that teachers, staff, and leaders in schools everywhere want this type of culture. Realizing these hopes requires educators to be radical learners.

**Jeff Ronneberg is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.**

### on board JEFF RONNEBERG

Jim Knight describes radical learners as "people who are driven by learning, who get up in the morning fired up to try something new, to make a difference, to teach and learn" (Knight, 2010).

However, radical learners cannot flourish working in isolation. Ensuring the success of each of our students is a collective endeavor. Support, active involvement, and an impatience with average — from every staff member — are necessary.

I feel fortunate to be a member of Learning Forward, an association that recognizes the need for effective collaboration that aligns the work of adults around improving student learning. Learning Forward provides a place to find resources, support, and connections with like-minded educators so we can deepen our collective efforts to meet the needs of our students.

I recently spent a couple of hours visiting an elementary school in my district. Afterward, I kept thinking about the level of student engagement and personalized learning I had seen. Students were engaged in substantive conversation, setting goals and monitoring their own learning, and, most important, experiencing success.

How did it get that way? The staff members are radical learners who have

made professional learning a part of their collective work. They don't take collaboration and their work with students for granted — it is a constant focus. The staff consistently turns to Learning Forward as a resource.

Accomplishing excellence in schools takes a team of radical learners collectively working to foster a culture that results in every staff member aspiring to be remarkable. This kind of adult learning can happen in all schools.

The beneficiaries are students, as well as the adults, who experience a greater sense of efficacy in their work.

Are you impatient with average? I hope so.



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**Maxwell, J. (2004).** *Winning with people: Discover the people principles that work for you every time* (p. 208). Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson. ■



## Pass it on

Learning Forward members have a chance to share the valuable tools and resources they receive and earn membership rewards by referring a friend or colleague to join Learning Forward.

Through the membership referral program, members receive \$10 off their next membership renewal for every new member they recruit.

Here's how it works: The applicant fills in the member's name, city, and state on the membership application form or mentions the member's name when joining by phone at 800-727-7288.

Current members will receive a \$10 off coupon toward their next membership renewal for each new member who adds their information to his or her application. There is no limit to the membership discounts members can receive for referring new members.

For questions or additional information, contact the Learning Forward Business Office at **800-727-7288** or **office@learningforward.org**.

## Keep the cycle of giving in motion

The Learning Forward Foundation relies on donations from members who share its vision to support educators through grant and scholarship opportunities. (*Read about the impact of this support in the profile of scholarship recipient Karla McAdam on p. 55.*)

How does your donation support professional learning initiatives for individuals and teams? Among the grants and scholarships the foundation offers are:

- **Chidley Fund Academy Scholarship**, which provides two scholarships annually to participate in Learning Forward's Academy to educators working with large populations of underserved students.
- **Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship**, which provides a scholarship annually for a school-based teacher

leader/coach to participate in Learning Forward's Academy.

- **Learning Forward Affiliate Grant**, which provides funding for a multiyear project that allows an affiliate to create or expand its outreach.
- **The Principal as a Leader of Professional Learning Scholarship**, which supports the growth of a principal through Learning Forward Annual Conference participation and individualized executive coaching.
- **Learning Forward Team Grant**, which supports teams that achieve a challenging goal aligned with Learning Forward's purpose.



Last year, the foundation raised more than \$18,000. Please consider a donation today to keep the cycle of giving in motion. **Learn more at [www.learningforward.org/foundation](http://www.learningforward.org/foundation).**

## Hirsh to advise Center on Great Teachers and Leaders

Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh has joined the advisory board of the Center on Great Teachers and Leaders.

The center supports the efforts of state education leaders to ensure great teachers and leaders for all students. Continuing the work of the National Comprehensive Center for Teacher Quality, the center provides technical assistance and online resources designed to build systems that:

- Support the implementation of college and career standards.
- Ensure the equitable distribution of effective teachers and leaders.
- Recruit, retain, reward, and support effective educators.
- Develop coherent human capital management systems.
- Create safe academic environments that increase student learning through positive behavior management and appropriate discipline.
- Use data to guide professional development and improve instructional improvement.

The center is administered by American Institutes for Research, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Public Impact. Learn more at [www.tqsource.org](http://www.tqsource.org).

