JSD

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FROM THE PATH TO EXCELLENCE

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NEW! **LESSONS FROM RESEARCH:**
The spillover effects of teacher professional learning p. 65

learningforward

NANCIE ATWELL

Turns your beliefs into schoolwide action

"There are steps teachers and administrators can take to make a classroom or school a place that's safe for children, one where every student feels noticed and known, one that challenges kids and entices them with the intrinsic rewards of real work done well."

—Nancie Atwell
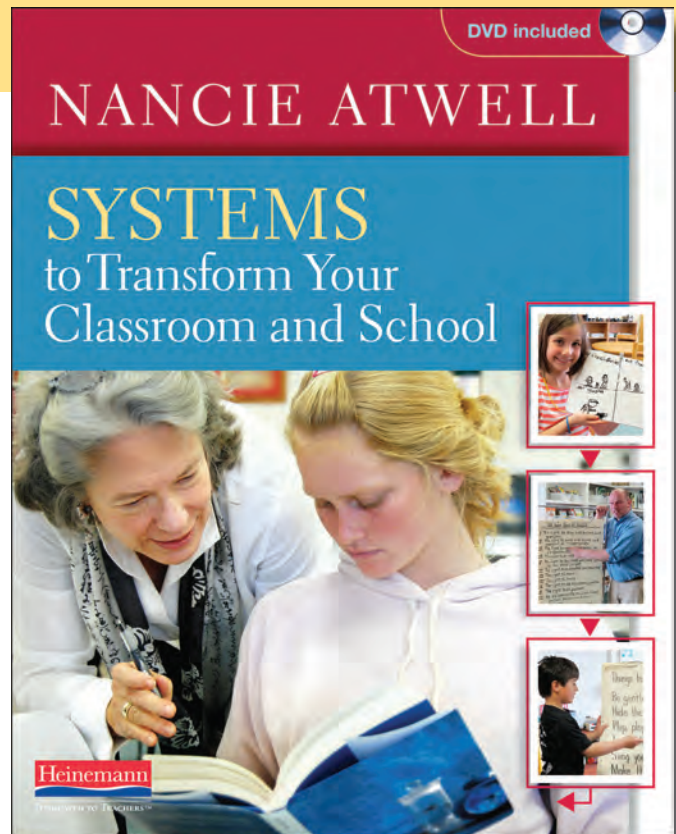
Nancie shares practices that she and her colleagues have identified as essential to powerful learning and a smooth-running educational environment—from entire schools to classrooms to individual students. This workshop-in-a-book shares solutions to common teaching problems, video of master teachers at work, and dozens of printable resources.

Grades K–8 / 978-0-325-04266-4 / 2013 / 128pp + DVD / $29.50

Learning to dive

When I was young, I spent many hours in our neighborhood swimming pool. While I managed to become a competent swimmer fairly quickly, learning to dive was a slog. There was nothing natural about it. I had to watch other divers, dissect each step, ask them to pause and tell me what they were doing as they approached the end of the diving board. I spent many hours step-step-stepping to the end of the board and then stopping in fear or frustration, but still determined not to be the only kid jumping in feet first.

Late one afternoon, I repeated the routine, conscious of every move, until something clicked. I hit the end of the board and bounced, arced, and splashed. As it happened, I knew I had it. I came up for air, and what I felt in that moment was joy. I wasn't proud or relieved — I was elated.

Years later, I remember vividly that moment of getting it. In piecing together the steps to get to that moment, I see the goal, the challenge, my lack of skills, the research, the persistence, and the feedback from others. But that's all academic — I want the joy. Shouldn't we all find joy in learning?

"Success, growth, and joy in learning were identified as fundamental

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

goals for students, teachers, and administrators," writes David McCommons on p. 13 as he describes how educators in the Fox Chapel Area School District achieve and sustain high results for students.

We're compelled to share stories like his. We are ever on the lookout for evidence in real schools that professional learning contributes in significant ways to students achieving at higher levels. At the same time, McCommons highlights joy as a goal. We don't often talk about that as a desired outcome for professional learning.

Yet we know how important joy is in schools. Educators who walk into schools each day certainly hope for it for the children they teach. They know instinctively the connection between joy and learning, that when students are engaged, struggling, and breaking through to their aha moments, that they experience real moments of joy.

We all experience joy in different ways. However, Learning Forward hopes that educators also find joy in learning. We believe that outcomes from aligning adult learning with Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning are a path to joy. When school systems and schools create cultures of collaboration and trust, the environment is ripe for joy. As teachers increase their sense of self-efficacy, they have more opportunities to experience joy. When schools are places where all educators have time daily to join with
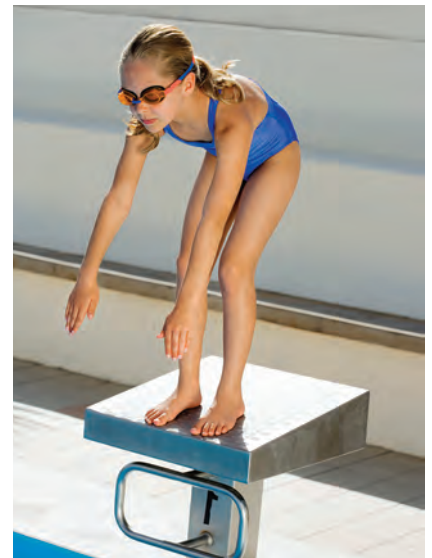
their colleagues to slog through the challenges, they are surely experiencing more moments when they get it — and the elation that follows. Educators know that hitting that mark is what will take them to their next goal to reach students.

We're excited to introduce a new column in *JSD*. In each issue, Learning Forward Senior Advisor Joellen Killion will write about recent relevant research in professional learning and explore how particular studies advance our understanding of effective professional learning. More importantly, she'll highlight what the studies mean for practitioners. Read Lessons From Research on p. 65. We appreciate Killion's insights and look forward to sharing them with you in future issues. ■

elearning
starts here

Learning Forward's e-learning programs and webinars help you gain insights and practical strategies on key themes affecting today's professional learning leaders. Explore topics including coaching, data-driven professional learning, implementing change, establishing and maintaining effective professional learning communities, collaborative inquiry, and more. Learn from leaders in the field through live sessions, collaborative activities, and ongoing discussions with peers.

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essentials

STRONGER TEACHING
**A Human Capital Framework
for a Stronger Teacher Workforce**
*Carnegie Foundation for the
Advancement of Teaching, 2013*

Human capital is the largest single investment K-12 districts make. The Carnegie Foundation offers a four-part framework to take stock of current efforts to enhance the teacher workforce as well as underlying theories of how the teacher workforce improves over time. The four parts include: Get the right teachers in the right positions on time; support professional growth in school-based learning communities; nurture, reward, and challenge high-performing teachers; and inform evidence-based personnel decisions. The white paper also notes evaluation's role in building a stronger teacher workforce.
http://bit.ly/1fLfCP9

PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT
**Teacher Learning Through Assessment:
How Student-Performance Assessments
Can Support Teacher Learning**
Center for American Progress, September 2013

The authors discuss how teachers' engagement with performance assessments influences their understanding of the standards and their students' abilities. They encourage states, districts, and schools to:
- Ensure that performance assessment is integral to the learning system;
- Include performance tasks as part of assessments;
- Ensure that rubrics for scoring assessments are clear and explicit;
- Involve teachers in collaborative scoring of assessments;
- Expand opportunities for teachers to engage in assessment;
- Provide teachers with coaching and professional development around assessment; and
- Build communities of practice to inform performance-assessment work.

http://bit.ly/1dr4swy

TRANSITION TO COMMON CORE
**Implementation of the Common Core State Standards:
A Transition Guide for School-Level Leaders**
*The Aspen Institute, Education First, Insight Education Group,
Student Achievement Partners, and Targeted Leadership Consulting, 2013*

This guide offers specific steps and tools for successful transition to Common Core at the school level. Built around seven indicators of high-quality transition, the guide includes high-impact actions that the leadership team and other stakeholders should take, examples of ways to collect and analyze data, and links to supporting materials. Also included are three vignettes to illustrate how those indicators might appear in day-to-day practice with discussion questions for leadership teams and other school communities to explore.
http://bit.ly/1cWfrA6

EVALUATION
Connect the Dots: Using Evaluations of Teacher Effectiveness to Inform Policy and Practice
National Council on Teacher Quality, October 2013

The National Council on Teacher Quality's annual "State of the State" report provides a detailed and up-to-date lay of the land on teacher evaluation policies across the 50 states and District of Columbia. It also offers a more in-depth look at the states with the most ambitious teacher evaluation systems, including their efforts to connect teacher evaluation to other policy areas. In addition, it includes some advice and lessons learned from states' early experiences on the road to improving teacher evaluation systems. An *Education Week* blog post details highlights from the report.
http://bit.ly/J1wxl5
http://bit.ly/1fLfSxG

TEACHER SUPPORT

Building the Missing Link between the Common Core and Improved Learning
The Bridgespan Group, September 2013

The authors describe how to help the Common Core succeed. The answer, according to the report, is to support teachers in improving their practice. Three exemplars — Kentucky, Hillsborough County Public Schools, and the Center for Inspired Teaching — are featured to extrapolate lessons for others to consider. Lessons include: Communicate the potential of the Common Core, empower teachers to lead change, and provide them with the structures, time, and resources to support the work.

http://bit.ly/1bUTiB1

A COHERENT APPROACH

Creating Coherence: Common Core State Standards, Teacher Evaluation, and Professional Learning
Center on Great Teachers & Leaders, September 2013

The brief identifies an approach for creating meaningful coherence across these interdependent reforms. The approach is designed to help states develop an understanding of the pedagogical skills and practices needed to teach to the Common Core, verify that state and district frameworks support these practices, and create opportunities for teachers to enhance their instruction in ways that will help students meet the more rigorous expectations of the Common Core. This is one of a series of tools from the Center on Great Teachers & Leaders at the American Institutes of Research.

www.gtlcenter.org/sites/default/files/CreatingCoherence.pdf

EDUCATION TECHNOLOGY
EdSurge

EdSurge is a website for educators and entrepreneurs interested in the use of education technology. The site features new products and services, models of technology use, reports from education technology conferences, and analyses of how education technology is impacting education. Sign up for a free weekly newsletter on the site's home page.

www.edsurge.com

LESSONS FROM SCHOOLS ALL OVER

"IT'S BEING DONE": ACADEMIC SUCCESS IN UNEXPECTED SCHOOLS
Harvard Education Press, 2007

Karin Chenoweth examines several schools that are achieving at high levels in this book and two follow-up volumes, *How It's Being Done: Urgent Lessons From Unexpected Schools* (2009) and *Getting It Done: Leading Academic Success in Unexpected Schools* (2011). All three books profile schools with high-poverty, high-minority student populations that find success. The books help readers to understand the practices that make the difference in these schools, with the most recent book detailing school leadership practices in particular.

THE EDUCATION TRUST
www.edtrust.org

With a focus on closing achievement gaps in education, The Education Trust is a comprehensive source of data and reports about schools and systems and the policies and practices relevant to achieving equity. The Dispelling the Myth project highlights schools that achieve at high levels (and many are profiled in the most recent book in Chenoweth's series, above). Recent reports examine conditions that support effective teaching in high-poverty schools and teacher and principal preparation programs.

THE SMARTEST KIDS IN THE WORLD AND HOW THEY GOT THAT WAY
Simon & Schuster, 2013

Amanda Ripley tells the stories of three American high school students who attended schools in other nations — Finland, Poland, and South Korea — to explore what is happening in education in these countries to contribute to their relatively higher-achieving results.

NAEP: THE NATION'S REPORT CARD
http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard

Continually updated with new results and reports, the National Center for Education Statistics at the U.S. Department of Education offers this portal to education data tied to the National Assessment of Education Progress.

KEY FINDINGS FROM THE 2012 PROGRAMME FOR INTERNATIONAL ASSESSMENT (PISA)
www.oecd.org/pisa/keyfindings/pisa-2012-results.htm

The recent release of PISA results offers an opportunity to examine the policies and practices of education systems across the world. The Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) has published several volumes of findings from the assessment of students in 65 nations, including a report specifically for the United States on lessons from strong performers, and volumes that highlight student engagement and beliefs and specific policies and practices.

IN THIS ISSUE OF *JSD*	THE LEARNING STARTS HERE ▼
If you're interested in …	**Start with the article on page …**
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• SCHOOL-LEVEL transformation	24, 32, 42, 46, 56
• CLASSROOM and school leadership	38, 52, 56
• EQUITY focus	24, 46

powerful WORDS

"Every great dream begins with a dreamer. Always remember, you have within you the strength, the patience, and the passion to reach for the stars to change the world."

— *Harriet Tubman*
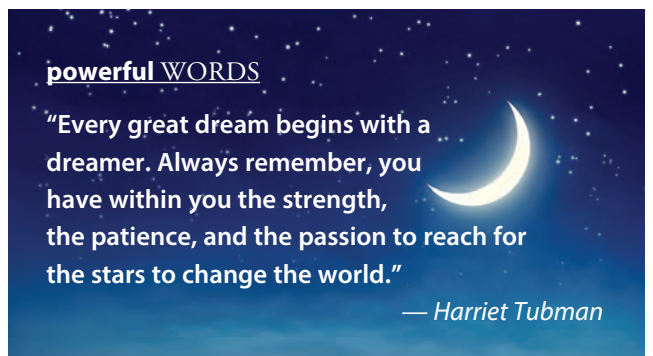
How do the Standards for Professional Learning contribute to high performance?

Throughout this issue, the context or components of professional learning outlined in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning play an explicit or implicit role in higher results for students. Use this table to note specific examples of how the standards contribute to improvement and consider implications for your practices as a team, leader, or advocate for effective professional learning.

STANDARD	Evidence of alignment with standard (Cite quotes or page numbers.)	What can I take away from this?
Learning Communities • Engage in continuous improvement. • Develop collective responsibility. • Create alignment and accountability.		
Leadership • Develop capacity for learning and leading. • Advocate for professional learning. • Create support systems and structures.		
Resources • Prioritize human, fiscal, material, technology, and time resources. • Monitor resources. • Coordinate resources.		
Data • Analyze student, educator, and system data. • Assess progress. • Evaluate professional learning.		
Learning Designs • Apply learning theories, research, and models. • Select learning designs. • Promote active engagement.		
Implementation • Apply change research. • Sustain implementation. • Provide constructive feedback.		
Outcomes • Meet performance standards. • Address learning outcomes. • Build coherence.		

WHAT IT TAKES

What do we mean by success?

a. Success in schools means that students are learning.

b. Success in schools means that more students are learning.

c. Success in schools means that all students are learning.

d. Success in schools means that all students are learning at higher levels.

e. Success in schools means that all students are learning at the highest levels.

Success in schools can mean all of the above. When a school starts from a point where low-performing students outnumber high-performing students, it is success to be able to make the first statement — to know with confidence that students are learning.

Of course, all schools aim for higher benchmarks. In the U.S., improving schools are recognized in state accountability systems, and those schools celebrate their moves from underperforming up a ladder that they hope will take them to ever-higher levels of success. Ultimately, educators hope that all students will learn at high levels.

In this issue of *JSD*, we examine schools and school systems in a range of contexts and circumstances that have made great strides in taking student learning to higher levels. They start from different points — many are already high-performing and can point to years of sustained excellence. Regardless of where they start and where they end, we're particularly interested in understanding the professional learning and leadership practices that were central to improvement.

While each success story is unique, in these pages you'll see some common themes to help glean lessons for consideration in your own contexts and practices. Highlighted here are several themes. What others are important in your experience?

COLLABORATION

Ongoing collaborative learning supported by structures such as learning teams and resources including time and coaches are essential to most successful examples.

"Teachers pointed to the power of collaboration, both among themselves and among students. 'We've developed trust and relationships through synergy with each other, and it's important to maintain that synergy if we want to continue the momentum,' one teacher said. Science teacher Lauren Pennock described how she adapted reciprocal teaching practices for science articles and, as a result, her students were reading more closely and with more engagement than they had in the past" (Lent & Voigt, p. 34).

"Collaborative groups made the extra work of action research possible, allowing teachers to divide the work, keep each other on track, and serve as a source of encouragement when the task was daunting. Additionally, the teams connected highly motivated professionals who shared commitment to their learning and student success" (Pett, Strahan, & Gates, p. 40).

"Ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality, rigorous instruction requires a collaborative approach between teachers and administrators to clearly identify the elements of instruction that need to be in place in every classroom" (Kind, p. 46).

TO SUCCEED

COMMITMENT TO ALL STUDENTS

Built into all improving schools and systems are expectations that every student will learn rigorous content. Professional learning provides educators with relevant support to share those expectations and help students to meet them.

"The expectation is that all adults are responsible to work together to ensure that all students will reach benchmark goals — no exceptions. And because teaching is a complex profession, all teachers will be supported to improve and grow to meet that expectation" (Gleason & Garzon, p. 25).

"Educators at Grant knew that the adults in the school had to make changes. Teachers had to be more effective in reaching the school's rural, high-needs students, many of whom are Hispanic English language learners. Teachers needed to examine their own practices and embrace learning new strategies and ways of reaching all students" (Lambertson, p. 45).

ALIGNMENT

To have a sustained impact, professional learning cannot stand alone from school and district goals and must be integrated across a district's systems, departments, and initiatives.

"The district's high level of achievement is attributed to the alignment of systems such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, supervision, and resources with the vision, mission, core values, and beliefs outlined in the strategic plan. The administrative team and teacher leaders work collaboratively to assure that goals, action plans, and strategies among these systems are cohesive" (McCommons, p. 12).

"Through all these efforts, the underlying approach to building capacity in the York Region District School Board has been to ensure alignment and coherence of all initiatives so that they are consistent with all improvement planning processes" (Belchetz & Witherow, p. 20).

DIFFERENTIATION OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Recognizing adults as learners with varying levels of expertise allows schools and systems to create learning experiences that will fill gaps and tie adult learning to student learning.
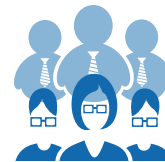
"One size does not fit all in building capacity that will change classroom practice and improve student learning" (Belchetz & Witherow, p. 20).

"As school communities sought to understand students as persons and learners in order to best support and challenge, they understood they needed to do the same with the adults. The more adults were understood for who they were, the more it was possible to help them make progress helping students" (Gleason & Garzon, p. 28).

TEACHER LEADERSHIP

Identifying, encouraging, and leveraging the leadership in classrooms helps to create schoolwide cultures of learning and build shared leadership and responsibility for student learning.
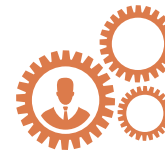
"The culminating experience for participants has been presentations of results that elevate the work of individual teachers and teams to influence policy, program, and resource decisions to the district level" (Pett, Strahan, & Gates, p. 39).

"Areas of expertise and talent should be identified, fostered, nurtured, and made public. Teachers should find themselves regularly consulting with peers in areas of expertise. This is observable and measurable and rarely happens in schools" (Zimmerman, p. 55).

AIM HIGHER

**LOFTY GOALS
AND AN ALIGNED SYSTEM
KEEP A HIGH PERFORMER
ON TOP**

By David P. McCommons

Every school district is feeling the pressure to ensure higher academic achievement for all students. A focus on professional learning for an administrative team not only improves student learning and achievement, but also assists in developing a systemic approach for continued success. This is how the Fox Chapel Area School District in Pennsylvania propels the high-performing district forward.

Fox Chapel Area School District is a nationally recognized, award-winning public school district with high student achievement. Located in a suburban community about 11 miles northeast of Pittsburgh, the district encompasses an area of 36 square miles with 30,000 residents.

Six municipalities (the boroughs of Aspinwall, Blawnox, Fox Chapel, and Sharpsburg, and the townships of Indiana and O'Hara) comprise the district and represent a wide range of social, economic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. The district operates six schools: four elementary K-5 schools, one grades 6-8 middle school and one grades 9-12 high school. The schools provide a comprehensive array of educational opportunities to serve the needs of its 4,200 students and meet the high expectations of area residents.

The district has consistently exceeded state assessment targets. Over the last three years, state assessment results continue to improve. However, annual gains have gotten smaller. This trend is attributed to the nearness of the district's scores to the ceiling score, which is 100% of students demonstrating proficiency. In 2011, 89% of students in grades 3-8 and 11 were proficient or advanced in math and 90% in reading.

The district's high level of achievement is attributed to the alignment of systems such as curriculum, instruction, assessment, professional learning, supervision, and resources with the vision, mission, core values, and beliefs

outlined in the strategic plan. The administrative team and teacher leaders work collaboratively to assure that goals, action plans, and strategies among these systems are cohesive.

