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JSD
The Learning Forward Journal

theme THE 3 R'S OF SUMMER: READ, REFLECT, RENEW

JUNE 2014, VOLUME 35, NO. 3

The pause that refreshes

I recently learned about a "20-20-20" rule for reducing eyestrain caused by spending too much time in front of a computer screen: Every 20 minutes, take 20 seconds to look at a point at least 20 feet away. As someone who buries my nose in a laptop for hours at a time, I found this in some ways very reasonable and simple, and in other ways ridiculous. I've barely dug in deep to some good writing after 20 minutes. Who wants to stop then?

However, as I practice this exercise, I notice an added benefit. When the timer goes off and I look into the mid-distance, something is happening in my brain. When I pause, I consider what I'm doing in new ways. I return to the information in front of me with a different perspective.

The 20-20-20 exercise is one I'd like to adapt as we think about what our brains need to learn. When we barrel ahead bringing in new information, whether it's with other adults, challenging content, new teaching strategies, or a new software program, we're putting a lot of strain on our brains. If we don't take a moment to look up, take a deep breath, and consider where new information fits in with what we know already, we risk losing all sense of how to use that new information to grow.

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This notion aligns with research that stresses the importance of reflection in learning, not to mention the other elements of supporting learning in ways that lead to changed practice, such as ongoing follow-up, coaching, and opportunities for practice.

Taking time to pause and reflect isn't automatic for educators. There are too many demands during the day and too much other ground to cover during other times. Yet it's too important to skip. These are minutes where learners make meaning of what they've heard.

For summer, when some of the burdens on educators are a bit lighter, let's think about our own 20-20-20 rules for supporting learning. For some, it could be as simple as this: For every 20 minutes of formal learning, build in 20 minutes of follow-up and 20 minutes of reflection and analysis. Others might take a different tack: Every 20 minutes of reading is best supported by 20 minutes of discussion and 20 seconds of tweeting. Perhaps learning communities can adapt their own 20-20-20 rule to balance new information with reflection and analysis.

In addition to considering how to plan reflection time, let's also use summer to take a deep breath. On page 8, where Learning Forward Director of Learning Carol François writes about using summer for learning, we include questions to guide your learning plan.

A key step in looking ahead is looking back. What worked this year? In your learning, what resonates most loudly today? Where do you need to dig deeper to compound your understanding for next year's challenges? And, most important, how can you build in a reflection step for each new learning challenge you encounter next year? ■

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essentials

PARTNERSHIPS
**Teachers Unions
and Management Partnerships:
How Working Together
Improves Student Achievement**
Center for American Progress, 2014

This research sheds light on the impact that union-management partnerships and teacher collaboration can have on student performance. To create and support more long-term partnership arrangements in U.S. school districts, policymakers and educators should provide incentives and support for districts to establish union-management partnerships, build learning networks across districts, and support research on efforts that have produced results.
http://bit.ly/QzXm3b

FUTURE OF TEACHING
**Teaching Stars:
Transforming the Education Profession**
The New Zealand Initiative, 2014

This is the third report from the New Zealand Initiative, a public policy think tank, investigating the main issues in international attempts to develop effective teaching, raise student achievement, and foster a top-performing teaching profession. Policy recommendations include:
- Create a compelling and aspirational career structure;
- Pay on performance, not time served;
- Make entry to teaching selective and post-graduate;
- Improve teacher training;
- Create alternative routes into teaching; and
- Identify future leaders early and prepare them better.

http://bit.ly/OaY0mx
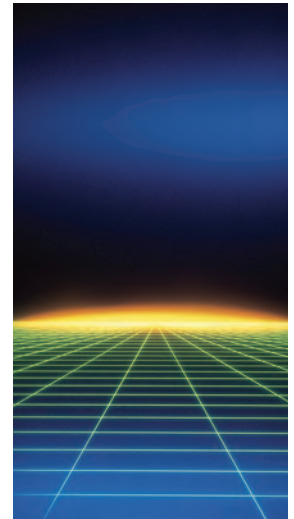
DATA USE
Five Steps for Structuring Data-Informed Conversations and Action in Education
U.S. Department of Education, 2013

This facilitation guide shows how to apply data to direct strategic action. Using guiding questions, suggested activities, and activity forms, the guide provides a framework and the tools and vocabulary needed to support data-informed conversations and action. It walks users through five key steps in using data for decision making and strategic action: setting the stage, examining the data, understanding the findings, developing an action plan, and monitoring progress and measuring success.
http://1.usa.gov/1eX34bd

SCHOOL LEADERS
Great Principals: Developing Every Teacher
America Achieves and New Leaders