COMING SOON:

## A new tool for implementing the standards

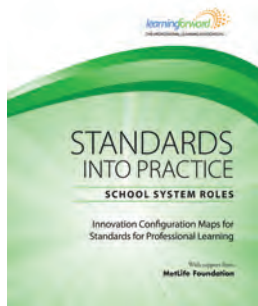
Thanks to MetLife Foundation, Learning Forward continues to develop tools that lead to deeper implementation of the Standards for Professional Learning. Available soon are the next set of Innovation Configuration maps. *Standards Into Practice: School System Roles* presents IC maps for those who work in the following roles: central office, director of professional learning, superintendent, and school board.

IC maps identify and describe the major components of the standards in operation, helping those in various roles understand the actions they take as part of systemwide implementation.

The IC maps provide clear pictures of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in practice and guide educators in increasing the quality and results of professional learning.

This is the second of three volumes of IC maps to complement the standards. *Standards Into Practice: School-Based Roles* is available through the Learning Forward Bookstore at <http://store.learningforward.org>. A third volume supporting those working outside of school systems will be published later in 2013.

Learn more at [www.learningforward.org/standards/innovation-configurations](http://www.learningforward.org/standards/innovation-configurations).



### Powerful WORDS

“The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision. It’s got to be a vision you articulate clearly and forcefully on every occasion. You can’t blow an uncertain trumpet.”

— The Rev. Theodore Hesburgh

### LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

- June 30:** Deadline to save \$75 off registration for the 2013 Annual Conference.
- July 21-24:** Learning Forward's 2013 Summer Conference in Minneapolis, Minn.
- Dec. 7-11:** Learning Forward's 2013 Annual Conference in Dallas, Texas.



**LEARNING FORWARD'S PURPOSE:** Every educator engages in effective professional learning every day so every student achieves.

#### BUSINESS OFFICE

504 S. Locust St.  
Oxford, OH 45056  
513-523-6029, 800-727-7288  
Fax: 513-523-0638  
office@learningforward.org  
www.learningforward.org

#### LEARNING FORWARD STAFF

##### Executive director

Stephanie Hirsh  
stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org

##### Director of strategy and development

Frederick Brown  
frederick.brown@learningforward.org

##### Director of communications

Tracy Crow  
tracy.crow@learningforward.org

##### Director of learning

Carol François  
carol.francois@learningforward.org

##### Director, Center for Results

M. René Islas  
rene.islas@learningforward.org

##### Director of business services

Leslie Miller  
leslie.miller@learningforward.org

##### Director of marketing

Robert Tess  
robert.tess@learningforward.org

##### Associate director of e-learning

Tom Manning  
tom.manning@learningforward.org

##### Scholar laureate

Shirley Hord  
shirley.hord@learningforward.org

##### Senior advisor

Joellen Killion  
joellen.killion@learningforward.org

##### Distinguished senior fellow

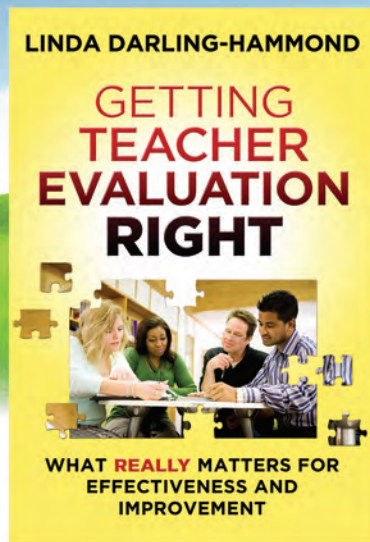
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# Summer Reading Essentials

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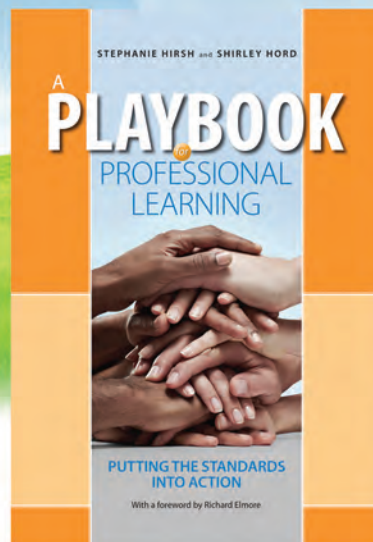