Success, growth, and joy in learning were identified as fundamental goals for students, teachers, and administrators. Success refers to the acquisition and transfer of skills or concepts at a given time. Growth in learning needs to occur over time. Lastly, all individuals must experience joy. These three goals were driving forces when allocating resources, determining priorities, and developing and monitoring action plans. Effective leadership is necessary to implement and sustain systemic organizational change while valuing and nurturing people as they respond to change.

According to Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), "Effective leaders understand how to balance pushing for change while, at the same time, protecting aspects of culture, values, and norms worth preserving. They know which policies, practices, resources, and incentives to align and how to align them with organizational priorities. They know how to gauge the magnitude of change they are calling for and how to tailor their leadership strategies accordingly. Finally, they understand and value the people in the organization. They know when, how, and why to create learning environments that support people, connect them with one another, and provide the knowledge, skills, and resources they need to succeed."

Here is a look at how the district aligned the content and processes of professional learning and supervision to foster organizational change.

DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION

Differentiated instruction has been the focus of professional learning across the district for seven years. While the term is frequently used, meanings and level of implementation vary widely. The overall intent of professional learning is to deepen and extend knowledge of differentiated instruction principles and practices to cultivate a common understanding and even implementation.

Sousa and Tomlinson's (2011) nonnegotiables of differentiated instruction are the focus of professional learning content and include: high-quality curriculum, continuous assessment, positive learning environment (building community), flexible grouping, and respectful tasks. A national consultant, in collaboration with district administration, provided onsite and ongoing comprehensive professional learning for administrators and teachers. To increase individual and collective knowledge and understanding of the principles and practices of differentiated instruction, teachers and administrators studied professional literature and reviewed professional learning videos.

Building capacity and promoting sustainability are critical components. Differentiated instruction teacher leadership teams consist of teachers representing grade levels, content areas, and buildings. Their purpose is to foster a cohort of teachers who receive intensive differentiated instruction training, engage in collegial coaching, and develop building-based professional learning. Additionally, members of the leadership team are developing training modules, promoting ongoing and consistent implementation of the principles and practices of differentiated instruction.

High-quality curriculum, one of the five nonnegotiables, is exhibited in clear expectations as learning statements referred to as KUeDs. The term "KUeD" represents what the learner is expected to know (facts, terms), understand (concepts, principles, and generalizations), essential questions (stem from the understanding), and do (standards or skills). The design and communication of well-developed KUeDs are paramount to effective program implementation, whether for classroom instruction or for professional learning. See sample KUeD template on p. 14.

Building and central office administrators model strategies to be implemented in the classroom, reinforcing clear

Fox Chapel Area School District
Pittsburgh, Pa.

Number of schools: **6**
Enrollment: **4,208**
Staff: **495**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**84%**
Black:	**4%**
Hispanic:	**2%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**8%**
Native American:	**0.5%**
Other:	**1.5%**

Limited English proficient: **1.5%**
Languages spoken: **Chinese, Korean, Spanish**, plus **12** others
Free/reduced lunch: **19%**
Special education: **12%**
Contact: **David P. McCommons**, assistant superintendent
Email: **david_mccommons@ fcasd.edu**

KNOW, UNDERSTAND, AND DO (KUeD) UNIT PLANNING TOOL

Teacher(s):		
Department:	**Course:**	**Unit:**

Enter what students should know, understand, and be able to do within a unit of instruction.
Every "know" and "do" should link to an "understanding."

KNOW	UNDERSTANDINGS	DO
(Terms, academic vocabulary, facts)	(Concepts, big ideas, enduring learning, principles, generalizations)	(Skills/standards — may be written as phrases)
	Essential question(s): **Overarching:** **Topical:**	

POST-ASSESSMENT (brief description):

Source: Adapted from Tomlinson & McTighe (2006) by S. Lampe, Fox Chapel Area School District administration, and teacher representatives, 2010, 2013.

expectations. For example, the assistant superintendent teamed with the national consultant to design a seminar on formative assessments. In doing so, the assistant superintendent modeled a range of formative assessment strategies as he engaged the teacher leadership team during the seminar. Examples of formative assessments used include turn-and-talk, think-pair-share, entrance and exit slips, and quick writes.

Building administrators and teacher leaders create differentiated instruction plans for each level that support the district-level differentiated instruction goals. The building-level differentiated instruction plans establish clear expectations for all teachers at varying levels of implementation and comfort. These building-level plans guide administrators in providing feedback and facilitating teacher learning in the supervision process.

During the supervision process, administrators discuss the alignment of the observed lesson with: the unit and lesson KUeD, the use of formative assessments, and instructional decisions related to flexible grouping, another of the nonnegotiables. The adjustment of assignments to students' readiness levels (tiering) for at least one lesson per unit — related to the nonnegotiable of respectful tasks — was a districtwide expectation.

The equalizer planning tool is a vehicle that builds in assurances of rigor and authentic learning experiences (Tomlinson, 2001). Using this tool, a teacher creating various tiers of a task can adjust the difficulty from basic to advanced. The content of professional learning is evident in the supervision process.

SUPERVISION

A difficult question for administrators to answer is, "What supervisory strategies can an administrator employ that will

Becoming a Reflective Teacher

On-site PD

Equip your staff with the knowledge and resources they need to grow as professionals. In an era of increased accountability, self-evaluation and self-reflection practices can empower teachers to chart their own path to improvement. In this workshop, participants will learn what teachers can do by themselves, for themselves. Uncover why classroom autonomy and collaboration go hand in hand when it comes to effective teaching and student success.

- Identify ways to integrate reflection into your collaborative work in teams.

- Self-assess your proficiency in applying each of the 41 elements of effective teaching.

- Learn how to use video data, student survey data, and student achievement data to improve your practice.

- Explore specific classroom situations in which reflective practices can be applied.

- Acquire tools to support your ongoing reflective practice.

stretch a teacher's professional practice?"

The process of engaging a teacher in a conversation for the purpose of growth can be challenging when a teacher has specific areas of deficiency that require improvement. It is even more challenging when a teacher meets or exceeds expectations with his or her instructional delivery.

The administrative team developed representative statements of effective practice, or affirmations, and reflective questions to pose to teachers during post-observation conferences. These affirmations and reflective questions are a tool to encourage and engage teachers in reflective practices for professional growth facilitated by their building administrator.

Professional learning for the administrative team includes discussion to hone and refine the affirmations and reflective questions. The nonnegotiables of differentiated instruction were incorporated into the affirmations and reflections, providing reinforcement of the content expectations. The results were quite powerful. Observable data collected by the administrative team during informal and formal observation indicated that teacher implementation of differentiated instruction strategies increased from less than 30% to more than 60% of the time.

Building administrators also conducted classroom walk-throughs. A team of three to five administrators from the central office and building levels convened briefly to identify affirmations based on the lesson they had observed. The affirmations and questions were used to encourage reflection, conversation, and growth between the teacher and administrator. The teacher received written feedback.

In some cases, administrators will meet with the teacher after the walk-through to provide feedback and engage in a conversation to promote professional growth. The administrative team dedicates several hours of uninterrupted time. Each classroom visit typically takes 10 to 20 minutes per teacher plus the time to produce the written response.

Feedback on a complete classroom observation uses a reflective conference protocol as another supervisory tool. Like the walk-through, the essential aspect for growth is the reflective conversation around the differentiated instruction nonnegotiables during a post-observation conference with the teacher and administrator. The protocol has five components:

- Provide an open-ended question to promote teacher reflection on practice and to learn of their perspective;
- Recognize an effective practice by providing a focus question or statement related to an affirmation in order to learn about the teacher's thinking and to reinforce the effective practices;
- Provide two or three additional affirmations to reinforce effective practice;
- Highlight a teaching skill to be strengthened or improved by providing a question to foster growth; and
- Provide opportunity for the teacher to summarize affirmations and growth areas and plan ways in which the admin-

istrator will follow up.

The format may vary depending on the relationship between the administrator and teacher and the intent of the feedback. It is essential that the feedback be specific and meaningful, while completed in a timely manner.

MUTUAL COMMITMENT

A pivotal component that enables the Fox Chapel Area School District to move initiatives forward is the relationship between the teachers union and the administrative team. The association and administration share a mutual commitment in promoting a systemic approach in moving the district forward.

In a state where professional associations can make or impede progress, the association's attitude toward educating students can be summed up in one word: professional. Both the administration and teacher association embrace a solution-oriented atmosphere, exhibiting a willingness to work through conflicts to find a middle ground in the best interest of students. This collaborative spirit is enriching and vital to organizational growth. Students will achieve success, growth, and joy when teachers' professionalism is coupled with administrative support, all dedicated to maximizing student learning, achievement, and development.

The district's experience demonstrates that, for systemic change to take effect, three conditions are necessary: the design and implementation of professional learning for teachers and administrators; central office administrators establishing priorities, setting the course, and leading by example; and building-level and central office administrators and teacher leaders monitoring to ensure sustainability. As new challenges appear — such as the incorporation of the Common Core State Standards — current systems are established and positioned to support change.

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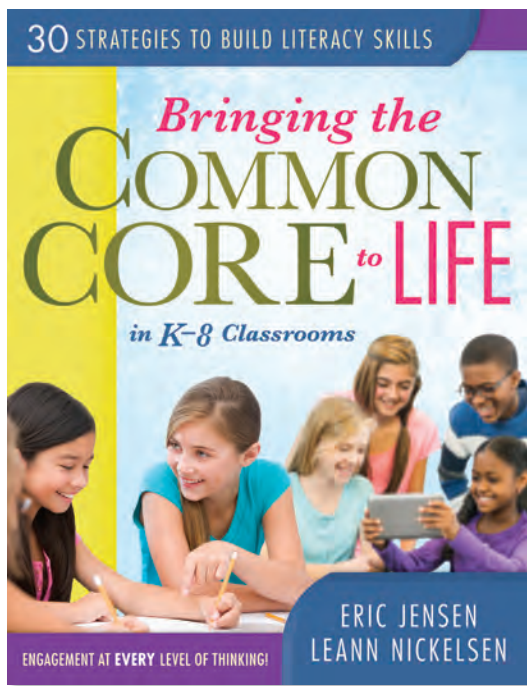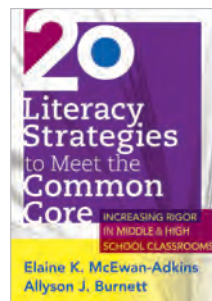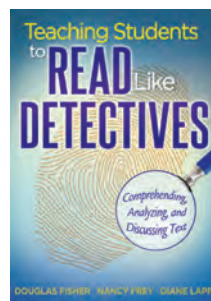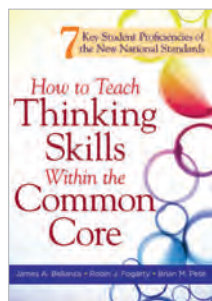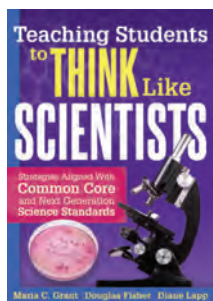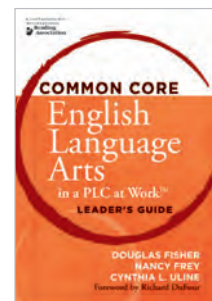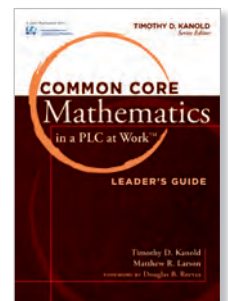
ONTARIO DISTRICT EMBRACES *an* EVOLVING APPROACH *to* LEARNING

By Denese Belchetz and Kathy Witherow

The York Region District School Board is recognized as a high-performing district in Ontario, Canada, and has also garnered international attention. Visitors from across Canada, as well as Singapore, Finland, England, Scotland, Holland, Bahamas, Korea, China, and Taiwan, have come to learn about its system and observe the teaching, learning, and leadership practices underway in its schools and classrooms.

The district's achievement and resulting recognition is no accident. Through its commitment to intentional capacity building at all levels of the organization, the district has worked to cultivate a culture of collaboration and continuous learning that focuses on and positively impacts improved student achievement and well-being.

OVERVIEW

Over the past decade, the York Region District School Board's plan for continuous improvement has focused on improving student achievement through its literacy and numeracy strategy. A case study by the Ministry of Educa-

tion's Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat (2008) describes six areas of this work:

1. The district has implemented a systemwide focus on professional learning through a centrally organized and delivered literacy collaborative (p.23).
2. Numeracy is embedded in the work of literacy development and literacy learning.
3. There is a systemwide understanding that, given time and support, all students can learn.
4. School leaders and teachers gain the capacity to support assessment for learning practices and data-informed decision making about student learning.
5. The district carefully allocates and identifies resources within the budget.
6. The district encourages partnerships and interactions with critical friends from outside the board. These partners serve as content specialists and bring a research-based lens to the process.

Following a change in district leadership in 2009, student well-being became part of these improvement efforts. While literacy, numeracy, and student achievement remain a core focus, the work became grounded in an understanding that caring and safe learning environments are as vital
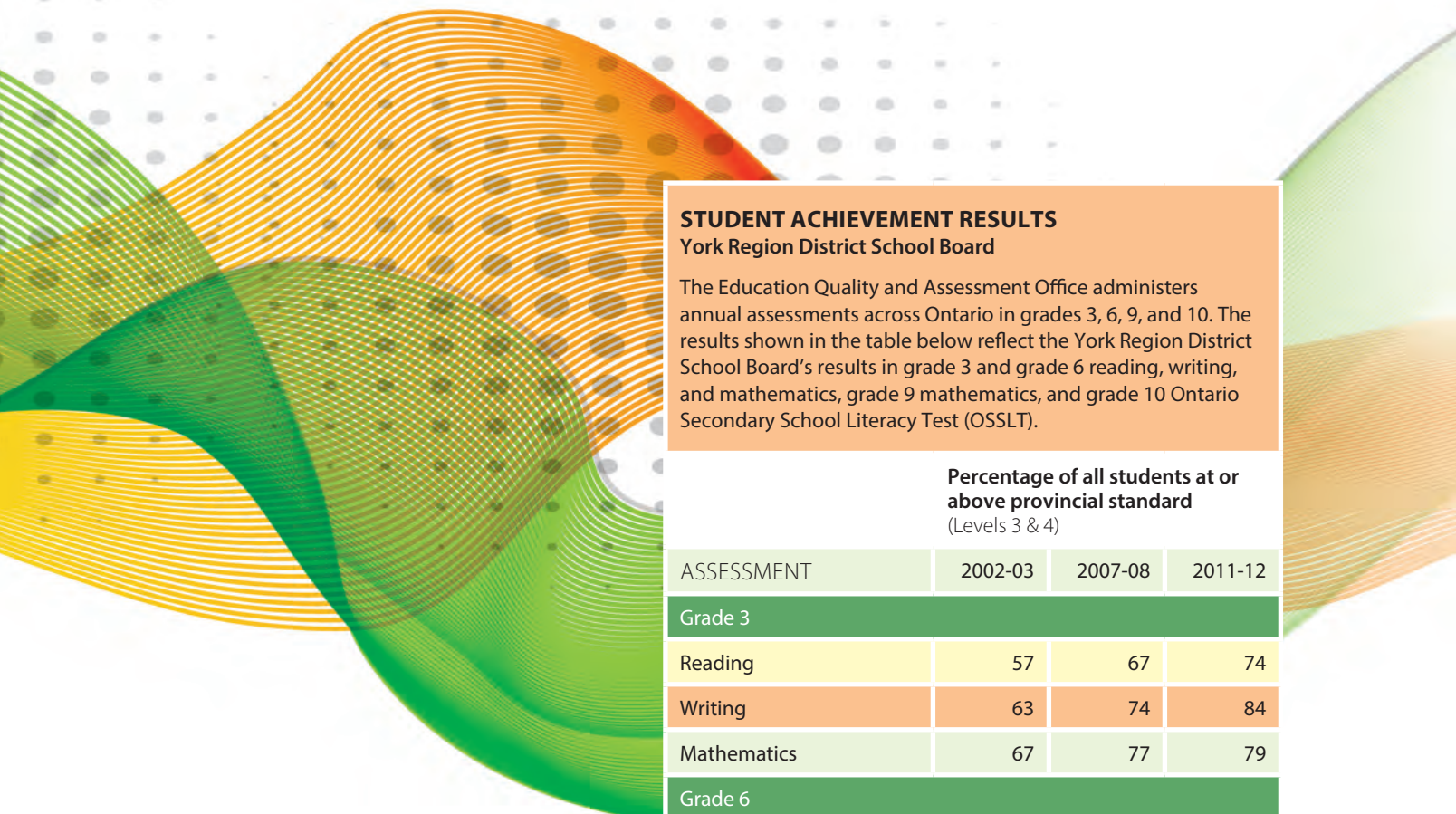
STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT RESULTS
York Region District School Board

The Education Quality and Assessment Office administers annual assessments across Ontario in grades 3, 6, 9, and 10. The results shown in the table below reflect the York Region District School Board's results in grade 3 and grade 6 reading, writing, and mathematics, grade 9 mathematics, and grade 10 Ontario Secondary School Literacy Test (OSSLT).

ASSESSMENT	Percentage of all students at or above provincial standard (Levels 3 & 4)		
	2002-03	2007-08	2011-12
Grade 3			
Reading	57	67	74
Writing	63	74	84
Mathematics	67	77	79
Grade 6			
Reading	64	74	84
Writing	62	77	84
Mathematics	65	73	71
Grade 9			
Academic mathematics	70	84	90
Applied mathematics	20	41	50
Grade 10: OSSLT			
Percentage of fully participating students who were successful in their first attempt at writing the grade 10 OSSLT.	77	88	89
Grade 9 cohort			
Cohort starting year	2000-01	2003-04	2007-08
Five-year graduation rate	85	87	91

Source: EQAO Achievement Result, www.eqao.com.

as contextual leadership and differentiated instruction to ensuring equitable achievement outcomes.

"Literacy continues to be a key priority for the York Region District School Board. It is the ever-evolving underpinning of our society and fundamental to what we wish to achieve in public education," says Ken Thurston, the district's director of education, outlining the strategic directions to the organization as part of the board's improvement plan.

Ken Thurston

The district is also focused on developing school leaders (Belchetz, 2009). Building this capacity has brought intentional awareness to the scope and sequence of capacity building across the system. Not only are leaders required to think about the context of schools, they are also required to reflect on their own development as a leader.

In addition to all of that, leaders also "had to tailor their leadership practice based on the magnitude or 'order' of change they were leading" (Waters, Marzano, & McNulty, 2004). Heifetz and Linsky (2002) refer to "techni-

cal" versus "adaptive" change. Technical change is described as people having the necessary know-how and procedures to address solutions to problems (p. 13), while adaptive change requires learning new ways — changing attitudes, values, and behaviors in order to thrive in the new environment. The district's work addresses technical changes surrounding the ongoing efforts to build capacity for leading, learning, and teaching.

Achievement results (see table on p. 19) show that the district has made significant progress over time but that there is still much work to be done.

ALIGN WITH MINISTRY INITIATIVES

Ontario's approach to improving school and district outcomes puts capacity building at the heart of its education strategy. The Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, established within the Ontario Ministry of Education in 2004, developed, coordinated, and delivered the government's literacy and numeracy strategy while ensuring that initiatives resulted in greater instructional effectiveness at the classroom level. Leadership from the Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat has significantly impacted the province over the years.

Michael Fullan points out that capacity building involves the use of strategies that "increase the collective effectiveness of all levels of the system in developing and mobilizing knowledge, resources, and motivation, all of which are needed to raise the bar and close the gap of student learning across the system" (Literacy and Numeracy Secretariat, 2008, p. 4).

Furthermore, while the focus is firmly on improved student achievement, the Ontario approach has deliberately inverted pressure and support (Barber, 2001) to put a firm emphasis on support first, through capacity building for educators as the central strategy, with pressure through professional responsibility, as well as external accountability, as a supporting strategy.

Kenneth Leithwood (2013) describes nine critical features of characteristics of strong districts and their leadership. Among these are job-embedded professional learning for all members, a comprehensive approach to leadership development, and a learning-oriented organizational improvement process. Through all these efforts, the underlying approach to building capacity in the York Region District School Board has been to ensure alignment and coherence of all initiatives so that they are consistent with all improvement planning processes.

As the district has moved from technical to adaptive change modes, district leaders have come to realize the importance of learning from the practice of others. The Ministry of Education offers districts opportunities to learn from other districts, and district leaders keep abreast of improvement efforts in other jurisdictions. Their goal is to be cognizant of the bigger picture of school improvement, student achievement, and well-being as they strive to situate the district and its schools on the cutting edge of high-yield teaching, learning, and leadership practice. As noted by Hargreaves and Shirley (2009), districts should build

on the best of what they have learned from the past while also looking ahead for intelligent alternatives that will guide them forward in the future.