## Getting Teacher Evaluation Right: What Really Matters for Effectiveness and Improvement

Linda Darling-Hammond

Teacher evaluation systems are being overhauled by states and districts across the United States. And, while intentions are admirable, the result for many new systems is that good — often excellent — teachers are lost in the process. In the end, students are the losers. In her new book, Linda Darling-Hammond makes a compelling case for a research-based approach to teacher evaluation that supports collaborative models of teacher planning and learning. Finally, Darling-Hammond offers a vision of teacher evaluation as part of a teaching and learning system that supports continuous improvement, both for individual teachers and for the profession as a whole. *Teachers College Press, 2013*

**B555, 192 pp.**  
**\$25.00 members**  
**\$31.25 nonmembers**

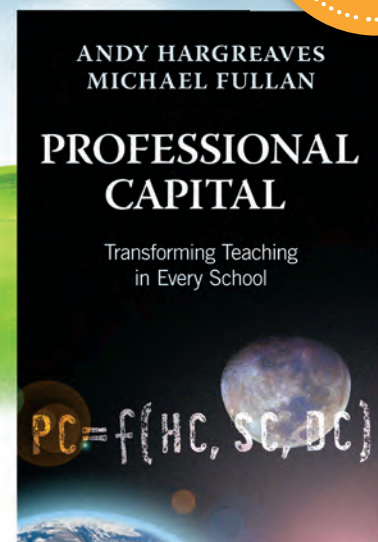


## A Playbook for Professional Learning: Putting the Standards into Action

Stephanie Hirsh & Shirley Hord

Introducing *A Playbook for Professional Learning*, your practical guide to facilitating professional learning in your workplace by two experts in the field. Authors Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord provide examples of real problems facing educators and how to apply the Standards for Professional Learning to resolve these issues. Easy-to-follow activities for each chapter will help you and your colleagues develop the capacity to use the standards at different levels. Don't let the road ahead take you into an educational wasteland. Use this book to move knowledge into action to benefit all students. *Learning Forward, 2012*

**B540, 208 pp.**  
**\$32.00 members**  
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## Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School

Andy Hargreaves & Michael Fullan

The future of learning depends absolutely on the future of teaching. In this latest and most important collaboration, Andy Hargreaves and Michael Fullan show how the quality of teaching is captured in a compelling new idea: the professional capital of every teacher working together in every school. Speaking out against policies that result in a teaching force that is inexperienced, inexpensive, and exhausted in short order, these two world authorities — who know teaching and leadership inside out — set out a groundbreaking new agenda to transform the future of teaching and public education. *Teachers College Press, 2012*

**B549, 240 pp.**  
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## BROWSE THE BOOKSHELVES

<http://store.learningforward.org>

Learning Forward's Bookstore has a new look to make it even easier for shoppers to find the resources they need to strengthen their professional learning library. See what's new, browse the best sellers, or shop by category of interest. New titles include *Standards Into Practice: School-Based Roles*, containing the latest Innovation

Configuration maps; *Coaching Matters*, outlining the critical elements of effective coaching practices; and *A Playbook for Professional Learning: Putting the Standards Into Action*, demonstrating how to put the Standards for Professional Learning into daily practice. Learning Forward members save 20% on all purchases.

## TEACHER CAREER PATHS



<http://bit.ly/YLyTcw>

In the most recent *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*, about half of teachers say they have a leadership role in their school and about half also say they have an interest in a role where they are teaching part-time combined with other responsibilities in the school or district. Read about the range of possible career paths teacher leaders can take in the spring issue of *The Leading Teacher*, sponsored by MetLife Foundation. The tool invites readers to identify interests and options as they consider what direction their careers might go.

## FREE DOWNLOAD

<http://bit.ly/YLhGA0>

*Facilitator Guide: Standards for Professional Learning* is designed to assist facilitators in introducing and helping others implement the standards. Published in PDF format and available free online, the guide contains practical activities, reflection questions, and tools to deepen users' understanding. Complete with handouts and presentation slides, the facilitator guide is organized to support a full-day learning session and includes suggested variations for a two-hour introduction. Turn on the bookmarks feature in Acrobat to navigate among chapters, slides, and handouts.



## THE POWER OF LANGUAGE

<http://bit.ly/YYAwPu>

*Joellen Killion, Learning Forward senior advisor, describes the power of language and the words that fail professional learning:*

“Unmasking assumptions about professional learning through analysis of language provides opportunities to confront beliefs and practices that serve as barriers to effective professional learning.

... When education leaders care more about development rather than learning, they unmask yet another false assumption about professional learning.