To this end, the district has engaged in reciprocal professional learning with global partners such as the United Kingdom and Finland for the past decade. While these relationships began informally, they have become an opportunity for continued learning and reflection by school, system, and classroom leaders. These exchanges inform district practice regarding well-documented high-yield strategies that make a difference in schools.

Research from the British experience to improve schools has shown significant alignment with issues in Ontario (Hargreaves & Shirley, 2009). Recognizing this, York Region district leaders have learned much from these partnerships.

APPROACHES TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

York Region's approach to professional learning has evolved over the past decade. Sustaining the improvement the district has experienced requires a more personalized approach to professional learning.

In the past, capacity building for teachers focused on centrally determined content delivered in large settings. This was an essential element of the district's improvement process, setting system expectations and allowing the district to determine key parameters for classroom practice. Since then, the belief that learning happens best when it is close to the classroom and based on student learning needs has influenced how the district engages teachers and leaders in capacity building.

In recent years, the district has taken a much more responsive approach to professional learning. District leaders shifted the location of the learning to as close to the classroom as possible. Schools are organized into learning networks with locally determined learning foci. These networks meet in each other's schools on a monthly basis and involve teachers and school leaders as co-learners in the process.

Because they are organized around a school-determined challenge of practice based on student learning evidence, learning networks are a highly effective approach to professional learning. Student learning needs determine teacher and leader learning needs. Locating network meetings in schools has helped personalize the learning and proven to be an engaging strategy for teachers and school leaders in collaborating with colleagues.

Understanding that developing the conditions for shared ownership in the learning is critical for sustainable improvement has prompted the district to examine multiple approaches to professional learning. One size does not fit all in building capacity that will change classroom practice and improve student learning.

For the past several years, the district's focus has been on the instructional core (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). The relationship between student, teacher, and content in the presence of robust tasks is at the core of any long-lasting improvement. Learning about the instructional core through a process

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The district has developed a protocol in which educators work together to make evidence-based decisions about student learning. There are four stages to the process: co-planning, co-teaching, co-debriefing, and co-reflecting. The learning comes from observing student learning stances in the classroom based on lessons co-planned and co-taught by the teachers involved. In the co-debrief and co-reflect stages, participants co-construct their own learning to take back to their classrooms.

The district has learned much over the past decade about how leadership impacts student learning. Two key components of the district's professional learning are that leader learning must align with teacher learning and that adult learning emerges from an analysis of student learning needs. The more school leaders understand the core elements of teaching and learning, and the more they are seen as co-learners in the process, the more impact their leadership has on student outcomes.

SUPPORT

As the district strives to sustain its improved results of student achievement and well-being in a new context, it is working to create the conditions to support professional trust and judgment. District leaders need to shift the dialogue from continuous improvement to continuous learning.

Professional learning needs to be differentiated and personalized, depending on the context. Schools are working along a continuum of collaborative practice and learning (Wise, 2009). Therefore, professional learning needs to be designed so it meets the individual and collective needs of teachers and school communities.

The district's challenge is to create job-embedded learning that is relevant to teachers and creates a sense of shared ownership. District leaders integrate collaborative learning opportunities into current structures and processes so they are not seen as add-ons. The district wants teachers and school leaders to see that "learning is the work" (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012).

Leveraging internal expertise and knowledge and combining that with what is known from the best evidence of research is part of the district's strategy for creating collaborative learning cultures within its schools and across the district. Engaging teachers in learning in their local settings is essential — it is no longer enough to have a few innovators implementing new practices in isolation.

Mobilizing the learning so that everyone takes an active role has become part of the district's professional learning strategy. District research shows that simply creating the time for teachers to meet does not guarantee that learning will occur. Teachers must make the personal commitment to engage with colleagues in collaborative learning (Witherow, 2011). Leadership plays an important role in creating the conditions for engagement in learning.

Focusing on the what, why, and how of professional learning compels educators to become more reflective in their practice. It also calls for a more inclusive approach to professional learning where scale means more than just the spread of an innovation. Coburn (2003) argues that "scale must include attention to the nature of change in classroom instruction; issues of sustainability; spread of norms, principles, and beliefs; and a shift in ownership" (p. 3). These factors can only be achieved when teachers and school leaders feel engaged in the learning and build in time for collaborative work, reflection, and feedback.

Building relationships and creating the conditions for professional learning to occur are high priorities for York Region's system and school leaders. If school leaders are to purposefully create the conditions for improvement in student learning, they need to focus on creating the conditions to build professional capital (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Professional capital is built when teachers and leaders focus on engagement, leverage expertise and knowledge, and develop a learning community among the staff. These conditions will go a long way to develop professional trust among teachers and shared ownership for improving learning — their own and that of their students.

SHARED COMMITMENT

Focused capacity building and development of professional capital in schools and across the district are critical to the success of the York Region District School Board. An international study of the world's best-performing systems notes that improving a school system is a complex task (Barber & Mourshed, 2007). Three key elements are: Get the right people to become teachers, develop them into effective instructors, and put in place systems and targeted supports to ensure that every child is able to benefit from this excellent instruction.

The district's achievement has been the result of hard work, shared commitment, collaboration, and input from school and system leaders and from critical friends across Canada and abroad. The district values opportunities to learn with and from others, input and leadership of senior leaders and stakeholders, and the expertise and skill of its teaching and support staff. The relationships that the district has developed and continues to foster with all its stakeholders are pivotal to supporting the district's work.

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BY SONIA CAUS GLEASON AND NANCY GERZON

HIGH-ACHIEVING SCHOOLS PUT
EQUITY
FRONT AND CENTER

How does professional learning look and feel in high-poverty schools where every student makes at least one year's worth of progress every year? How do schools and leaders put all the varied components of professional learning together so that they support all students learning every day? What professional learning grounds and sustains educators in high-achieving, high-poverty schools that personalize learning?

We studied two rural and two urban schools with significant free-lunch eligible populations whose achievement data outperformed most schools and narrowed the achievement gap for multiple student groups over time. The four public schools differed from one another while sharing unique ways of linking equity and professional learning. This article conveys their common characteristics as well as specific examples from one of the study sites — Stults Road Elementary School in Richardson, Texas.

This article is adapted with permission from *Growing Into Equity: Professional Learning and Personalization in High-Achieving Schools* (Corwin Press, 2013) by Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon.

EQUITY FOCUSES AND DRIVES DAILY PRACTICES.

Educators commit to every student — no exceptions — making substantial and continuous progress. Equity and high standards travel hand-in-hand. Some students do this with a little help in certain areas, others need a lot of supports in every area. This whatever-it-takes attitude permeates philosophical statements, instructional and student support practices, and professional learning. Equity for these schools exists in the context of high expectations that incorporate national or state standards but are not limited by them. They are the floor, not the ceiling, of what is possible.

Most educators and school communities have and believe statements about achievement for all. Yet these statements can remain aspirational, like many New Year's resolutions or wishes for world peace. They are valued in concept but are not realistically planned for or actualized over the long term. School meeting agendas, instructional plans, and professional learning days may be perpetually one or two steps away from directly focusing on equity.

In the end, it is expected and acceptable that only some students do well (Hilliard, 1991). Goals can be too low, or too narrowly defined, to accomplish high achievement for all. Political pressure and policy goals may focus dispro-

portionately on test scores. This may improve overall scores without fundamentally improving student learning. At best, these efforts make baby steps. We get to equity for some, but not across the board, and not consistently over time.

At Stults Road Elementary School, the equity commitment is evident in tag lines the school uses as organizing themes for a year. One year, the theme was: "Know them by name, know them by need." Another year, it was: "Meeting the needs of all students isn't extra work. It is THE work." These statements appear in newsletters, on faculty and student T-shirts, on school walls, and they are made real by specific commitments. Clear and thoughtful language is essential as a starting point. These equitable ideals are then enlivened by a range of specific practices.

All four of the schools studied make a central commitment to equity over time, both in the language of their values statements and in their practices. It is explicit in missions, vision statements, communications with the community, and explanations of programs. The equity language at all the schools, developed collaboratively and with intentionality, evolves as educators get clearer about what students need and what is possible. See box above.

At Stults Road, for example, interventions take place to support both student learning and teacher learning when interim assessment results show that students are not making expected progress. As one would see in many schools, if a student score is below the 80% threshold on interim assessments, the student is provided immediate targeted support through the response to intervention program. If a group of students or a whole class score below 80%, a similar set of supports is activated for teachers.

What of the professional learning? Coaches and specialists respond immediately to support the teacher in question to deepen his or her approach to a concept, or a colleague might come into the classroom and demonstrate a model lesson that has been successful with students on that academic standard. The expectation is that all adults are responsible to work together to ensure that all students will reach benchmark goals — no exceptions. And because teaching is a complex profession, all teachers will be supported to improve and grow to meet that expectation.

EQUITY COMMITMENTS REQUIRE PROFESSIONAL COLLABORATION AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSIBILITY.

The shift from settling on some students doing well to ensuring every student does well catalyzed changes in thinking about professional learning. Educators at the schools studied understood that once they made this commitment, they could not be successful being isolated in their own classrooms.

They had to collaborate because no one teacher's in-

EQUITY COMMITMENTS

- Our goal for students is not for them to merely be doctors, teachers, or lawyers, but rather doctors, teachers, or lawyers that change the world.
- Students will score at least 80% on key assessments (whatever the proficiency score is), or get support until they do.
- Every student will graduate ready for college.
- Every student will make at least one year's progress.
- Every student and teacher will achieve his or her personal best.
- We don't just conference with the "problem" students. We conference with all students.

dividual success was enough and because no one teacher could be expert at supporting every student's gifts and challenges. If it wasn't good enough for just some teachers to personalize or some students to do well, they all had to rely on one another. This was propelled by another value: a sense of collective responsibility. Everyone was responsible for all students, not just students they knew or taught, and everyone was responsible for helping colleagues in a pinch.

At Stults Road, when a teacher first arrives to work at the school, he or she is observed and given feedback with intensity over the first few months. Colleagues are required to observe and be observed by colleagues while teaching. The new teacher is also scheduled to visit colleagues' classrooms. This is true whether the teacher is new to the profession or simply new to the school.

Getting into the habit of giving and receiving feedback in order to support student learning is part of the school culture and commitment to advancing equity. Teachers need to be comfortable or quickly become acclimated to this practice if they are going to be effective in this school culture. The working assumption is that colleagues have to be in each other's classrooms. They need to know each other's students and each other's practices so they can help each other as particular instructional challenges with individuals or groups of students arise.

Each school studied had stated expectations that collective responsibility means every teacher and staff member figures out ways to support a range of colleagues and expects others to pitch in and help.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING TO ADVANCE EQUITY REQUIRES UNDERSTANDING INDIVIDUAL STUDENTS AS PERSONS AND AS LEARNERS.

If every student matters, then every student needs to be understood for who he or she is. Educators across the study schools were conscious of hiring teachers who sought

to understand students as persons and as learners and engage families as part of that. In addition, professional learning was expected to help educators broaden and deepen their understanding of and commitment to students.

Educators in these schools needed to understand the talents and weak spots of their colleagues to focus their individual efforts and align them. As a result, educators were clear about what competencies they needed and those they needed to develop. Focused use of a range of formative and summative data informed starting places with students and tracked progress with an eye to continuous improvement.

At Stults Road, building relationships with students and their families over time and inventories that consider learning styles and preferences are essential. Data specialist Lin Wall says, "Each student has to know multiple teachers. That gives them a lot of people who care about their learning." Beyond peer coaching, teachers also have dismissal duties in different parts of the campus to give them a chance to interact with students beyond "their" students and outside of the classroom. Insights from these informal interactions are considered important and part of team-based conversations about students.

Knowing students as learners is grounded in the regular use of learning data. Teachers discuss classroom, benchmark, diagnostic, and unit assessment results in biweekly grade-level meetings as well as biweekly content-based team meetings, in which all teachers participate. These meetings focus on tapping the expertise of multiple educators — including English as a second language, special education, and academic coaches — to clarify students' current knowledge and develop and clarity next steps for student learning. This is not just one grade's practice, but something that is systemic.

These examples are consistent with all study schools, where the focus on understanding students was a central part of professional dialogue and where the time that is set aside for this is inviolate. Team time allowed teachers to look closely at student learning needs, document and celebrate progress, and develop consistent and high expectations.

ADVANCING EQUITY MEANS DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE.

Knowing students well means considering what educators don't understand about them already. Sometimes this means deepening an understanding of what data conveys about student knowledge or developing skills to respond to particular students. Other times, it means developing cultural competence — educators' ability to understand their own background in terms of race, class, culture, gender, language, and ability. With greater cultural competence, educators develop a greater understanding and appreciation of the range of backgrounds represented by students and adults at their school and improve their capacity to engage, challenge, and support students.

This professional learning may stem from an understanding that everyone has cultural blind spots and biases and needs to continuously deepen his or her awareness and competence. It could be prompted by a changing demographic. Or it could be a response to a practice or comment that communicates low expectations or exclusion of an individual or a group of students. See below for a list of ways that the schools studied supported cultural competence.

At Stults Road, the faculty participates in a simulation that assigns people to different roles in order to deepen their understanding about economic class differences. Every teacher has a role: teacher, parent, or student. Stults educators reflect on students' home lives and the implications for their school experiences. Insights from these conversations then resurface in team meetings, where teachers think through individual student

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DEVELOPING CULTURAL COMPETENCE

ALL SCHOOLS:
- Use shared readings as a way to build common understanding about equity.
- Confront expressions of low expectations regarding a particular student or a group of students.
- Differentiate learning to honor different interests, intelligences, and capacities.
- Name and discuss specific expectations and how they will be manifested and tracked.
- Use the data to inform what the student performance is, and use high expectations to shape instruction and support.

ONE OR MORE SCHOOLS:
- Work collectively to understand general issues of race, class, language, culture, and privilege.

- Explore personal bias, how it impedes student learning, school and district practices, and what to do about it.
- Design antiracist, antibias curriculum and assessments.
- Use instructional materials that acknowledge and incorporate student backgrounds.
- Participate in a simulation where participants take on the role of economically poor people in different circumstances.
- Consider different dimensions of learners by developing interest inventories, learning about multiple intelligences, or using True Colors or Myers-Briggs Type Indicator.
- Learn about family strengths and contexts, their structures, values, and patterns.
- Conduct student home visits.
- Use student survey data to ensure students feel personally supported in their learning.

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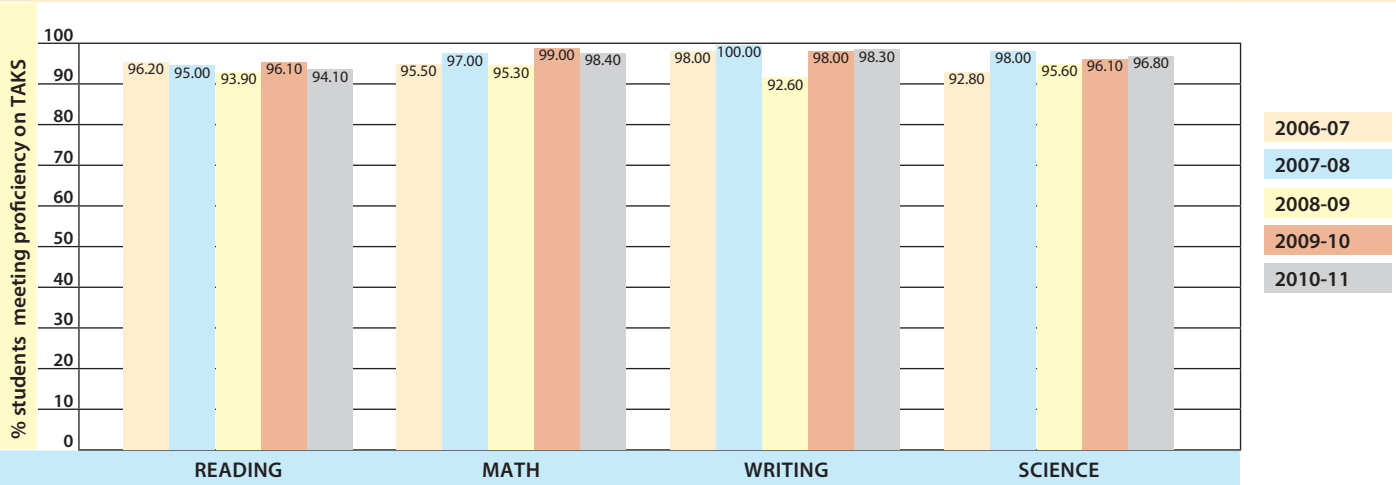
and family supports.

Teachers at Stults Road consider some of their cultural competency to be developed alongside work with experts as they deepen use of instructional strategies, knowledge of student learning styles, differentiated instruction, and pedagogy. Here they integrate knowledge and awareness of students with best practices of teaching. Sessions that raise sensitivity and awareness are not stand-alones.

Whatever the approach, each school had adults who were thinking about when challenge or achievement could be low for a particular group of students, and what professional learning could help raise awareness and deepen understanding so that low expectations or misunderstandings about students were not an impediment to achievement and the giftedness of an individual or a group of students had space to reveal itself.

Stults Road Elementary School
Richardson, Texas

Grades: **K-6**
Enrollment: **524**
Staff: **55**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**5%**
Black:	**41%**
Hispanic:	**47%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**4%**
Native American:	**0.2%**
Other:	**2.8%**

Limited English proficient: **38%**
Languages spoken: **Spanish, Vietnamese, Urdu, Arabic, Swahili**
Free/reduced lunch: **80%**
Special education: **12%**
Contact: **Amber Leblond, principal**
Email: **amber.leblond@risd.org**

ADULT LEARNING MUST BE PERSONALIZED THE SAME WAY STUDENT LEARNING IS.

At the schools studied, ensuring student excitement about learning went hand-in-hand with the idea that all the adults needed to be excited and productive in their own learning.

This was evident in a range of ways: individual teacher goal setting based on student data, coaching, new teacher mentoring, new teacher cultural acclimation, collegial learning in teams, data-driven learning in teams, observing students in a range of learning environments, and leadership conversations. As school communities sought to understand students as persons and learners in order to best support and challenge, they understood they needed to do the same with the adults. The more adults were understood for who they were, the more it was possible to help them make progress helping students.

At Stults Road, teacher Heidi Moore, new to the school, came with expertise in teaching gifted and talented students. Her class made significant progress on benchmark data using a particular strategy.

Assistant principal Amber Leblond asked Moore to introduce the strategy to faculty members at their weekly meeting. Teachers discussed the strategy, and whether and how they could start to use it over the coming weeks. Leblond and others followed up to track progress first in implementing, then in getting results.

The expectation at Stults is that every teacher has both examples of very good practice to share as well as areas where they need to focus on growth. That same teacher was having difficulty teaching a unit concept and recognized that her students were not progressing as she would like. She asked for support, and it came right away.

Leblond observed the teacher's classroom and studied the lesson plan and student data. Together, the two came up with strategies to adjust specific grouping, address pacing, and integrate new instructional techniques. They continued to track progress together over the following few weeks. At one point, Leblond demonstrated a new instructional strategy, then observed and provided feedback to Moore on its use. They worked out and refined new differentiation strategies until progress was accelerated and sustainable.

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students respond to them arise during grade-level data review meetings, vertical team meetings, and through the weekly meetings focused on developing innovative practices. The learning informs not only Leblond and Moore, but also the entire professional community.

Using this mindset, no teacher is pure genius or low performer, as no student is.

Everyone has strengths and weak spots and needs to be honored for his or her gifts and supported when there is not enough progress. The schools integrated everything they were learning about students and brought it to bear on instruction and assessments.

Dissemination of new knowledge and practices happened through a clear team structure, whereby innovations were practiced, evaluated, and shared with faculty, with the expectation that teachers will work to adopt these new practices. Follow-through was built in, with experienced teachers and academic coaches on hand to support schoolwide implementation, and the feedback loop tightly monitored to ensure teacher use of these identified high-impact strategies.

Just as teachers are the point persons for understanding how each student learns and where they are in terms of what they need to learn next, a range of school leaders were responsible for understanding teachers' knowledge and skills base, tapping their areas of strength, and supporting their growth in pointed ways.

POWERFUL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING IS A DEAL-BREAKER TO ADVANCING EQUITY.

The idea of all students learning is not just for dreamers and philosophers. It is practical and doable, and these four schools are the advance team for what is possible. Schools everywhere can help every student succeed, but not without consistent, powerful professional learning that helps teachers scaffold rigorous and engaging learning.

Values and aspirations require steadfast and thorough implementation, alongside professional learning that ensures teachers achieve the goals that support student learning. A range of formal and informal leaders can facilitate educator support and progress in the same way that teachers must support student learning. When rigorous and supportive learning happens for everyone in the educational enterprise, every person can make substantive progress.