It places priority on development — the structures, actions, or resources provided to promote professional improvement — rather than on learning that is demonstrated through refinement or change in practice and results for every student.”





## Raise expectations as well as support for the time we set aside for collaboration

In their 2012 Annual Conference keynote address, Michael Fullan and Andy Hargreaves discussed the major tenets of their book, *Professional Capital: Transforming Teaching in Every School* (2012). The ideas at the heart of their book are the foundation of our commitment to effective collaboration as key to improving schools for students and their teachers.

Hargreaves and Fullan write about the important roles of human and social capital in sustained improvement. Human capital is about the qualities of individuals.

In the context of schools, human capital is a teacher's cumulative abilities, knowledge, and

skills developed through formal education and on-the-job experience. Many reform efforts have focused on improving just this aspect of capital. In some situations, accountability becomes the primary driver for improvement, while in others, support and capacity building play that role.

Social capital is an idea Hargreaves and Fullan explore in-depth,

**Stephanie Hirsh** ([stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org](mailto:stephanie.hirsh@learningforward.org)) is executive director of Learning Forward.

informed by the work of Carrie Leana (2011) around this concept. They define it as the capacity of groups to work collectively toward school improvement. Social capital resides in the relationships among teachers. Social capital can raise individual human capital; a good team, school, or system lifts everyone. But higher individual human capital does not necessarily improve the overall team (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

This research and that of others (e.g. Bryk & Schneider, 2002) show that when relationships among teachers in a school are characterized by high trust and frequent interaction — that is, when social capital is strong — student achievement scores improve.

Many schools and school systems understand this at some level. For more than a decade, professional learning communities have proliferated in schools. And in the 2011 *MetLife Survey of the American Teacher*, teachers report much greater job satisfaction when they have opportunities for regular collaboration (MetLife, 2012).

Yet time to collaborate is not enough. We must be deliberate in our expectations and support for the collaboration time that we set aside for educators. We have all had experiences with high-functioning and high-performing groups as well as groups that began with similarly well-intentioned participants and never achieved their stated goals.

Learning Forward's role is to

support system and school leaders to see building social capital as key to achieving their visions. Our standards stress that schools and school systems must provide the leadership, conditions, and resources — including, but not limited to, time — that facilitate the ongoing development of social capital.

Achieving this vision will take skillful collaboration. So I'd ask you to start with your leaders. Do they have the skills to collaborate? Do you? Do you know how to make the best use of time, how to ensure that you are developing productive relationships, communicating effectively, setting goals and shared visions?

Ensuring education leaders have collaboration skills to facilitate the ongoing development of social capital is essential to ongoing improvements and lasting success.

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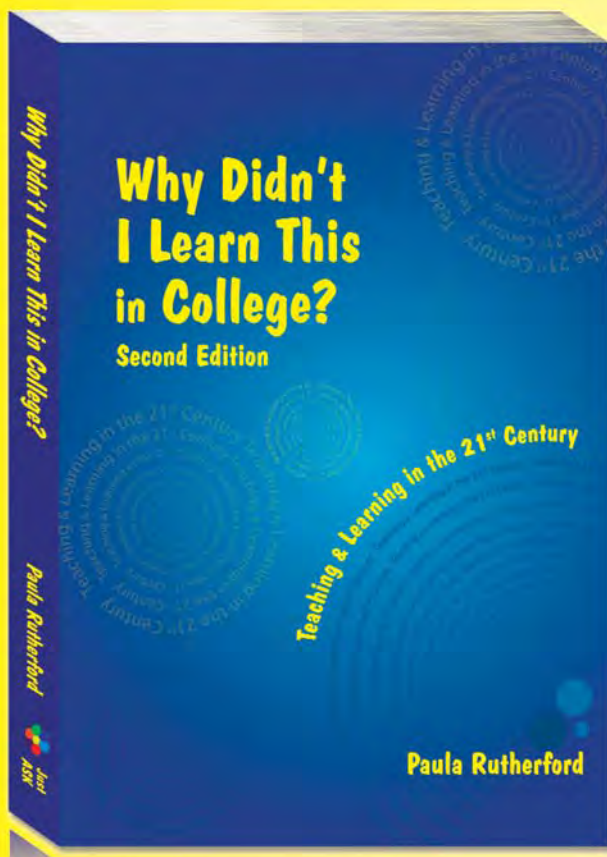
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