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Ontario district embarces an evolving approach to learning

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GROWING LEADERS *from* WITHIN

SCHOOL FORMS A TIGHT-KNIT LEARNING COMMUNITY TO TACKLE LITERACY

By ReLeah Cossett Lent and Marsha McCracken Voigt

There are two types of school leadership initiatives. One takes existing leaders and gives them increasing leadership responsibilities. The other engages in an organic process that grows leaders from a crop of teachers who, at first, may not appear to be leaders at all. This is a story about the second type of initiative and how it ignited a literacy team that changed teacher practices and increased student learning.

In fall 2011, Principal Steve McWilliams and literacy coach Marsha Voigt looked at data from students at Barrington High School in Barrington, Ill., a northwest suburb of Chicago. They were pleased to see that most students scored high on state measurements, but they were concerned that there were some students who were not where they should be — in fact, their learning seemed stagnant, and standardized measures indicated they were below expectations in reading.

McWilliams understood the impact professional learning would have for the teachers of these students, and he was willing to invest in it, but the question became: What type of professional learning? School leaders knew they could either invest in professional learning from an external provider that, according to the advertising, had a track record of success, or they could focus on the assets within the school. With only one shot at this initiative through a hard-earned grant, administrators thought the second

alternative looked risky, while the guarantees of the one-size-fits-all approach seemed promising — and safe.

As Voigt examined the options, however, she became convinced that a customized plan would yield positive, sustainable change. Backing her argument with articles and books, she shared data from schools that had significantly increased student learning by investing in a team of teachers who had become change agents within their faculty.

This approach is similar to that of countries where students are outperforming those in the United States. In Finland, for instance, teachers are immersed in "powerful learning environments" where they engage in a "cycle of self-responsible planning, action, and reflection/evaluation" (Darling-Hammond, 2010, p. 200).

Voigt also looked at models of capacity building, such as one advocated by Michael Fullan, where embedded professional learning develops "skills, clarity, and motivation" (Fullan, 2007, p. 59). As Fullan points out, "Once these experiences are generated collectively — that is, shared by the group — they become potent new forces for breakthrough improvement" (p. 59). School leaders agreed that a breakthrough was exactly what they were seeking.

With a green light from administrators, Voigt began looking for a source of customized professional learning. She contacted ReLeah Lent, consultant and author of several books on literacy, including one on literacy learning communities (Lent, 2007). "We wanted a balance of theory and activities that were tailored to the needs of our teachers and students," Voigt said, "and we wanted someone to work with me, much like a peer coach, not a consultant with an agenda in hand."

CHOOSING LITERACY LEADERS

During their first conversation in spring 2012, Voigt and Lent discussed the scope of the project and the goal of empowering schoolwide literacy leaders. The first step was to identify the right teachers for this project, and together they came up with criteria they felt to be important when considering participants for the initiative. These included the following personality and leadership traits.

Personality traits

"Perhaps this is not a scientific, objective criterion; perhaps it's not even politically correct to mention it, but personality counts," Lent said. "We wanted teachers with

a 'can-do' attitude."

- **Optimism:** "We wanted optimistic, glass half-full kind of people, since they were going to be asked to make some significant changes and lead others through those changes," Voigt said. "It's OK for them to have different views or approaches; in fact, that makes the group dynamic and creative, but we didn't want naysayers or people who make excuses for why something couldn't happen." This didn't mean they would exclude teachers who question. "But questioning or suggesting other ways of doing something is very different from being resistant to change."

- **Risk taking:** Teachers in this group had to be willing to "approximate" — take risks and embrace mistakes as an important part of the learning process, as Brian Cambourne says of this condition in his model of engagement (Cambourne, 1995; Lent, 2006). Voigt knew that, in order to achieve breakthrough improvement, teachers must be willing to put their egos on a shelf and risk a less-than-perfect outcome, especially the first time they tried a new strategy or practice in their classroom.

- **Flexibility:** Effective leaders inevitably return to a foundation of flexibility as they evaluate progress and adapt their course of action based on new information or circumstances. Because this was a change initiative, participants had to be those who were not intimidated by the process.

LEADERSHIP TRAITS

As Hargreaves and Fink assert in *Sustainable Leadership*, "Leaders of learning have to be much more than orchestrators of other people's performances. Being a leader of learning means more than poring over … achievement results and finding quick ways to boost the figures or narrow the gaps" (2005, p. 40). The list of teacher candidates for this project was further narrowed by considering these

Barrington High School
Barrington, Ill.

Grades: **9-12**
Enrollment: **3,046**
Staff: **220**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**70.5%**
Black:	**1.5%**
Hispanic:	**15.7%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**9.2%**
Native American:	**0%**
Other:	**3%**

Limited English proficient: **1.5%**
Languages spoken: **62**
Free/reduced lunch: **17%**
Special education: **11.5%**
Contact: **Steve McWilliams**, principal; **Kelly Hansen**, director of secondary curriculum and instruction
Email: **smcwilliams@barrington220.org, khansen@barrington220.org**

qualities of good leaders.

Successful leaders:

- Communicate well and are willing to share new learning with colleagues;
- Garner respect among their peers for their abilities in the classroom;
- Listen to others' views;
- Question assumptions yet do not rush to judgment; and
- Relinquish individual control for the good of their students, the group, and the school.

Learning leaders:

- Focus on student learning more than on test scores;
- Value active, inquiry-based learning in place of lecture; and
- Understand the learning habits of adolescents in general and of their students in particular (Lent, 2012).

More than 20 teachers representing various disciplines and experience levels were invited to participate in a yearlong literacy initiative that involved time out of class, action research with new teaching methods, and a book study. Almost every teacher responded with an enthusiastic yes.

PLANNING THE WORKSHOPS

The district contracted with Lent to provide three customized literacy workshops for several days throughout the 2012-13 school year. Once the group was formed, Voigt and Lent listed guiding principles that they felt would be important in sustaining the initiative: Foster teacher empowerment, focus on deep learning, and build a community of practice.

Foster teacher empowerment.

A key component of the project was to build teacher autonomy. As such, Voigt would keep notes regarding all strategies, practices, and new ideas Lent presented or participants suggested during the one-day workshops.

She would then provide the annotated list to the group and ask them to choose one or more to incorporate into their curriculum. Teachers were encouraged to adapt strategies to students' needs.

Focus on deep learning.

Principal Steve McWilliams made clear that he wasn't interested in a quick fix. He wanted teachers to internalize, adapt, and apply concepts within their disciplines. As such, Lent provided time frequently during each workshop for teachers to ask questions, talk in small groups, and practice new learning.

Build a community of practice.

Lent and Voigt recognized that the group needed to grow collectively as well as individually. Participants would be seated around tables and interact with each other during the workshop and during lunch. Teachers could create lessons together based on their new learning during planning time at the end of each workshop.

LEADERSHIP IN ACTION

As the year progressed, teachers in the group became a tight-knit learning community. Between Lent's visits, Voigt met with and supported teachers. She also published a newsletter that highlighted new lessons teachers were trying in their classrooms.

At the beginning of each workshop, teachers shared how they had adapted strategies, discussing what worked and what didn't. Often, teachers asked one another questions and exchanged resources. One teacher set up a Google Docs account so members of the group could share websites, resources, and teaching ideas in a central location.

LESSONS LEARNED

At the last workshop in March 2013, the principal and district curriculum director observed the group at work. Teachers began, as they had during each workshop, by sharing what they had tried in their classrooms.

At the end of the session, the principal asked what the group had gained from the project and what group members saw as their roles going forward. As Voigt and Lent took notes, teachers described the most significant aspects of the yearlong initiative: Collaboration positively affects student learning; autonomy grows leaders; and support is essential.

Collaboration positively affects student learning.

Teachers pointed to the power of collaboration, both among themselves and among students. "We've developed trust and relationships through synergy with each other, and it's important to maintain that synergy if we want to continue the momentum," one teacher said. Science teacher Lauren Pennock described how she adapted reciprocal teaching practices for science articles and, as a result, her students were reading more closely and with more engagement than they had in the past.

Nick Yeager, an English teacher, created a successful in-depth inquiry project based on Terry Trueman's novel, *Stuck in Neutral*. "They read more independently and engaged in discussions without my having to provide prompts," he said. The health teacher said that he also used Yeager's lesson plans because the novel complemented his curriculum as well.

Some teachers said they had begun meeting regularly with other department members to share strategies, materials, and ideas. Others were working together to collect articles, websites, and books that could be used as supplemental resources. Mercedes Beltran, an English language learners teacher, presented a mini-workshop for colleagues who needed additional literacy support.

Autonomy grows leaders.

Teachers noted that past professional learning didn't allow them to adapt their new learning to their own curriculum. "This wasn't a train-the-trainer type of project where we were expected to be robots of the presenter. We were encouraged

to think on our own and come up with our own ideas. I felt rejuvenated as a professional," one participant said.

Science teacher Vanessa Fennig described how she sought out and incorporated current articles into each unit of study. "The way in which students interacted with the article varied," she said. "Sometimes students responded to one overarching question. With other articles, students completed two readings, each with a different purpose." She reported that students' comprehension had increased with this practice.

Voigt pointed out that such autonomy encouraged risk-taking that led to increased innovation in the classroom. Moreover, as teachers worked together to refine lessons that increased student learning, the more confident they became in sharing their ideas with others.

Support is essential.

Participants repeatedly mentioned the importance of support from the literacy coach. "Marsha (Voigt) was the glue that held everything together," one teacher said. "In the past, I was just too busy to try something new, but she was always there, reinforcing what we'd learned, encouraging us, and providing new strategies if something didn't work."

Teachers said they were incorporating more challenging tasks for their students through the scaffolding that Voigt and Lent provided. "My students have been completing higher-level tasks than in years past. I have also observed students writing more detailed responses to questions," said Dave Udchik, a special education teacher.

"Just as we were listened to and then supported in our endeavors, we began asking students how we could support their learning," one teacher said. "For example, we asked students what types of questions they prefer, and they said they feel more successful writing a single, thoughtful response instead of the fill-in-the-blank or rapid-fire questions that we have used in the past. With this information, we have been better able to plan assessments and improve our teaching."

Other teachers said that without the net of support, they might not have tried something new for fear of wasting time or not being successful.

MOVING FORWARD

The administration and district office decided to expand the project for the 2013-14 school year, with Lent leading eight full-day workshops for a second cohort of leaders in the high school and a combined literacy leadership team for two middle schools. The work of the original high school group would continue with a focus on writing.

In their first meeting with the new high school group, Voigt and Lent discovered that this new cohort was beginning the project in a very different place than the original group had begun the previous year:

• The new group had more background knowledge about literacy than the first group as a result of their having co-taught with a member of the first group or having heard someone from the first group share ideas in a department meeting.

• None of the members in the new group had to be persuaded to buy in to the initiative because they had already seen the positive student outcomes in colleagues' classrooms.

• The new group understood that this was an embedded, sustainable project and that they would be afforded autonomy and respected as professionals. This is in contrast to the original group, which first felt that this was one more thing imposed from above.

Perhaps the most affirming evidence of the initiative's sustainability was when librarians at the high school asked if they could join Lent's workshops and Voigt's follow-up sessions. They knew about the project and wanted to create similar professional learning on research skills. They also wanted to see the cohorts in action and to work with teachers to build classroom libraries, one of the project's goals.

While whole-school change is the ultimate goal, important changes occur one teacher at a time. "Instead of students immediately running to Google or looking up answers in their textbooks, they have been talking through ideas with partners before asking for clarification," says social studies teacher Kathleen Duffy, a member of the original group of teachers who participated in the project. "They still need me to validate their claims, but they have started needing me less, which is definitely progress."

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STRENGTHEN
YOUR SCHOOL

"Previously, there was not a lot of teacher involvement at the leadership level. Now they want to do it, can do it, and I empower them to do it."

Mandy Scott, principal
Santa Fe (Texas) High School

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EXPERTS IN THE CLASSROOM

**FELLOWS PROGRAM CONNECTS
TEACHER LEARNING
TO STUDENT OUTCOMES**

**By Kate Pett, David Strahan,
and Carlye Gates**

In a large meeting room, community leaders and teachers have gathered for an informal dinner. At the front of the room, six teachers, dressed in white lab coats, participate in a skit that pokes fun at stereotypes of scientists. After the laughter subsides, they present a serious message: The traditional elementary schedule does not provide enough time for authentic, hands-on science. To support their message, they share examples of student work that they collected when they stretched the time periods for science.

Later, during a breakout session, a soft-spoken teacher tells the story of a child who found school difficult and her efforts to teach him self-discipline. Rethinking her responses to him and studying his responses to her have dramatically changed her approach toward classroom management.

The next day, in a middle school across town, students giggle and smile as they look at a journal article hot off the press. A few months before, guests with cameras had captured pictures of them engaged in a lesson their teacher had offered as part of a pilot study on conversation and literacy. The pictures were featured in an article about teachers and innovation.

INNOVATION FELLOWS PROGRAM

These snapshots of teacher leadership in action are one result of the Asheville (N.C.) City Schools Foundation Innovation Fellows program, an approach to providing high-quality professional learning for the district's best teachers. With start-up funding from the Z. Smith Reynolds Foundation, this program was created to retain great teachers and lessen achievement gaps by directly connecting teacher learning and student outcomes. Fellowships are awarded on a competitive basis for teacher-directed action research.

Over the last four years, the Asheville City Schools Foundation awarded more than $101,648 in fellowships to 70 teachers and three administrators. Projects spanned various disciplines, directly impacted students from kindergarten to 12th grade, and produced impressive student and teacher learning outcomes.

Teams studied and implemented strategies including Paideia, the Baldrige Model, Conscious Discipline, Leveled Literacy Intervention, project-based learning, and the Schoolwide Enrichment Model. Through their projects, fellows enhanced grade-level proficiency in reading, improved college test scores among first-generation college-bound students, increased student engagement using brain-based strategies, discovered how to best integrate the use of technology into the classroom, incorporated global education into the elementary-level curriculum, and much more. The culminating experience for participants has been presentations of results that elevate the work of individual teachers and teams to influence policy, program, and resource decisions to the district level.

Results from a comprehensive evaluation of the fel-

Central to the success of the fellows' projects was their commitment to student learning. In 2010, for example, eight fellows formed a professional learning community to improve instruction in 5th-grade science. In their action research plan, the fellows focused on enhancing students' understanding of science and critical thinking skills.

lows program have documented a number of ways that the fellows program has been an effective tool for improving student learning and increasing teacher effectiveness. Survey data shows that all of the fellows perceived their experiences as very worthwhile. In their project reports and focus group interviews, fellows reported that they felt more empowered to experience greater success in low-wealth schools. Further, they described specific ways that they had grown professionally and that students benefitted from their innovations. Most of the fellows assumed stronger roles as teacher leaders in their schools.

> **Overwhelmingly, teachers indicated that the fellows experience transformed them into experts in their own classrooms.**

Many factors have contributed to the successful outcomes of these teacher-directed professional learning experiences. The original project design established a comprehensive approach to teacher learning reflected in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. From the beginning, participants exhibited the necessary prerequisites for success: commitment to all students, readiness to learn, and disposition for collaborative inquiry and differentiation (Learning Forward, n.d., p. 3). Analysis of data from the first four years suggests that three core components of the program were especially important:

- A teacher-designed action research project that addresses a pressing problem in the classroom;
- Funding for professional learning, released time from the classroom, stipends for summers, and necessary materials; and,
- Support to design and collect meaningful data about the impact of new strategies on student learning.

EXPERTS IN THEIR CLASSROOMS

The most important lesson the district has learned is that investing in teacher-directed professional learning produces powerful results for both teachers and students. Teachers are granted fellowships based on a competitive application process that aligns a classroom need with appropriate professional learning.

Unlike other professional learning, self-directed and self-designed projects have heightened relevance and meaning for each teacher-participant. Overwhelmingly, teachers indicated that the fellows experience transformed them into experts in their own classrooms. Additionally, they described their experiences as both inspiring and empowering.

One fellow reported, "We have a renewed hope for our ability to positively impact our disengaged students. We feel our daily work has taken on new meaning."

This lesson echoes the findings of several recent reports. Flint, Zisook, and Fisher (2011) reviewed studies of professional development and noted that "authentic professional development is voluntary, inquiry-oriented, pervasive across time

and space, and open to the complexity, range, and variation of professional development based on teachers' self-identified needs and interests" (p. 1164).

Vaughn and McLaughlin (2011) examined the professional learning experiences of six teachers from four elementary schools in which students made consistent gains in reading achievement. They concluded, "The 'one-size-fits-all' method of professional development and implementation is not working for these teachers. Teachers are expected to differentiate to meet students' individual needs, yet their professional development is not differentiated to their needs. Teachers within this study reported a higher level of change when they had ownership over their learning and a role in the decision making" (pp. 53-54).

CONNECT WITH OTHER TEACHERS

The fellows experience embodies other key components of high-impact professional learning. Compton (2010) surveyed teachers at four different stages of their careers, asking them to rate 16 different types of professional learning.

Consistently, across all four career stages, the most highly rated activities were "having opportunities to connect with other teachers," followed by "crafting new methods of instruction," and then by "receiving support for reflection about the result of the work I do in my classroom."

The Innovation Fellows built teams across grades, content areas, and schools depending on their perception of the best combination of participants to tackle the challenge they sought to address. The few fellowships granted to individual teachers were less productive than those fellowships granted to groups of teachers.

Collaborative groups made the extra work of action research possible, allowing teachers to divide the work, keep each other on track, and serve as a source of encouragement when the task was daunting. Additionally, the teams connected highly motivated professionals who shared commitment to their learning and student success.

Central to the success of the fellows' projects was their commitment to student learning. In their review of teacher development, Hammerness, Darling-Hammond, and Bransford (2005) concluded that this commitment is essential to teaching successfully: "Descriptions of classroom practice suggest that some teachers eventually develop a strong focus on student welfare and learning that drives their teaching decisions and self-improvement efforts, whereas others stop short of this state, developing techniques that 'work,' in that they get teachers through the day, but that do not result in high levels of learning for students or high levels of teacher concern when learning does not occur" (p. 379).

In their project reports, fellows demonstrated growth in their abilities to measure student learning. Part of the fellowship experience includes developing student learning goals and crafting a data collection plan that measures the impact of new

approaches on student learning.

Fellows have been challenged to find valid tools for understanding project impact beyond gross measures of student learning, frequently forced to think deeply about how teachers can tease out the value of an approach from the wide net of strategies and interventions at work.

Fellows were supported in this effort through a partnership with Western Carolina University and the administrative staff of the Asheville City Schools Foundation. Teachers reflected on their projects and the results and made recommendations to decision-makers in the district. The adoption, replication, and expansion of fellow-led projects affirmed the value of teacher-directed action research.

In 2010, for example, eight fellows formed a professional learning community to improve instruction in 5th-grade science. In their action research plan, the fellows focused on enhancing students' understanding of science and critical thinking skills. As a group, they decided to spend their fellowship funds to support field trips with students to a local nature center. They reviewed new curriculum guides, gathered research, and consulted with local leaders in science education.

Based on these conversations, they drafted more sophisticated units with enhanced inquiry activities and better assessments. In the spring, they analyzed the results of both formative and summative assessments. In their project report, they noted, "Using purely empirical data, our schools are headed in the right direction with 5th-grade science instruction. Citing the state science exam, 65% of our 5th-graders showed proficiency in science in 2009. This number increased to 78% in 2010. 82% of 5th-grade students in our schools demonstrated proficiency in spring 2011."

As the year ended, the fellows asked if they could continue the project for a second year. One fellow said, "I knew the collaborative piece outside the school level was valuable but didn't know how much it would invigorate me — and I see it in the other teachers, too."

COST-EFFECTIVE MODEL

In addition to serving as a successful approach to improving student achievement and engagement, the Innovation Fellows Program has proven to be a far-reaching, cost-effective model of teacher professional learning. Each of the fellows' projects has been held to a cost of $5,000 per team per year, and every project has directly impacted multiple classrooms. Many projects have impacted hundreds of students.

One team of six fellows presented a day-long professional learning to 80 teachers on curriculum developed based on brain research, and the total project cost over two years was less than $9,000. Another fellow became a certified trainer and provided professional learning for eight teachers in her school, and the total cost of her project was $6,300. The cost per student impacted is not only relatively small within the year of the fellows'

engagement, but the investment in teacher learning yields student results for years.

One fellow said, "As teachers, we have all changed for the better. Not only have we established an authentic learning community where we learn, implement new strategies, and reflect upon successes and weaknesses, but we have acquired a belief that our work needs to continue and be shared."

Information gathered from online surveys, case study interviews, and focus groups confirms the experience has not only been meaningful, but invigorating. According to one fellow, "The fellows program has re-energized me. It has given me time to reflect, resources to transform a desire into reality, and opportunities to interact with other visionaries. I believe that my students have been the greatest beneficiaries of the fellows program, and I am a close second."

Another said, "The change in me as a teacher is great. On a daily basis, I am calmer and feel more able to handle the challenges of being a classroom teacher."

The Innovation Fellows program is a noteworthy model of professional learning for other school districts. According to one fellow, "All teachers should be so fortunate to have this kind of professional support for growth. If we value good teaching practice and we value retaining high-quality teachers, the Innovation Fellows program is a best practice for professional development that truly honors the art and science of teaching."

When teachers are given time to design their own projects, funding to support their development, and encouragement to study their impact, students benefit from their efforts.

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'FAILURE IS NOT AN OPTION'

STRUGGLING HIGH SCHOOL USES STANDARDS TO GUIDE REFORM

By Sherry Lambertson

Grant High School
Grant, Mich.

Grades: **9-12**
Enrollment: **572**
Staff: **25**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**79.2%**
Black:	**0.52%**
Hispanic:	**17.66%**
Asian/Pacific Islander:	**1.05%**
Native American:	**0.35%**
Other:	**0%**

Limited English proficient: **6.99%**
Languages spoken: **English, Spanish**
Free/reduced lunch: **48.43%**
Special education: **11.54%**
Contact: **Jonathan Whan**, superintendent
Email: **jwhan@grantps.net**

We know the story of the Wizard of Oz. Dorothy and her band of misfit friends embark on a journey to find something larger than life. They are in search of the Great and Powerful Oz, who has the power to make their every wish come true. Their story is one of relationships and adventures, from which they discover that what is truly important becomes visible as they overcome obstacles to achieve a common purpose. Their journey is not unlike that of educators.

School reform is hard. Turnaround seems impossible but holds the same promise of something larger than life: successful students who become healthy, contributing members of society.

Dorothy was repeatedly told to "follow the yellow brick road." Similarly, school reformers have a path of their own. The Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), when implemented with high levels of fidelity, guide schools to student achievement. Grant High School in Grant, Mich., is one such school.

In spring 2010, the Michigan Department of Education notified Grant Public

Schools that its small, rural high school of about 500 students was on the list of the state's persistently low-achieving schools. Grant High School was in the bottom 5% of schools in the state based on student achievement. District administrators and staff met the news with disbelief, embarrassment, and some anger.

Student achievement scores had been slipping, and morale followed the same downward trajectory. Educators knew they had to do better.

Legislation required the district to develop a transformation plan for the high school. Persistently low-achieving schools could apply for a School Improvement Grant to support their plans for comprehensive school improvement. That summer, the superintendent, title director, high school principal, and teacher leaders designed a plan using the Standards for Professional Learning as a guide. In fall 2010, the school received a School Improvement Grant.

LEARNING COMMUNITIES

At the start, the staff at Grant High School was a disparate group. Teachers had little in common. They worked in the same building, but, as Principal Dan Simon explained, "We had always been kings and queens of our own castles. … One person taught all sections of a given subject."

School leaders worked to change the culture from isolation to collaboration. With guidance from external coaches, teachers learned collaboration skills using strategies from *The Adaptive School* (Garmston & Wellman, 2009) and *Cognitive Coaching* (Costa & Garmston, 2002). Teachers learned how to facilitate meetings, how to engage in cognitive conflict, the importance of paraphrasing one another, and posing mediative questions to support one another's thinking.

Teachers learned collaboration skills through modeling and application. Coaches modeled best practices of collaboration, assisted teachers in engaging in cognitive conflict, and used facilitation strategies that were transparent and debriefed so they could be replicated. This process ensured fidelity of implementation and long-term sustainability of the desired practices.

Math teacher Bruce Tacoma says, "One of the biggest things [we learned] was collaboration. We have gleaned from one another ideas on how to be successful with our students."

Simon says this work has allowed the teachers to come full circle: "Groups are really working together now. The grant provided funding for teachers to meet regularly, and this has made a significant impact on our school culture. The shift was from kings and queens to where we are now with common assessments, sharing ideas, and deep conversations around teaching and learning."

LEADERSHIP

Grant's leaders kept school staff focused on their goals. Superintendent Jonathon Whan and his predecessor Scott Bogner share a vision of academic excellence for all students. Principal Dan Simon set challenging expectations that required teachers to collaborate around data and the curriculum. He also honored the time designated for collaboration. Housekeeping issues were set aside so that teachers could use collaborative time to concentrate on the work of examining data, practices, and student work that is central to professional learning communities.

Dan Simon

Simon encourages teachers to identify new strategies and try new approaches. "At Grant High School, we are going to succeed. We believe we are going to succeed. Failure is not even an option," he says.

Maxine Schneider, an English language arts teacher, says, "Mr. Simon's leadership style focuses on data, and this has been the backbone of our professional learning community process. Data have helped the teaching staff to confidently identify student learning needs and ways to focus our collective teaching."

RESOURCES

During the early stages of developing the transformation plan, Grant leaders decided to invest in the resource

that would yield the biggest result: teacher effectiveness, one of the biggest indicators of student success (Marzano, 2001).

Superintendent Whan says, "The key to achieving high levels of student achievement depends on adults having the desire, or at least the willingness, for self-improvement. Teachers and administrators need to live and model this philosophy, not only for our improvement, but also to support our students' growth."

As a requirement of the School Improvement Grant, the school's planning team selected a state-approved service provider to support the school's turnaround efforts. The school committed to a comprehensive plan because the staff was determined to make a significant impact on student achievement over the three-year grant period.

> **Teachers and coaches in all content areas worked in professional learning communities to review state and ACT assessments to identify the critical standards that students needed to master.**

The external partner, the Institute for Excellence in Education, created a plan that focused on teacher efficacy. Three on-site coaches were in the building three days a week and spent a fourth day each week reviewing data, collaborating with other coaches, and/or identifying and preparing resources to support teaching and learning.

One coach served primarily as the leadership coach and worked with building and district administrators and teacher leaders to guide the work. The other two coaches, one literacy and one math, spent time in classrooms observing, co-teaching, and engaging teachers in planning and reflective conversations based on *Cognitive Coaching* (Costa & Garmston, 2002).

"It took time for the coaches to gain the trust of skeptical teachers, but the coaches listened, and, by December, the coaches had established trust. They were a part of the staff," says former superintendent Scott Bogner.

The Institute for Excellence in Education also provided eight days of professional learning to the staff each year of the grant. These days focused on teachers' needs as they related to increasing student achievement. On professional learning days, teachers learned research-based strategies to engage all students, the skills to differentiate teaching and learning, and more specific systems for analyzing and using data. Coaches followed up as they coached and co-taught using student engagement and differentiation strategies with all teachers.

DATA

Almost everything about data has changed at Grant High School: the types of data collected, the frequency of assessments, and, most importantly, how teachers and students are involved in and use data.

The external coaches introduced a strategy that was instrumental in shifting the use of data. As an example, teachers believed that students came to Grant High School with poor reading skills. Coach Mary Alice Krajenta used student reading data from state assessments to show that reading scores declined at the high school. Armed with this data, teachers began holding higher expectations for students' reading and identified strategies to support struggling students.

Teachers and coaches in all content areas spent time in professional learning communities reviewing state (Michigan Merit Exam) and ACT assessments to identify the power or critical standards that students needed to master.

Once teacher teams identified the power standards, they aligned their teaching to the assessments. For example, if they found that algebraic thinking was an essential skill, teachers made sure to devote adequate time and expert strategies to this concept.

Teachers used biweekly assessments to monitor student mastery of the power standards. More importantly, students became engaged in this process and tracked their success. Students charted their progress to identify which power standards they had mastered and which they had not.

Teachers used data to determine what additional teaching, reteaching, and interventions were necessary and for whom. Students could retake assessments, rewrite papers, and revise work to achieve mastery. This new emphasis on learning became part of the school's culture.

Coaches took data a step further. A coach met with every 11th-grade student to review results on Plan and Explore assessments (predictors of success on the ACT). This individual student focus encouraged students to invest in their own success. Student investment became obvious when ACT test results came in and students were heard in the hallway asking one another how they did on the test — something that would not have been heard in this agricultural community two years earlier. One student who received a score of 22 on the ACT was thinking about college for the first time in his life. He was a student receiving special education services, and now college was a possibility for him.

LEARNING DESIGNS AND IMPLEMENTATION

The school's redesign team took reform research seriously. The team developed a plan that provided focused professional learning for teachers and school leaders to develop new skills. The team invested in collaborative practices by establishing and honoring professional learning time. And the team created a system where professional learning was job-embedded and heavy on follow-up.

Coaches provided ongoing, job-embedded support by modeling best practices, co-teaching, leading discussions, and using structured planning and reflecting conversations to improve teacher practices. Initial efforts focused on math and reading and eventually included all content areas.

School leaders also paid attention to the fact that the School

Improvement Grant would only last three years. School reform is not sustainable unless the organization's culture changes. There is reason to believe that Grant High School's success will continue because the culture of the building is now focused on learning. Teacher efficacy, the biggest predictor of teacher effectiveness, is now high. And students believe they will be successful. Administrators in the district believe the sustainability lies in the fact that teacher practice has changed.

The changes are confirmed in the behaviors of the school community. Grant now celebrates its successes. A billboard announcing student success overlooks a major expressway near town. As students entered the testing area during the 2012-13 school year, teachers and staff lined the hallway cheering and encouraging them to do their best.

The grant expired Sept. 30, 2013, and with it the funds to provide additional collaboration time. The teachers created and administration supported a plan to sustain the collaboration time by restructuring their schedule and taking on additional responsibilities. It was a clear demonstration of their commitment to sustain the project and the culture of the school.

OUTCOMES

The administrators and teachers who designed the transformation plan for Grant High School began, as Covey (1989) said, with the end in mind. The outcomes they selected not only focused on increasing student achievement, but also recognized that teacher effectiveness is the variable with the greatest impact.

Educators at Grant knew that the adults in the school had to make changes. Teachers had to be more effective in reaching the school's rural, high-needs students, many of whom are Hispanic English language learners. Teachers needed to examine their own practices and embrace learning new strategies and ways of reaching all students.

The outcomes identified addressed the who and the what of the learning process. Teachers and administrators noted that they would sharpen their focus on curriculum standards and Common Core expectations. At the time the transformation model was written, the team did not know how this would happen, but they knew it was necessary.

Some staff members had already been introduced to professional learning communities and recognized the power of identifying clearly what Grant's students needed to know and be able to do, how teachers would measure if students knew it, and what to do for students who had not yet mastered the standards. The outcomes ultimately guided the work of everyone at the school.

STUDENT RESULTS

The school's staff and students knew they had achieved their goals when the ACT scores arrived in spring 2012. Grant's ACT composite score had increased nearly two points from the 2010-11 school year, landing the school in the 90th percentile

GRANT HIGH SCHOOL ACT SCORES

	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12
Composite	17.5	17.8	17.9	18.5	20.3
English	15.9	16.4	16.9	17.5	20.1
Reading	17.5	18.3	18.0	18.9	20.5
Mathematics	17.5	17.7	17.8	17.9	19.4
Science	18.5	18.2	18.3	19.2	20.8

of Michigan schools.

The school continued that success during the 2012-13 school year, when it moved up to the 92nd percentile of schools in Michigan. The Michigan Department of Education named Grant a Rewards School and a Beating the Odds School. As Principal Simon says, "The culture of Grant High School has changed from a focus on teaching content to a focus on student learning. The staff have embraced the professional learning community concepts and collaborate weekly to plan for remediation and celebration of learning. These changes mean that our students have more opportunities than ever before when they leave our doors after four years."

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UNITED
WE LEARN

**TEAM EFFORT BUILDS A PATH
TO EQUITY AND ALIGNMENT**

By Jill Kind

Sitting down to plan professional learning for the 2011-12 school year brought about fundamental and necessary changes for educators at Robbinsdale Cooper High School in New Hope, Minn., a suburb of Minneapolis. Professional learning communities were in their infancy, conversations around data were about autopsies of annual standardized tests, and there was no description of what high-quality instruction should look like. To jump-start the planning, the staff examined Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

As staff members articulated their visions for the school, it became evident that they would need to focus on three of Learning Forward's standards: Leadership, Resources, and Implementation. With those standards to guide them, they would create an instructional framework (see table on p. 47) built around one SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound) goal to improve instruction and the necessary supports for teachers to implement the framework with high levels of fidelity and success.

When creating the instructional framework, they defined best practices and what the essential elements would be in classrooms and how school leaders can support teachers and align resources systemically.

Ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality, rigorous instruction requires a collaborative approach between teachers and administrators to clearly identify the elements of instruction that need to be in place in every classroom.

At Robbinsdale Cooper High School, this work also required the development of a group of teacher leaders who could plan, facilitate, and evaluate the professional learning needed to support the implementation of the instructional framework.

BUILDING-LEVEL SMART GOAL 2013-14

RESULTS GOAL	INDICATORS	MEASURES	TARGETS	ACTIONS
By the end of the 2013-14 school year, we will decrease the percentage of students failing courses by 5%, from 34% to 29%.	Grades	Common formative assessment data	Professional learning communities will complete a minimum of two common formative assessments with data dialogues and action plans per quarter.	Develop data dialogues and action plans with instructional coach.

Develop daily closing activities on learning targets.

Monitor the use of WICOR strategies through the use of the learning walk.

Monitor the performance of the students of color.

Examine our data on students of color and compare it to the implementation of WICOR strategies. |
		Weeks 5, 7, 9, and semester	At weeks 5, 7, and 9, the percentage of students failing courses is 5% lower than the previous year.	
	Engagement	Learning walks	By the end of the first quarter, we will collect baseline data on the percentage of students engaged.	
		Student engagement survey	By the end of the first quarter, we will develop a common Cooper definition of student engagement.	
	Discipline	Classroom referrals	Monitor classroom referrals every month to look for patterns.	

If we implement the instructional framework with fidelity, then we can provide feedback, change instructional practices, and develop timely interventions.

CLARIFY IMPLEMENTATION

Creating the instructional framework came after years of administrative turnover and a multitude of initiatives that had left teachers with many areas of foci. The instructional framework that was created, in its most basic form, articulates what is expected in each classroom each class period.

The five main elements are learning targets, WICOR (writing, inquiry, collaboration, organization, and reading) strategies, closing, feedback, and common assessments that are all framed through the lens of equity (see diagram on p. 48). These five main elements then serve as the backbone for aligning all of the work and the school's professional learning plan.

One of the school's first tasks was to examine the structures that support instruction and professional learning. Out of this examination, the staff concluded that, while the school had structures, such as department chairs, it needed a broad-based representative body whose main goal would be school improvement.

From this came the learning and leadership team.

The learning and leadership team includes 15 licensed staff members, one equity liaison, and two administrators. The majority of members are elected by building staff per the teachers union contract. The instructional coach and equity liaison are standing members.

To begin, the learning and leadership team identified the major initiatives that supported the instructional framework. The team articulated each initiative's desired accomplishments. In addition, the team identified the current work, implementation work, and learning work for each initiative. These are defined as:

- **Current work:** These components of the initiative have been implemented in the past one or two years, and teachers have received significant professional learning and support. New teachers receive significant support in this area, and veteran teachers receive support on an as-needed basis.
- **Implementation work:** Teachers are working these

components of the initiative for the first time and need learning and ongoing support.

- **Learning work:** Various groups may be studying or exploring these components of the initiative to determine if the work fits with the instructional framework.

Next, the team worked with components listed as implementation work, identifying the knowledge and skills that teachers need to successfully implement each component. In its first iteration, team members brainstormed individually and then worked with two partners to combine, categorize, and sort the knowledge and skills identified. Then the small groups shared with a large group, which sorted, combined, and categorized again. This was overly time-consuming, so a change was necessary.

Now, the learning and leadership team divides into small groups, assigning each group an initiative. Each small group identifies the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to be successful. Groups post their list of knowledge and skills on the wall (see photo on p. 49), then the whole team takes a gallery walk, adding clarifying questions, missing pieces, and other ideas on each group's poster. Groups also identify how their initiative connects to other initiatives. Then each small group responds to the feedback on its poster and makes a final draft to share with the whole group.
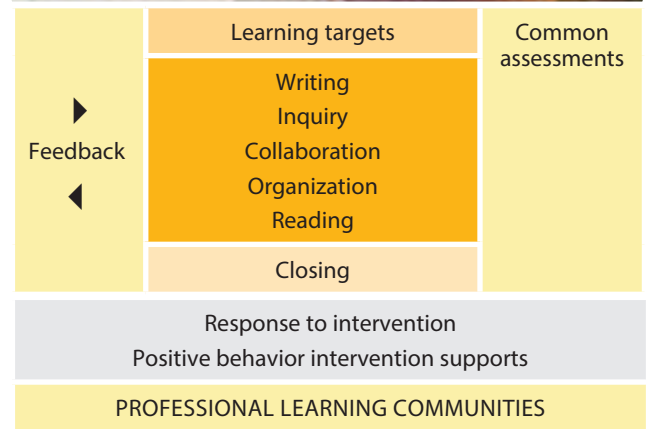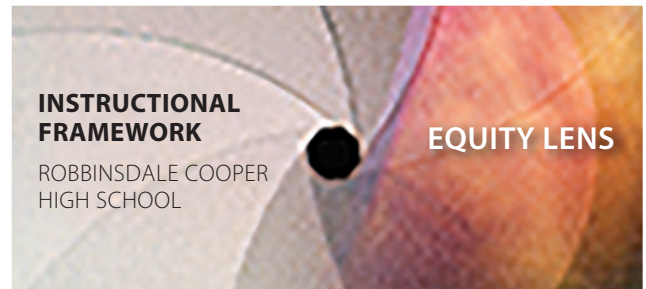
Once the team identifies the knowledge and skills teachers need, it can look deeper to identify the professional learning needs associated with each piece of knowledge and skill and then determine the structure, product, and logistics of the professional learning.

ALIGN RESOURCES

As the learning and leadership team planned the professional learning that teachers need to implement the instructional framework, the administrative team looked at how to align resources to support the work. The largest constraint the administrative team faced was to do this without additional financial resources.

The administrative team changed the school's master schedule to allow some professional learning communities to meet during the contract day. In the first and second year, the math professional learning communities met every day and the 9th- and 10th-grade social studies, English, and science teachers met

INSTRUCTIONAL FRAMEWORK
ROBBINSDALE COOPER HIGH SCHOOL

EQUITY LENS

Feedback ▶ ◀	Learning targets	Common assessments
	Writing Inquiry Collaboration Organization Reading	
	Closing	

Response to intervention
Positive behavior intervention supports

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

twice a week in their professional learning communities. During these two years, the school used a federal Smaller Learning Communities grant to pay for other professional learning communities to meet.

Since then, the school has embedded professional learning community time into the day for most of the professional learning communities, giving 67 out of 77 regular education teachers time built into their day a minimum of once a week.

The school also added a full-time instructional coach. The coach's responsibilities include:
- Facilitating data dialogues and other protocols with professional learning communities;
- Working with professional learning communities to articulate student learning, writing assessments, and rubrics;
- Conducting learning walks (see sidebar on p. 50) to collect data on implementation of the instructional framework;
- Facilitating large-group professional learning;
- Coaching teachers who are struggling with implementing the instructional framework; and
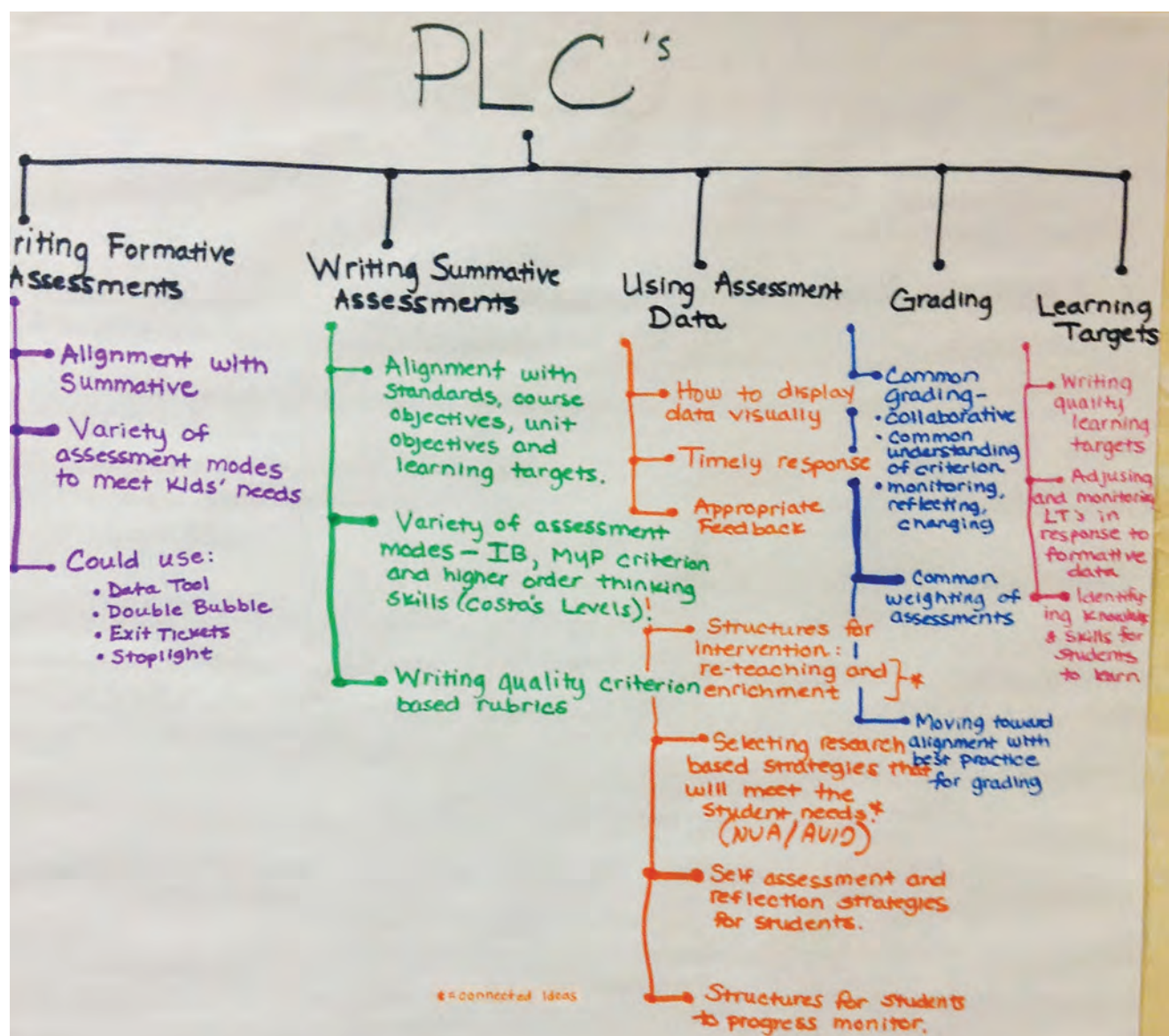- Co-facilitating the learning and leadership team.

This alignment has reinforced implementation of the instructional framework.

TAKE LEADING DEEPER

All of this preparation is critical to developing a coherent professional learning plan. The next step is to develop the capacity of the learning and leadership team.

In the initial meetings of this group, the co-facilitators

Members of the learning and leadership team work in small groups to identify and list the knowledge and skills necessary for teachers to be successful. Here is one example.

stressed the importance of team members taking a systemic view of the work, rather than advocating for his or her own department or role.

To build capacity, the co-facilitators led the group in writing this purpose statement: The purpose of the learning and leadership team is to work collaboratively with other members of the team as well as staff from other departments based around the building-level goals. The learning and leadership team will work with building administration to improve student learning by facilitating professional development and aligning continuous improvement planning in the areas of curriculum, instruction, assessment, and other continuous improvement planning activities.

Learning and leadership team roles include:
• Facilitating building-level processes and procedures related to professional development design and delivery as related to building-level goals;
• Facilitating the work of professional learning communities; and
• Facilitating curriculum and instructional alignment, assessments, and school improvement.

Using the purpose statement, the group developed five outcomes. These outcomes are:
• Analyze data to develop the school improvement plan;
• Design professional learning to support the school improvement plan and teacher needs;

LEARNING WALKS

Learning walks are one method that Robbinsdale Cooper High School uses to monitor the implementation of its instructional framework. Administrators, district office staff, and the instructional coach conduct learning walks weekly using a rubric written by the building's learning and leadership team that articulates what each element looks like in practice.

Learning walks are short time periods — 15 minutes in a classroom to gather data. Learning walks that take place during the first 15 minutes of class focus on the learning target and link to daily instruction; ones that take place during the second 15 minutes of class look for the use of instructional strategies; and learning walks that occur in the last 15 minutes of class look at instruction and how it relates to teachers checking for understanding on the daily lesson or the closing.

Learning walks provide feedback to teachers on their implementation of the instructional framework. This data is then shared with the learning and leadership team to plan further professional learning. By gathering this data from the learning walks, the school has been able to target its professional learning on specific areas for growth. The next step is to differentiate the learning for teachers based on this data.

- Plan and execute professional learning related to major school initiatives;
- Monitor and evaluate implementation of the school improvement plan and major school initiatives; and
- Eliminate the achievement gap.

LEARN ABOUT DATA

The team's next step was to learn about data. The group examined student performance on state standardized tests, the ACT, graduation rates, course failures, and behavior referrals. This conversation led to the creation of one goal for the building: To decrease the percentage of students failing courses. This goal remains central to all conversations and work.

> **Central to all conversations and work is the goal of decreasing the percentage of students failing courses.**

While examining student data, the learning and leadership team also engaged in book study on *The Will to Lead, the Skill to Teach* (Muhammad & Hollie, 2012). The book prompted discussions about school culture and the role it plays in student success. While these conversations have been difficult due to long-held beliefs about the role of teacher leaders and issues of race and entitlement, they have strengthened the group and empowered a few members to have difficult but critical conversations with peers.

Members of the learning and leadership team are also learning to be facilitators of adult learning, modeling protocols and effective group facilitation skills.

STUDENT RESULTS

Clarifying implementation and aligning resources and learning has led to improvements in student achievement. Since 2011, 11th graders increased their performance on the state math test by 11%, 10th graders increased their performance on the state science test by 7%, and the percent of students failing courses decreased by 3%.

While the work has been hard, these changes have created a quick win for staff members in those departments and allowed staff members who may have been questioning the work to see results.

Next, the team will use common formative assessment data to respond to instruction and become more intentional about which research-based instructional strategies are used in classrooms. In addition, a task force will evaluate and develop recommendations to improve secondary student progress reporting and grading practices. Through each step, an aligned instructional framework will help the school keep a steady focus on its goals.

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*"While I think I have
something to say,
no one listens, and so,
as a consequence, I have
learned to remain silent."*

NURTURE HIDDEN TALENTS

**TRANSFORM
SCHOOL CULTURE
INTO ONE
THAT VALUES
TEACHER EXPERTISE**

By Diane P. Zimmerman

One sunny spring day, I held a heavy three-ring binder full of student writing. The evidence of a career as an exemplary teacher of writing was in front of me. This teacher had saved copies, and sometimes originals, of kid-perfect writing. The binder was an amazing compendium of models of writing collected over a 34-year teaching career — like an encyclopedia yearbook.

The number of original copies surprised me. It seemed that students knew about this collection and found honor in donating original work. I opened the binder and started to read, "How to Make Blueberry Muffins Grandma Sam's Way." Not only did I learn how to make muffins, I fell in love with Grandma Sam, who knew just how lumpy to make the muffin batter.

As I flipped through the binder reading one kid-friendly essay after another, I asked, "Why haven't we ever seen this?" The teacher shrugged and said, "Oh, I don't know. It never seemed like the right time to share it." Together we had been working on his retirement tribute. I thought, "At least we can celebrate this collection as he goes out the door."

UNDERRATED AND IGNORED

The backstory tells more than I'd want to admit about the school culture and how teacher expertise often stays hidden and underused. This teacher was known for producing excellent 6th-grade writing. Teachers often assigned to this class students who were ready to take off as writers. Sad to say, no one ever figured out his magic — not I, as the principal, nor his colleagues at this intermediate school.

Because he kept to himself and often chose not to join in schoolwide social events, it was easy to ignore him. Each fall, he had this irritating habit of writing what he called "lesson plans" for an entire year. His peers wondered, "How does he do this?" We would now call what he was writing a pacing guide, which ensured he did not miss even one writing assignment. His expertise as an exemplary teacher of writing was never valued in this school, and that is a shame.

While our media-rich culture places a high value on talent, the irony is that talent is underrated in most schools, and educators often remain silent about their hidden talents. Many school cultures are not conducive to dialogue that supports displays of teacher talent. One teacher summed it up this way: "While I think I have something to say, no one listens, and so, as a consequence, I have learned to remain silent." Others report criticisms from peers for being know-it-alls.

Veteran high school principal and colleague Bill Sommers says his purpose as a leader is to get the "talent to come out from behind closed doors." He says, "Often when I go into a school, teachers will beg me not to showcase their work because of the response they anticipate

> **While our media-rich culture places a high value on talent, the irony is that talent is underrated in most schools, and educators often remain silent about their hidden talents.**

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

Educators can use these reflection questions to create opportunities to identify talents and then to foster and nurture them.

MATERIALS NEEDED:

- One large (4 inch by 24 inch) sentence strip for every participant and a few extras for mistakes.
- A large wall to organize the sentence strips.

Reflection 1	Mine existing group talent

1. Each person takes about five minutes to reflect on his or her teaching career and to answer these questions:
   - What part of your teaching gives you the most energy?
   - When are you most proud of your students' accomplishments?
   - What talents contributed to this success, and how would you describe them to a colleague?

2. Working with a partner, describe how you define your talents and the one for which you are most proud. Partner listens and captures your most-proud-of talent on a sentence strip large enough for others to read. Change roles and repeat. (To keep balanced participation, all participants can choose only one talent while recognizing that there are many.)

3. Each participant takes a moment to stand and announce his or her talent and then post it on the wall at the front of the room. Ask participants to post similar talents in close proximity to other talents already posted.

4. The group looks at the wall and reflects collectively:
   - What are we learning about our talent pool?
   - What else are we learning? (Continue this question until group comes to a stop.)

5. Ask the group to summarize what participants learned. Designate a scribe to capture these thoughts.

6. Type up the talent pool list and the summary and distribute.

Reflection 2	Deepen understanding about talents in a school

1. Looking at the talent wall, participants ask colleagues to expand on their thinking: "Tell me more about how you … ." Continue as long as time allows and the group is engaged.

2. Working in teams of three, develop questions that can help participants better understand another teacher's personal stance for excellence.

3. Each team selects a question to ask the whole group. The expert answers first, and then others are asked to contribute, allowing others with a similar talent to be recognized. Continue as long as time allows and the group remains engaged.

Reflection 3:	Honor talents (Note: In schools with strong taboos about "showing off" or being "singled out," this may need to be the first reflection.)

1. As an entire staff, discuss the following questions:

   - How do we celebrate and learn from excellence? Note: Only tangible evidence is acceptable, such as: "Last year, a board meeting showcased student writing from one of our teachers."

   - What are the barriers that keep us from celebrating excellence? Probe deeply: List the behaviors and keep asking for more. Often, the presenting problem is not the real problem, so be slow to come to conclusions.

   - Distribute copies of this article to all participants and discuss: How can we fulfill the promise of this article? How will we continue to celebrate and learn from our talent pool? How will we make our talent pool known to others? What are our next steps?

from colleagues."

He attributes what he calls the "silence of talent" to school cultural norms, which are observable. Pay attention to what teachers and administrators talk about, and you know how talent is valued in that school.

NURTURE TALENT

Striving for excellence by developing and capitalizing on talent ought to be an inherent goal for all schools. We need to pay attention to our most valuable asset: the cognitive capital of teachers (Costa, Garmston, & Zimmerman, 2014).

The quality of school leadership is one of the most powerful contributors to the development of teacher quality. Too often, educators give lip service with visions, missions, and serial reform initiatives but do not stop to think about what it means to foster, nurture, grow, and optimize talent.

Costa, Garmston, and Zimmerman (2014) asked colleagues, "How do you optimize teacher talent in your school?" Most gave lengthy but vague explanations of excellence. In the end, their answers could be summed up in three words: "We do not."

Despite the emphasis on effective adult learning practices and professional learning communities, the thoughtful work in schools is too often driven by external demands such as standards, textbooks, technology, assessments, or other reform initiatives. There is little time devoted to finding out about and optimizing talent that already exists in a school.

> **We owe it to our schools to optimize the talent of our teachers.**

Teachers will quietly admit to "going underground" in their bid to preserve the wisdom gleaned from a career in teaching. One teacher said, "When the external review team came to see my math lesson — I had gotten the highest 3rd-grade scores in the district — I knew they'd be looking for the textbook. Instead of trying to explain why the way I taught fractions was better than the book, I simply adapted my lesson that day to include the textbook."

DEVELOP EXPERTISE

Schools need to expect teachers to be expert and work to develop this expertise both pedagogically — how we work with students — and for the content and standards of instruction.

Each teacher should be expected to become an expert in multiple areas, including but not limited to curriculum content and strategy, pedagogy, technology, behavior management, relationship management, and brain development. These specializations ought to and need to come from the teacher's interests, passions, and unanswered questions about learning.
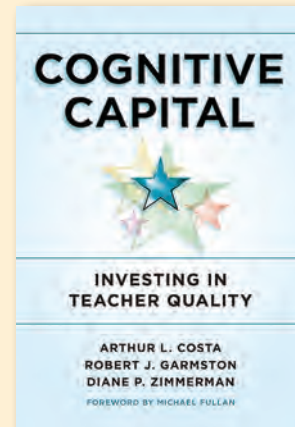
Areas of expertise and talent should be identified, fostered, nurtured, and made public. Teachers should find themselves

regularly consulting with peers in areas of expertise. This is observable and measurable and rarely happens in schools.

Imagine as a new teacher being given a directory of staff that tells not only the obvious — those with content specialties — but also the less obvious — those who have specializations in the nuances of teaching and learning. Envision a school where teachers collect evidence of student learning, share it, and use it to gain collective wisdom.

Dream of schools that see teaching and learning as a continuous evolution of knowledge that capitalizes on learned wisdom. And, finally, believe in the miracle of schools that have the capacity to pass on teacher wisdom to the next generation of teachers. We owe it to our students to optimize the talent of our teachers.

The almost-happy ending to my story is: At this teacher's retirement, the binder was celebrated publicly and passed on to his daughter, a first-year teacher. His legacy lives, just 34 years too late and in a different school.

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A VIVID ILLUSTRATION *of* LEADERSHIP

PRINCIPAL'S ACTIONS PROPEL STRUGGLING SCHOOL'S TURNAROUND

By Stephanie Dodman

School leadership is second only to classroom teaching as an influence on pupil learning, according to Leithwood, Harris, & Hopkins (2008, p. 28). Research makes clear that leadership must be at the forefront when attempting to reform underachieving schools. The question is: What kind of leadership? Not just any type of principal leadership will suffice for schools striving to build the instructional capacity necessary for student achievement. Rather, leadership that simultaneously leads a school forward while distributing power throughout the faculty is considered the path to creating not only a successful school as measured by achievement tests but also a learning organization. In a learning organization, stakeholders "assume internal responsibility for reform and maintain momentum for self-renewal" (Lambert, 1998, p. 3). School improvement becomes the job of vested insiders rather than outside experts.

When I studied a high-needs, high-poverty school that had made remarkable improvements in student achievement, I found the relationship between leadership, classroom teaching, and learning to be illustrated in vivid color. For this school, enhanced student achievement relied on leadership rather than better test preparation or a new curriculum.

Principal leadership was the catalyst for an entire school transforming who they were and what they did. So what did this leadership look like in action? How did a school with limited internal capacity transform into a success when so many other schools have been unable to do so? What follows offers a glimpse into some of the steps a first-year principal took to turn his school into an organization that valued learning and embraced change.

THE CONTEXT

Determined to document how underachieving high-needs schools improve, an area of surprisingly little research, I conducted a case study of one high-poverty, chronically underachieving elementary school. This school experienced great transformation in school culture and subsequently in student achievement.

The faculty of this school told a story of change that traced back two years to the assignment of a new principal. The principal leadership of the school exhibited characteristics aligned with those of Learning Forward's Leadership standard: developing capacity for learning and leading, advocating for professional learning, and creating support systems and structures. The work spurred by this principal's leadership resulted in the school achieving Adequate Yearly Progress for all student groups for the first time in the school's history.

IN THE BEGINNING

It's important to understand the school context that the principal entered. Teachers who had been there for years were disconnected from the administration, and the administration had distanced itself from the teachers and students. There was a deep sense of complacency among the faculty as a whole in terms of their instruction. Those that naturally exhibited strong instructional practices and sought out opportunities for learning continued doing so. Those that did not already have such tendencies or skills did not develop them.

The principal described how "best practices … such as the architecture of the minilesson weren't there [when I entered the school]. Teaching points weren't there. … Flow of the day was not there. … Differentiating instruction wasn't there. Some of those key practices that good teachers do weren't happening." He said he saw multiple opportunities for instruction that were wasted throughout the day. Teachers said that their approach to instruction was more moment-by-moment than intentional.

LEADERSHIP ACTIONS

Establish an urgent, common goal.

Coming aboard, the principal saw areas to address immediately. The first was to establish a sense of urgency. There was no evident urgency to the school's work, which seemed to hinder the staff in moving forward and contributed to their complacent teaching and learning behaviors. The principal used the school's stagnant achievement and assignment in the state's accountability scheme to bind them all together in a common goal for students.

The sense of urgency imposed on the school to meet AYP to avoid restructuring left no time to be wasted by excuses. Teachers had to meet students' needs, and they had to do it now. Participants indicated that if it were not for this common goal established so early in the principal's tenure, there might have been a great deal more resistance to his leadership. Setting a goal and posing a question to teachers — what can we do to move forward? — were crucial.

Create relationships and establish instructional accountability.

Binding the staff together in a goal would not have been as effective if the principal had not also mobilized school leaders and established a like-minded leadership team of teachers and coaches who were influential among staff. "I surrounded myself with people who thought the way I thought, who wanted to work the way I work and move [us] forward," the principal said. "… I'm not going to surround myself with individuals who are negative or aren't team players or that [don't have] the best interests of kids at heart."

To learn who these individuals were, the principal immediately embedded himself in the life of the school. He was in classrooms, he was talking with students, and he was looking at student learning data. In a very short time, he learned the social dynamics of the school and the instructional practices of the teachers.

Knowledge of the faculty, however, was a means rather than an end. With this knowledge, the principal was able to establish expectations for instruction, most of which were district expectations that should have been in place long before. Because he was in classrooms so frequently and had such an influential leadership team with strong classroom ties, he knew when expectations were being fulfilled and when they were not, and he knew when teachers were struggling in certain areas.

Use instructional knowledge for teacher learning.

Instructional accountability also created opportunities for professional learning. Participants noted the principal's practice of arranging professional learning based on what he had observed in classrooms and heard in grade-level meetings. Approaching the assistant principal or instructional coaches to arrange professional learning between teachers was commonplace. These included teacher-to-teacher observations and teacher-led professional learning. In fact, the master school schedule was arranged to maximize opportunities for peer observations.

The principal also trusted teachers to direct their own professional learning. When teachers had ideas for new instructional practices, he trusted in their abilities to make sound decisions for their students. One teacher said, "[The principal] said to me, 'I trust you as a teacher. I trust your judgment. If you need to veer from the pacing guide and you don't want to use your textbook and you think you can come up with better ways to teach your kids, go for it.' " This empowerment to change was always tied to data. The leadership team expected that teachers' new learning would be evident in new instructional practices and that the effects would be seen in student learning data.

Use problems to build a community.

Pedagogical problems became the catalyst for building community among teachers. The leadership team redefined professional learning communities to focus on response to intervention. Administration and instructional coaches reviewed assessment data to find trends and outliers across a grade level. They then presented those findings to a professional learning community and solicited help from teachers. Teachers shared student data and relied on peer teachers and coaches for expert advice. The shared commitment to the learning of all students meant that faculty opened their classrooms to share data, problems, and successes. Student learning became everyone's responsibility, not just the responsibility of one assigned teacher.

One participant said, "I would say, 'I've tapped into everything I have got. Who has something else that they can give me? What can we [do]?' It was empowering in a way because I knew I was going to the experts at my school to help me. It wasn't just finding a program or putting them on a computer for x amount of minutes. I had my colleagues and my coaches saying, 'What about if I take [your student] and help him?' "

Fullan (2010) discusses this phenomenon in terms of "positive pressure," where transparent work and data analysis within a community of peers capitalize on peer pressure. As part of this internal accountability strategy, outcome data are not used punitively, but rather to identify "causal relationships between particular instructional actions and specific student engagement and learning" (p. 125). This is exactly what this school demonstrated. The leadership's "driven by data" approach within communities of learners created conditions of positive pressure, collective responsibility, and continuous problem posing that enabled teachers to strengthen their teaching.

Take advantage of externally imposed initiatives.

Schools do not operate independent of a larger policy con-

Greece Professional Learning Center policy board members (from left) Jan Marchetti, Cherie Gerych, and Karen Delgatti analyze data.

Photo by SHEILA B. ROBINSON

DISTRICT DIVES INTO DATA
TO IMPROVE FEEDBACK

By Sheila B. Robinson and Marguerite G. Dimgba

T he Greece Professional Learning Center, a New York State Teacher Center in Greece Central School District, works to ensure all district employees have access to high-quality professional learning that supports and facilitates their learning and ultimately advances student achievement. The center is an integral part of the district — the state's 9th-largest — and the community.

An important part of the center's work is evaluation. As Learning Forward states in *Standards for Professional Learning* (2011), "Well-designed evaluation of professional learning provides information needed to increase its quality and effectiveness" (p. 38). New York State includes evaluation in its Professional Development Standards: "Professional development is evaluated using multiple sources of information to assess its effectiveness in improving professional practice and student learning" (New York State Education Department, n.d.). Evaluation, however, has

consistently been the most challenging standard area to implement (Abielle & Hurley, 2002).

To meet this challenge, the Greece Professional Learning Center created a process to evaluate professional learning using a collaborative approach involving multiple partnerships and a web-based professional development management and evaluation tool.

Since 2011, the center has led a group of educators and community members in analyzing participant feedback. This group engaged in collective inquiry around how data were collected, what the group could learn from the data, and how data could help the group understand the connection between professional development and student learning. As a result of the inquiry, the center changed its feedback forms to focus on collecting more rich and meaningful data from participants about their learning and its impact on student achievement.

Through this process, the district learned more about how educators experience professional learning and about effective program evaluation, qualitative data analysis, and how data are used for informed decision-making.

Greece Central School District
Greece, N.Y.

Number of schools: **17**
Enrollment: **11,372**
Staff: **3,016**
Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	**69.5%**
Black or African American:	**13.4%**
Hispanic or Latino:	**10.8%**
Asian or native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander:	**3.2%**
American Indian or Alaska Native:	**0.2%**
Multiracial:	**3.0%**

Limited English proficient: **2.4%**
Languages spoken: **40**
Students with disabilities: **11.4%**
Contact: **Sheila B. Robinson,** Strengthening Teacher and Leader Effectiveness grant coordinator
Email: **Sheila.kohn@greece.k12.ny.us**

OUTCOMES AND OUTPUTS

Teacher Centers are grant-funded by New York State and provide job-embedded professional learning designed *by* teachers *for* teachers to all district employees. Teacher Centers are governed by a teacher who serves as director and a policy board made up of teachers, parents, and representatives from private schools, local businesses, and the Board of Education. Teacher Centers assess the impact of their activities and programs through a variety of strategies, using both quantitative and qualitative data, and sharing evaluation findings to build awareness of their work.

Evaluation is one of 10 New York State Standards for Professional Development (New York State Education Department, n.d.), and, according to the Teacher Center's bylaws, the policy board must examine the impact of the center's programs

on teacher effectiveness and student learning.

In 2008, the Greece Professional Learning Center purchased MyLearningPlan PDMS, a web-based professional development management and evaluation system, to analyze the effectiveness of its professional learning. Using the online platform for systemwide data collection, the center would be able to evaluate outcomes, including teacher learning and changes in practice, in addition to outputs (i.e. tracking the number of and participation in professional learning).

The Greece Professional Learning Center policy board considered broad evaluation questions:
- Are teachers constructing new knowledge from professional learning?
- Are they applying that learning in classroom practice?
- Are changes in teaching impacting student learning?
- Do we have evidence that supports the student achievement results we are seeking?
- Can we measure the return on our investment in professional learning?

The first set of feedback forms were based on questions the district had asked participants in the past. Once the group collected these data, it sought a way to analyze them to assess the efficacy of feedback forms in capturing data the group had hoped to obtain: rich information about teacher learning, plans to apply that learning in practice, and effectiveness in terms of student outcomes.

COLLECTIVE INQUIRY

The first year of data collection yielded an extensive data set. The feedback forms included five multiple choice and five open-ended questions. The online tool generated user-friendly reports with bar charts and frequency data for closed-ended multiple-choice questions, making quantitative data easy to manage.

However, the first 1,800 responses to the open-ended questions generated more than 200 pages of narrative text. To analyze that much qualitative data, the board tapped the expertise of policy board chair Sheila Robinson. A certified program evaluator with experience in qualitative data analysis, Robinson taught board members about broad evaluation concepts such as program theory and logic models.

After a brief lesson on evaluation concepts, Robinson modeled a simple way to code qualitative data, a process unfamiliar to most members of the group. Using data from an open-ended question, she demonstrated the process by reading through responses and looking for patterns. Because these are generally short responses, this involved counting the number of times a particular word or phrase appeared and looking for related words and phrases as well. She then showed the group how to create categories that emerged from the data in a simple inductive approach.

Center director Marguerite Dimgba and Robinson then assigned small groups to analyze sets of open-ended questions on

the feedback survey using this brief qualitative coding strategy, and they collectively delved into their data sets. In this way, the 200 pages of responses were divided among many members in a jigsaw approach. Then groups collaboratively engaged in deep reflection as they attempted to systematically examine responses from open-ended survey items about the types and formats of questions used.

The reflection process included four focus questions:

1. What have we learned by asking this question?
2. Is it a worthwhile question for professional learning instructors or the policy board?
3. What responses did we get to the "other" category?
4. Should we continue to ask this question or modify it?

Each group was given data from its assigned question and a large poster with the focus questions in four large boxes with space to write in the group's findings. The group that analyzed each question brainstormed potential modifications to that question if needed. Groups completed two rounds of analysis in about an hour, with groups analyzing data from two questions each. Afterward, they participated in a gallery walk so that each group could examine and provide feedback on the others' work.

RESULTS

The collaborative data analysis process and reflection on focus questions yielded the following:

1. The group found many common responses or patterns to certain questions — typically when participants chose "other" when answering a multiple choice question and wrote responses in text boxes.
2. Responses to some questions about participant learning and impact on student learning didn't necessarily capture data the group had hoped to obtain. Respondents either answered very specifically about the course they attended or very generically (i.e. they attended a course on classroom management and responded "I learned about classroom management").
3. The group identified questions whose responses gave good insight into participants' learning and considered these questions well-composed and worth keeping.

After gathering all the analyses, the board created a new feedback form by modifying some questions and some response options to existing questions. The new form contained some original, some new, and some modified questions. For example, the first version of the feedback form asked, "What have you learned that you did not know before?" and gave participants a text box in which to write their answers. Analysis showed that answers fell into categories such as:

- Increased content knowledge;
- Strategies that will enhance my effectiveness;
- Strategies that will help students be more successful;
- Use of resources;
- How strategies can be applied; and

- More ways to assess students.

The board then modified this question for the new form as a multiple choice with a "check all that apply" option and an "other" option with a text box for participants to describe learning that does not fall into those categories. Other questions were modified in similar ways.

The board used the same collaborative analysis and inquiry process the following year with the newly collected data, and then further refined its feedback form, again in hopes of eliciting the richest, most meaningful data possible.

LESSONS LEARNED

Several valuable lessons emerged during this process. For the first time, board members thought deeply about how district-wide professional development feedback data serves different audiences — individual instructors, policy board, administration, and the community at large. They learned the importance of analyzing the data they collect to learn about participants' experiences and make informed decisions around future professional learning.

Policy board members realized that, if they wanted a richer exploration of participants' experiences in professional learning, and if they wanted to learn more about how professional development impacts student learning, they may need to ask different questions and ask questions in different ways. They learned that that the quality of the questions has a significant impact on the data analysis process.

Dimgba and Robinson also took pride in the fact that they led teachers in a data analysis process. Rather than have someone at central office analyze the data and tell teachers how to make sense of it, policy board members took on the task themselves, taking ownership of the data and constructing meaning from it to inform future programs.

FUTURE EVALUATION

The feedback from policy board participants was positive. Although some first expressed a lack of confidence with this new data analysis process, they enjoyed collaborating and gaining a new perspective on how colleagues in buildings across the district were experiencing professional learning.

"It was interesting and valuable to analyze the professional development survey questions to determine which questions did not produce meaningful data in order to edit, remove, or create new questions," one policy board member said.

Another board member added, "It was very interesting to analyze the data and see how people felt about professional development and be able to see the patterns in their feedback."

> **"It was interesting and valuable to analyze the professional development survey questions to determine which questions did not produce meaningful data in order to edit, remove, or create new questions,"** one policy board member said.

The Greece Professional Learning Center will continue to engage its policy board in evaluating professional learning and use a similar collaborative process to evaluate other types of professional learning, such as conferences and individualized job-embedded learning (i.e. peer coaching). The center has also shared its process at a statewide level to empower other Teacher Centers to analyze their data.

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text, and, as a result, this principal found himself having to lead his faculty in implementing several concurrent initiatives, some already in place and others just beginning. Response to intervention, Reading First, a partnership with a state university, and local district programs were just a few of the many initiatives needing to be implemented.

Leaders took advantage of the response to intervention model to build teacher community and professional accountability for student learning. Another initiative also stood out as especially noteworthy. The partnership with a state university allowed teachers at the school to attend graduate school with no tuition cost. The Teacher Leadership for School Improvement program at the University of Florida is an online graduate program for practicing teachers and administrators.

The program's courses included work focused on the dynamics of change. The principal said this involvement had a marked impact on his decisions, and other participants agreed that the communal involvement resulted in frequent use of program learning in school and team decisions. Five teachers and coaches participated. The shared professional learning by this group enabled stronger and quicker adoption of shared vision than perhaps could have occurred otherwise. It also created a model for continuous learning. The principal wasn't merely advocating for professional learning for teachers. He was participating, too.

LEARN HOW TO CHANGE

While it was clear in the study that change was a whole-school effort, it would not have happened without the leadership of the principal. His leadership actions pushed teachers harder, raised pedagogical expectations, and illuminated new possibilities for teacher leadership.

If educators are serious about improving schools, they could learn a lot from the work of principals like this. Learning Forward's Leadership standard is exemplified in such work, and it provides an example of how to help new principals in high-needs schools enact meaningful change and cultivate an organization focused on learning — for students and teachers.

While leadership is certainly more than just a principal, the importance of the principal's actions for student learning is striking. The principal of this high-poverty school shows that what is necessary for real improvement is to not just go through the motions (Baldridge & Deal, 1983; Fink & Stoll, 2005) but rather focus on developing the capacity to actually learn how to change.

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Problem-solving protocol

Purpose: To coach a client about an identified issue.

Time: 30 to 45 minutes.

The sweeping changes facing teachers today require a carefully orchestrated plan for implementation that incorporates support for individual teachers, teams of teachers, whole faculties, and teachers across schools. Coaches are a vital part of the change team.

Part of the coach's role is to focus on change management support to address individual educators' challenges and the frustration, negativity, and resistance that often accompany change of any magnitude. The problem-solving protocol on p. 64 is one way for coaches to assist individuals or teams in dealing with problems or conflict that arise as a natural part of the change process.

Coaching Matters, by Joellen Killion, Cindy Harrison, Chris Bryan, and Heather Clifton, reveals how coaching can make a difference. Each chapter describes an element of what research and the authors' experiences show it takes to make coaching effective. This tool is one of many that supplement the content of the book.
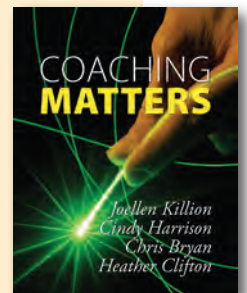
Buy the book at **http://store.learningforward.org.** The book is available for $45 for nonmembers, $36 for members. *Learning Forward, 2012*

	STEPS	QUESTIONS	RESPONSES
1	STATE THE PROBLEM.	What is the problem you want to solve?	
2	SET CONDITIONS FOR A SOLUTION.	If this problem were solved, how would you feel?	
		What are the top three to five criteria for an appropriate solution?	
3	PROPOSE SOLUTIONS.	What solutions might meet the interests of all parties?	
4	CHECK PROPOSED SOLUTIONS AGAINST CRITERIA.	How does each of these proposed solutions meet your established criteria?	
5	SELECT SOLUTION.	Which solution seems to meet the most criteria?	
		How will others respond to this solution?	
		What will you do to make this work?	
6	ACT.	How will you let others know what you are doing, if necessary?	
7	REVISIT.	How is it going?	
		What adjustments have you had to make along the way?	

Source: Killion, J., Harrison, C., Bryan, C., & Clifton, H. (2012). *Coaching matters.* Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Professional learning's spillover effect is real — and a real opportunity for school and system leaders

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

The benefits of teacher collaboration within and across schools are well-known. Researchers of this study provide empirical evidence about the benefits of teacher interaction as a mechanism to diffuse the effects of professional development (the term used throughout this study) to improve instructional practices.

Study description

This study examined the knowledge flow and spillover effects of teachers' professional development on their peers' instructional practices in writing across multiple disciplines. The current study used data from three school years, 2007-10, which were part of a larger longitudinal evaluation study of the National Writing Project's school partnership.

In the larger study, data were derived from teachers, who had limited or no prior experience with Local Writing Project sites, in 39 middle schools serving 7th- and 8th-grade students. The schools were randomly

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At a glance

This study provides empirical evidence that effective professional development has a positive significant impact on instructional practices not only for those who directly experience professional development, but also for colleagues who receive help and support from those who have participated directly and thus gained expertise.

THE STUDY

Sun, M., Penuel, W.R., Frank, K.A., Gallagher, H.R., & Youngs, P. (2013, April). Shaping professional development to promote the diffusion of instructional expertise among teachers. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 35*(3), 344-369.

assigned to partnership (treatment) or delayed partnership (control) cohorts.

Teachers across subject areas in 20 partnership schools participated in customized professional development provided by their Local Writing Project over two years. Nineteen schools, with features comparable in school contexts and teacher characteristics to the control schools, became delayed partnership schools and agreed to defer schoolwide professional development in writing for the subsequent two years except for state or district requirements.

Researchers, building on prior studies of peer effects, impact of professional development, social networks, and knowledge diffusion, studied the effects of professional development on peers' instructional practice.

Few studies have examined the spillover effect of high-quality professional development in content areas and on peer instructional practices. Spillover effect is defined as

"the effects of school-based professional development on instructional practices above and beyond the direct effects on teachers who participated in professional development" (p. 345).

Through interactions with colleagues who participate in effective professional development, teachers who do not participate directly benefit and consequently change their instructional practices.

Questions and hypotheses

Researchers posed two questions and corresponding hypotheses:

"1. How do the duration, content foci, and learning strategies of professional development affect the number of colleagues a teacher helps with teaching writing? …

"Hypothesis 1: Teachers are more likely to provide help with writing instruction if they participated in high-quality professional development. …

"2. How do teachers' changes in their instructional practices result

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

So how do we use this study to influence our practice? This study provides empirical evidence of the spillover effect and focused on specific attributes of effective professional learning.

When planning, implementing, and evaluating professional learning, leaders must **use research-based features**, including the three features examined in this study. These features, as well as additional ones drawn from a consensus of research and evidence-based practice, are delineated in the Standards for Professional Learning and guide the design and continuous assessment and evaluation for effective implementation.

With evidence that spillover effect is nearly equal to the effects of direct participation, leaders within schools and those within school systems must leverage this information to **distribute expertise among staff** by thoughtfully selecting and purposely building the capacity of staff within the school to increase the diffusion of expertise. Schools may benefit from multiple experts rather than a single expert such as an instructional coach.

Leveraging the spillover effect may mean that existing content experts within the school may need to **develop more capacity to collaborate** with colleagues or that leaders should **develop stronger content expertise** in teachers who have strong relationship and collaboration skills.

For the kind of interactions that produce the spillover effects described in this study to occur, state, district, and school leaders must **adjust school day schedules and school year calendars to provide time for collaboration** about content-specific instruction.

Teacher collaboration about instruction, particularly writing instruction as a tool for learning in all disciplines, has the potential to lead to increased student success in all discipline areas in which teachers integrate writing for multiple purposes.

However, the ultimate outcome of improved student learning is not magic. It requires that all teachers commit to developing and sharing expertise widely across the school. In such a culture of growth and development and collective responsibility, all students will thrive.

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from interacting with colleagues who had gained expertise from their prior professional development? …

"Hypothesis 2: The expertise that teachers gain from participation in professional development will spread to colleagues through the provision of help and thus change colleagues' instructional practices" (pp. 347-348).

Methodology

The study's methodology included three annual surveys of certified staff in each school in the spring semester of Year 1 (baseline year), Year 2 (first year of professional development), and Year 3 (second year of professional development), with an average response rate above 90% across all three years and all schools.

Standard deviations for school contexts, including student achievement as defined by meeting Adequate Yearly Progress, and teacher characteristics across partnership and delayed partnership schools were comparable.

Analysis

Researchers employed separate statistical analyses with mathematical modeling to examine the relationship between dependent and independent variables at the teacher level in the partnership and delayed partnership schools to isolate effects since there were wide variations in professional development across partnership schools and some delayed partnership schools experienced professional development with similar features to those in the partnership schools.

Dependent variables included:
- Number of teacher colleagues helped with writing in Year 3;
- Writing instruction in Year 3 as measured by teachers' self-report of frequency of use of research-based instructional practices in writing;
- Breadth of purposes of student writing; and
- Frequency of student engagement in writing-related activities.

Independent variables included these features of research-based professional development:
- Duration of professional development in Year 3;
- Breadth of content focus on knowledge, skills, and strategies in writing instruction;
- Breadth of active learning strategies used in professional development; and
- Exposure to expertise of colleagues who participated in Year 2 professional development.

Researchers developed multiple mathematical measures to analyze effects. One measure was based on the assumption that change in the number of colleagues helped between Years 2 and 3 was a result of expertise the helping teacher gained from professional development in Year 3.

A second measure calculated how professional development and collegial interactions shaped instructional practices. This measure, based on social network influence, measured how the knowledge and strategies participants in Year 2 professional development spread to peers as determined by the changes in instructional practices of the peers.

Results

Key findings of this study include:
- Teachers who participated in professional development of greater duration, with broader range of

Continued on p. 68

A strong, trusting community is an important element of a school safety plan

Tressie Armstrong is a shining star, a model for how to build a strong, trusting school community that can and will do the right thing should the worst thing imaginable occur. When bad things happen, it is too late to talk. Armstrong started early.

— *Susan Scott*

By Tressie Armstrong

On Oct. 8, 2010, Kelly Elementary School in Carlsbad, Calif., where I am principal, was put to the test. A lone gunman jumped the playground fence and began firing a handgun into a crowd of 250 1st, 2nd, and 3rd graders at lunch recess. Two students were injured.

This experience challenged relationships within the school community. From the first phone calls home to injured students' parents, to asking parents to wait calmly in the nearby park, to weathering the media onslaught, to holding a special celebration the following Monday to reclaim the campus, the school community relied on these relationships to ensure that our response and recovery could move us forward.

As Susan Scott says in *Fierce Conversations* (2002), "Our lives succeed or fail gradually, then suddenly, one conversation at a time. While no single conversation is guaranteed to change the trajectory of a career, a

business, a marriage, or a life, any single conversation can." In Scott's work, I found what would prove pivotal for my whole outlook on life, my work with children, and my focus on building strong, honest, lasting relationships that are trusting and can withstand adversity.

The close-knit Kelly community is known for respectful interactions and dialogue, for being an open and welcoming school that values and encourages parental involvement and volunteerism in the classroom, and for expecting positive relationships. Our work is important: We are building future leaders and strong community members, and each day we are loving little children. This reputation stems largely from the belief we share with Scott that "the conversation *is* the relationship." This influences how we interact with each other and how we expect the children to interact with each other.

During this very intense time, we had to rely on relationships built ahead of time, not only with each other, but also with first responders and district

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leaders. We were in this together, standing side by side with each other to move through the turmoil. While we were in lockdown, one father, waiting in the neighboring park to receive updates as the situation unfolded, texted me to ask, "I know you have my son safe. How can I help YOU?" I asked him to begin organizing people in the park and help calm the parents waiting there.

Tressie Armstrong

As parents waited in the park and we began to bring the children out of the school, one of the local police officers said, "Watch, this is where chaos will begin." The children were guided out, and one student began to break from the line to go to her mother. The mom put her hands out towards her daughter and said to her, "No, do the right thing and stay with your class." The parents remained calm and trusting, they gathered over the weekend in their neighborhoods to support each other, and they were all on board when, after

much thought about next steps, we decided to hold a community gathering at the school on the following Monday, called "Celebration of a Miracle," to reclaim our school.

That Monday, after handling some morning business with staff, we celebrated. The community brought balloons, tied ribbons all over the school fences, prepared gift baskets for those who played a large part in protecting the community during the situation, invited the mayor and other local officials, and brought the children back to Kelly Elementary School.

Since then, we've been through a lot — the trial and sentencing of the gunman, as well as the recovery of the emotional, physical, and mental sense of well-being for the entire community — and we are stronger than ever. We

are a close-knit community that stood together through a very traumatic experience, and our relationships are lifelong and stronger than ever.

Our reality shifted in a very large way in October 2010, but we were able to not only maintain our culture and community, but also thrive for the well-being of the children. One student, after leaving Kelly and moving on to middle school, was asked by a new peer, "Didn't you attend the school where you had the shooting?" The student responded, "No, I attended the school where we had the miracle."

Our leadership imperative in education is to continue to find ways to shift from crisis to opportunities to build community and improve student learning. While every effective comprehensive school safety plan

includes prevention, preparation, response, and recovery, there needs to be a fifth component: relationships. We must build trusting and strong relationships before any traumatic experience, large or small, occurs. It is only through healthy interactions with one other that we will come out stronger on the other side, as we have done at Kelly Elementary School.

REFERENCE

Scott, S. (2002). *Fierce conversations: Achieving success at work & in life, one conversation at a time.* New York, NY: Penguin.

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Tressie Armstrong (tarmstrong@ carlsbadusd.net) is principal of Kelly Elementary School, Carlsbad, Calif. ■

lessons from research JOELLEN KILLION

content foci on writing instruction and with a larger number of active learning strategies, were more likely to provide help to colleagues with teaching writing. They developed more expertise and confidence in practice and became go-to experts for peers and used the active learning strategies to help peers.

- Peers' interactions with colleagues who experienced intensive professional development in Year 2 had a significantly positive effect on their own instructional practices in writing in Year 3 in both treatment and control schools. Through collegial interactions, expertise spread among teachers.
- The effect of exposure to colleagues' breadth of writing instruction content on writing instructional practices nearly equals the effect of direct exposure to the breadth of content in writing instruction on writing instructional practices, signaling a noteworthy finding for the design and spillover effect

of professional development. Improvements in instructional practices of teachers who did not participate in professional development increased almost as much as those of teachers who participated directly in professional development.

Limitations

Researchers note a number of limitations. A single data set — the teacher survey — was used for the study. The unit of randomization in the longitudinal study whose data were used for this study is the school, yet the unit of analysis in this study is the individual teacher.

Only three features of professional development were analyzed: duration, content area focus, and active learning. Other features not analyzed might affect the positive spillover effects.

The study focused on teachers across multiple disciplines rather than subgroups of teachers. It is possible English language arts teachers may be impacted differently than teachers

of other disciplines. Researchers acknowledge potential measurement errors.

Finally, this study does not examine the impact of changes in instructional practices on student achievement. The authors advocate that future research addresses these limitations.

Implications

Researchers cite a number of policy implications that emerge from this study, including the design of professional development. Schoolwide instructional improvement results from professional development with extended duration, content focus, and active learning strategies and intentionally distributing teachers with expertise in content, pedagogy, and collaboration within the school.

Incorporating into professional development strategies to increase teacher collaboration to extend the diffusion of expertise may build the capacity of teachers to serve as internal experts who are available to provide assistance to their colleagues. ■

learning forward.org

http://learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/annual-conference-highlights

http://community.learningforward.org/home

Catch the highlights from the 2013 Annual Conference in Dallas. Videos of keynote speeches and thought leader lectures include **Michael Fullan** on maximizing impact, **Linda Darling-Hammond** on teacher evaluation done right, and **Gwendolyn Webb-Hasan** on culturally responsive teaching. Or participate in post-conference webinars, e-learning programs, and ongoing discussions with session presenters and fellow attendees in the Learning Exchange.

Fullan   **Darling-Hammond**   **Webb-Hasan**

WEBINAR ARCHIVES

http://learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars

All of Learning Forward's fall 2013 webinars are now available in the archives. Webinar topics and facilitators include:

- Implementing Change Through Learning, Shirley Hord and James Roussin;
- Developing and Assessing Teaching Effectiveness, Linda Darling-Hammond;
- Improving Leadership and Classroom Practices, Sonia Gleason and Wendy Sauer;
- Using Data for Continuous School Improvement, Victoria Bernhardt; and
- Professional Learning Through Virtual Communities, Sonja Hollins-Alexander.

Check this page also for the spring 2014 webinar schedule.

TRANSFORM PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

http://learningforward.org/publications/transform/2013/11/technology-in-professional-learning

The inaugural issue of Learning Forward's new bimonthly publication takes a look at leveraging technology in professional learning. Teacher leader Beth Sanders discusses the importance of empowering teachers to use technology to improve learning. For Principal Sharon Johnson, tracking and reporting tools became a game changer by improving efficiency and aligning goals. Former system leader Sonja Hollins-Alexander turned budget and staff cuts into an opportunity to do more with less by creating virtual learning communities. The featured tool in this issue outlines the recommended steps for acquiring and using technology to make savvy decisions about professional learning investments.

STAFF AGREEMENTS

http://bit.ly/1daoS0C
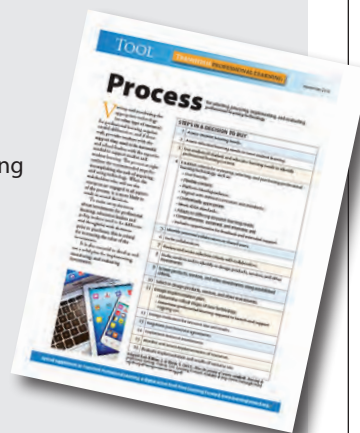
Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh talks about how to create a positive work culture:

"Creating a positive working culture isn't easy. It is only when staff members understand the power of such a culture that they will make the effort to play their roles in establishing it. At Learning Forward, we have a long history of developing, reviewing, modifying, and using staff agreements to maintain the culture we value. Our agreements describe how we want to be treated and how we are expected to treat others. Our goal is an organizational culture that honors the expertise and needs of individuals while supporting a shared purpose. We strive for a working environment that people view as productive, supportive, fun, and accountable."

abstracts

What it takes to succeed.

This issue of *JSD* examines schools and school systems in a range of contexts and circumstances that have made great strides in taking student learning to higher levels. While each success story is unique, some common themes emerge.

Aim higher:
Lofty goals and an aligned system keep a high performer on top.
By David P. McCommons

High student achievement in Fox Chapel Area School District in Pennsylvania demonstrates that, for systemic change to take effect, three conditions are necessary: professional learning for teachers and administrators; central office leading by example; and leaders monitoring to ensure sustainability.

Ontario district embraces an evolving approach to learning.
By Denese Belchetz and Kathy Witherow

The York Region District School Board is recognized as a high-performing district in Ontario, Canada. Visitors from around the world have come to observe the teaching, learning, and leadership practices underway in its schools and classrooms. Through its commitment to intentional capacity building at all levels, the district cultivates a culture of collaboration and continuous learning that focuses on improved student achievement and well-being.

High-achieving schools put equity front and center.
By Sonia Caus Gleason and Nancy Gerzon

How does professional learning look and feel in high-poverty schools where every student makes at least one year's worth of progress every year? The authors studied four public schools with significant free-lunch eligible populations whose achievement data outperformed most schools and narrowed the achievement gap for multiple student groups over time. While the four schools differed from one another, they shared unique ways of linking equity and professional learning.

Growing leaders from within:
School forms a tight-knit learning community to tackle literacy.
By ReLeah Cossett Lent and Marsha McCracken Voigt

There are two types of school leadership initiatives. One gives existing leaders increasing leadership responsibilities. The other grows leaders from teachers who, at first, may not appear to be leaders at all. Barrington High School in Illinois chose the second type of initiative, igniting a literacy team that fostered teacher autonomy, focused on deep learning, and built a community of practice.

Experts in the classroom:
Fellows program connects teacher learning to student outcomes.
By Kate Pett, David Strahan, and Carlye Gates

Through teacher-directed action research, the Asheville (N.C.) City Schools Foundation Innovation Fellows program has enhanced grade-level proficiency in reading, improved college test scores, increased student engagement, integrated the use of technology into the classroom, and incorporated global education into the elementary-level curriculum.

'Failure is not an option':
Struggling high school uses standards to guide reform.
By Sherry Lambertson

In 2010, Grant (Mich.) High School was in the bottom 5% of schools in the state based on student achievement. Using Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning as a guide, school leaders designed a plan to change the culture from isolation to collaboration, build leadership, shift data use, and design and implement learning to develop new skills. As a result, Grant moved up to the 92nd percentile of Michigan schools in 2012-13 and the school culture has changed from a focus on teaching content to a focus on student learning.

United we learn:
Team effort builds a path to equity and alignment.
By Jill Kind

Ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality, rigorous instruction requires a collaborative approach between teachers and administrators. At Robbinsdale Cooper High School in New Hope, Minn., this work also required the development of a group of teacher leaders who could plan, facilitate, and evaluate the professional learning needed to support the work.

Nurture hidden talents:
Transform school culture into one that values teacher expertise.
By Diane P. Zimmerman

A three-ring binder full of student writing stands as evidence of an exemplary 34-year teaching career — and how teacher expertise often stays hidden and underused. Many school cultures are not conducive to dialogue that supports displays of teacher talent. Striving for excellence by developing and capitalizing on talent ought to be an inherent goal for all schools. School leaders need to pay attention to their most valuable asset: the cognitive capital of teachers.

features

A vivid illustration of leadership:
Principal's actions propel struggling school's turnaround.
By Stephanie Dodman

Not just any type of principal leadership will suffice for schools striving to build the instructional capacity necessary for student achievement. Leadership that simultaneously leads a school forward while distributing power throughout the faculty is considered the path to creating not only a successful school as measured by achievement but also a learning organization. At a high-needs, high-poverty school that made remarkable improvements in student achievement, the relationship between leadership, classroom teaching, and learning is illustrated in vivid color when a first-year principal turns the school into an organization that values learning and embraces change.

District dives into data to improve feedback.
By Sheila B. Robinson and Marguerite G. Dimgba

The Greece (N.Y.) Central School District's Professional Learning Center works to ensure all district employees have access to high-quality professional learning that ultimately advances student achievement. An important yet challenging part of the center's work is evaluation. To meet the challenge, the center created a collaborative process using a web-based tool to examine how to collect and use data for program improvement. By analyzing participant feedback, a group of educators and community members gained an understanding of how best to gather feedback to make informed decisions about future professional learning and how feedback data serve different audiences.

coming up

in April 2014
JSD:

**THE FUTURE
OF LEARNING**

INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

columns

Lessons from research:
Professional learning's spillover effect is real — and a real opportunity for school and system leaders.
By Joellen Killion

School and system leaders can leverage the spillover effect of effective professional learning to distribute expertise among staff.

Collaborative culture:
A strong, trusting community is an important element of a school safety plan.
By Susan Scott and Tressie Armstrong

An elementary school community is put to the test when a gunman enters the playground.

From the director:
Learning is the 'secret sauce' for any high-performing organization.
By Stephanie Hirsh

A learning culture is life or death for transforming school systems.

Writing for JSD

- Themes for the 2014 publication year are posted at **www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure (**christy.colclasure@learningforward.org**).

- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at **www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines.**

@ learning forward

HOW CAN LEARNING FORWARD HELP *YOU*?

Learning Forward is looking for feedback on how best to help members achieve their goals.

Offering you what you need to improve: Learning Forward wants to advance members' careers and help solve your problems of practice. *What input can you offer to ensure we stay on the right track?*

Documenting impact of professional learning: "Where's the research documenting the link between professional learning and student results?" This question is on everyone's mind. *How can Learning Forward gather stories and research that help us build a definitive link?*

Leveraging technology to advance professional learning: The iPD strand at the conference and in our ongoing work demonstrates Learning Forward's desire to expose members to new technologies that support learning. *How can Learning Forward continue to support the application of emerging technologies?*

Meeting your learning priorities: Learning Forward is committed to meeting your needs for professional learning throughout the year. *How can Learning Forward best support your year-round continuous learning through a range of in-person and virtual products and services?*

Keeping you on the cutting edge: Learning Forward is reinventing its publications mix to better serve you. *What topics and formats are most important to serve your needs now and into the future?*

The changing value of membership: Change seems to be happening at an increasing rate, and what you value most from an association is likely changing as well. *What membership benefits and opportunities are most important to you today?*

Going global: Learning Forward seeks to serve educators worldwide. However, the majority of members are in North America. *How can Learning Forward best position itself internationally?*

Impacting federal and state policies: Learning Forward contends that good policy affects better practice. *What should be key elements of Learning Forward's policy agenda?*

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book club

FOCUS ON TEACHING
Using Video for High-Impact Instruction
By Jim Knight

Just as professional athletes improve their performance by watching videos of themselves and others in action, educators can do the same. Jim Knight presents a clear process for using video to promote professional growth and teacher effectiveness.

With online clips of educators modeling and discussing how they use videos for professional learning, this book shows how videos can help educators:

- Maximize the effectiveness of instructional coaching, professional learning communities, and authentic teacher evaluation;
- Encourage self-coaching and peer-coaching; and
- Develop a shared understanding of what quality teaching really looks like.

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 March 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call 800-727-7288 or email office@learningforward.org.
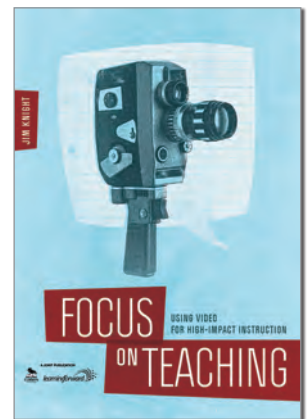
Collaboration and commitment
turn belief into innovative solutions

I believe in the power of professional learning. But belief, by itself, is not enough. To be effective, professional learning must also be driven by commitment, dedication, and deliberate action. In the state of Missouri, that means, "Show me, please!"

The Central Regional Professional Development Center in Missouri, where I serve as director, partners with 73 districts in the region to help implement high-quality professional learning. We have many district success stories, but I'd like to showcase one that demonstrates not only belief, but also the innovation and dedication it takes to rise to the top.

The center's long-term partnership with Grain Valley R-V School District, a suburban district serving 3,845 students east of Kansas City, grew its roots a few years ago at Learning Forward's conference in Washington, D.C. At dinner one night, assistant superintendent Bryan McDonald and I were discussing the district's goal of implementing a K-12 focus on balanced literacy. The district had already begun professional development efforts around Reading Workshop, and McDonald wanted to target literacy's companion, Writing Workshop. His teachers, he said, were understandably hesitant.

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Julie Blaine is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

on board
JULIE BLAINE

As McDonald talked, I was riveted by his story. I know all too well that implementing a districtwide initiative is bigger than difficult, but *sustaining* an initiative can be a real snag. It was at this moment my idea for a collaborative districtwide writing design team took root.

McDonald and I met often in the next few months to create an innovative design team known as Writers' Implementation Network. We developed an application process for selecting top candidates that included a writing sample describing why they should be selected as a team member. Today, 12 teacher leaders from across the district meet regularly to collaboratively design and implement model writing classrooms. Writers' Implementation Network leaders assist colleagues in developing common writing prompts and scoring guides, designing lessons with common objectives, and, most importantly, examining and scoring student work. These master teachers demonstrate effective writing strategies in classrooms with students and apprentice all district English language arts teachers.

Because of the team's success in implementing and supporting the districtwide Writing Workshop initiative, district scores on the Missouri assessment for writing continue to increase. To add to their success story, the Grain Valley Writers' Implementation Network team was also selected to showcase the district's professional development design at the 2013 Learning Forward Summer Conference.

It's true — we have to do more than just believe to get outstanding results. I see the Standards for Professional Learning at work in Grain Valley. The term "job-embedded" has real meaning for Writers' Implementation Network. I love facilitating this group monthly through discussing professional journals, troubleshooting implementation snags, examining student work, and diving into data.

Writers' Implementation Network confirms for me that when teachers have time to collaborate, belief lends way to innovative solutions for student success. Writers' Implementation Network leaders are dedicated learners alongside district writing colleagues and their students. The difficult, authentic work of Writing Workshop across the district is now full of professional commitment and deliberate actions. I am proud to work beside them. ■

DIGITAL RESOURCE LIBRARY FOR EDUCATORS

The Digital Opportunity Consortium, National Education Association, New Hampshire IHE Network, and EBSCO have formed the Habit of Mind partnership to equip future and current educators with resources to use high-quality research resources to improve learning and practice. Learning Forward members can have free access to this database through much of 2014.

Access the resources at **www.digitalopportunityforall.org/library.html** (case-sensitive password = EBSCO).

Apply for foundation grants

The Learning Forward Foundation is accepting applications for grants and scholarships that offer educators opportunities to develop their expertise in leading professional learning within their schools and districts and to engage them in the broader Learning Forward community for ongoing professional collaboration and support. Here are the grants and scholarships available.

Learning Forward Foundation Affiliate Grant provides a Learning Forward affiliate the opportunity to further its work within its respective state, region, or province.

Application deadline is April 15. For more information, visit **http://learningforward.org/foundation/scholarships-and-grants.**

The Principal as Leader of Professional Learning supports the accelerating growth of a principal who has successfully led an underachieving school for two years.

Learning Forward Foundation Team Grant supports teams in developing a professional learning project that advances Learning Forward's purpose.

Chidley Fund Academy Scholarships develop leadership in professional learning by providing two scholarships annually for tuition to participate in the Learning Forward Academy.

Patsy Hochman Academy Scholarship develops leadership in professional learning by providing a scholarship annually for a recipient to participate in the Learning Forward Academy.

LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

Feb. 15: Deadline to submit articles for the October 2014 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Evolving role of central office.

March 1: Apply to join the first all-Canadian cohort of the Learning Forward Academy.

March 15: Apply to join the next cohort of Learning School Alliance schools.

March 15: Apply to join Academy Class of 2016.

April 15: Deadline to submit articles for the December 2014 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Teacher evaluation.

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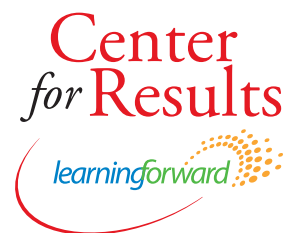
Learning is the 'secret sauce' for any high-performing organization

In December, the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) released its latest report on the countries that achieve at the highest levels in education. As expected, the news about the performance of U.S. education systems was rather glum.

If the U.S. had demonstrated a sudden leap in the rankings, we might have grounds for a new theory of action — adopt standards and everything

instantly improves. But we all know that is just not the case. We know it takes years to change trend lines and see results from substantive change efforts.

Educators over the last several years have become enamored with studying the lessons of high-performing schools, school systems, and organizations. We read the OECD reports, we look at the

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winners of Broad prizes, we look at the top scorers in National Assessment of Educational Progress. We're interested in understanding how it is that educators manage to make a difference, address their challenges, and achieve their goals. What do we hope to see? A colleague of mine says we are hunting for the "secret sauce."

So here's my answer to what the secret sauce is — and if it comes as a surprise, you haven't been paying attention. The secret sauce is learning. Systems must recognize that as long as we are not achieving our goals, we have more to learn. And I have no doubt that a learning culture is common to each of the highest-performing systems or any example of a school that achieves at high levels over the long term.

I recently read about the importance of a learning culture in organizations beyond education. As Josh Bersin of Deloitte Consulting writes, " 'Learning Culture' is what enables BP, Toyota, Microsoft, or IBM to identify the problems in their products and fix them quickly. It is what enables Cisco and Google and Apple to 'out-innovate' their competitors. It is what enables Wal-Mart, UPS, and Dell to drive down costs and maintain service quality. It is what enables ING Direct, Zappos, and Starbucks to grow at rates 10 to 100 times their competitors. And it is what prevented Digital Equipment Company, Tandem, Apollo Computer, Silicon Graphics, and hundreds of other

defunct companies from embracing changes in their markets and evolving their products. This topic is important: It means life or death for many organizations" (Bersin, 2010).

I agree — learning is life or death for transforming school systems. Yet we are continually challenged to justify our professional learning investments. Detractors hand us studies that report a particular professional learning effort failed to change practice or student outcomes. And I frequently and openly advocate for more rigorous strategies and commitments to document the impact of professional learning.

Yet even lacking solid impact evidence from most professional learning investments, I'll make a confident bet. I challenge all readers to find one example of a high-performing organization that doesn't apply the secret sauce of high-quality professional learning to its recipe for success. If you can find that system, I will take you out for dinner at a restaurant of your choosing.

What secret sauce will you bring to your next planning agenda? And how will you help Learning Forward's quest to highlight the learning practices that are part of every success story?

REFERENCE

Bersin, J. (2010, June 14). How to build a high-impact learning culture [Web log post]. Available at www. bersin.com/blog/post/How-to-Build-a-High-Impact-Learning-Culture.aspx. ■

Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners

The PLC Pack

If expanding and refining teacher repertoires of strategies for working with diverse learners is a priority for you, the **Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners PLC Pack** is just what you need.

This PLC pack includes multiple copies of *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners*, a copy of the 234-page *Meeting the Needs of Diverse Learners Facilitator's Handbook*, and other resources such as visual tools and sort cards that make planning professional learning easy!

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This book has the why and the how to of dozens of methods for meeting the challenges of at-risk, struggling, special needs, gifted and talented, and English Language Learners all in one easy-to-use reference."
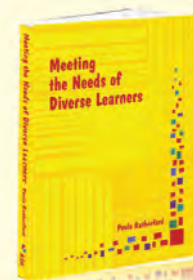
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