This series of videos showcases great school leadership and its impact on teaching. At Merrill Middle School in Denver, Colo., school leaders implemented a practice in which educators observe each other's lessons in learning labs, then offer direct feedback. Other videos feature schools helping teachers excel through goal setting, coaching, mentoring, and more. Resources include school profiles, case studies, and a policy guide with recommendations on how to recruit, support, and retain effective school leaders.
http://bit.ly/1hhyC5D

CAREER PATHWAYS
Creating Sustainable Teacher Career Pathways: A 21st Century Imperative
National Network of State Teachers of the Year and Center for Educator Effectiveness, 2013

With half of the nation's teachers planning to retire over the next decade, researchers focus on identifying practices that make teaching attractive for a new generation. The authors examine what the teaching profession can learn from other licensed professions, education systems in other countries, and the business world. Their report summarizes how lessons learned from recent initiatives can be applied more systematically across the teaching profession to meet 21st-century career expectations.
http://bit.ly/1gNry1s

PATH TO IMPLEMENTATION
Remodeling Literacy Learning Together: Paths to Standards Implementation
National Center for Literacy Education, 2014

A survey of more than 3,000 teachers shows that teachers feel ill-prepared to help students achieve the Common Core State Standards in literacy. While they view working with peers as the most valued support, time for working together in schools is decreasing. Teachers who report feeling the most comfortable are those working with others to analyze student work, design curriculum, and create assessments. The report recommends providing more time for educators to learn and plan together, encouraging teachers in designing and innovating, and including everyone who has a stake in strengthening teaching and learning.
http://bit.ly/QzXJuF

TIME FOR LEARNING
Making Time for Great Teaching
Grattan Institute, 2014

This report examines the timetables and budgets of six diverse schools across Australia to identify ways they can change their practices in order to free up time for teacher development. It recommends that schools make this time by reducing teacher presence at meetings and assemblies, extracurricular events, and professional development days that do not improve teaching.
http://bit.ly/QrUBS3

FILL YOUR SUMMER WITH LEARNING

By Carol François

The research is clear: Failing to fill summer months with meaningful mental stimulation can cause students to suffer stagnation at best and regression at worst. The same is true for adult learners.

If teachers fail to fill their summer months with challenging mental exercise, they, too, will return to school less able to function at their highest levels at the time their students need them at their best.

Professional learning leaders have a charge to advocate for and design high-quality summer learning options for the educators they serve. There are lots of interesting ways educators can continue learning over the summer. See the box at right for a list of ideas.

Educators can challenge themselves and their colleagues to try at least one of these ideas, then see how stimulated they remain over the summer months.

Learning Forward has many free reading options on its website tailored for teacher, school, and system leaders to keep educators current on latest research and trends.

Another option is to attend Learning Forward's Summer Institute July 17-20 in Chicago to learn with like-minded educators who see summer as their chance to learn, grow, and stretch. For more information, visit www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/summer-institute.

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Carol François (carol.françois@learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's director of learning.

WAYS TO KEEP ON LEARNING

1. Do an action research project.
2. Lead a book study.
3. Write assessments with a colleague.
4. Give presentations at conferences.
5. Do research on the Internet.
6. Maintain a professional portfolio.
7. Write an article about your work.
8. Read education journals, magazines, and books.
9. Attend a conference or summer institute.

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THE LEARNING STARTS HERE ▼

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• COACHING	22, 28, 42
• SYSTEM change	10, 16, 32, 38, 44
• DATA use	44

"You can't change who you are, but you can change what you have in your head, you can refresh what you're thinking about, you can put some fresh air in your brain."

— *Ernesto Bertarelli*

SUMMER LEARNING PLAN

Summer vacation isn't what it used to be. Many educators find that their so-called free time fills up so quickly that the time to renew and recharge is over almost before it begins. How will you create opportunities to refill your tank before school starts? Answer the questions at right to sketch out a plan of action for your learning time.

REFLECTING ON LAST YEAR

My most significant achievements this year:

How did my learning contribute to these achievements?

What was the role of collaboration with colleagues?

My most significant challenges this year:

What in my sphere of influence contributed to these challenges?

Who in my circle of colleagues was successful in this arena?

LOOKING AHEAD

How will I build on my success for next year?

What do I need to learn to do so?

How will I strengthen my knowledge and skills to address the challenges I faced this year?

Who can help me do so?

What new challenges do I anticipate for next year?

ACTION PLAN

Knowledge and skills I will develop:

Evidence that this is a smart focus for me this summer:

Learning that will support this growth:

Co-learners with whom I can work:

Resources I have/I need to do this:

How I will sustain this learning beyond the summer:

Evidence that will demonstrate growth:

> **Anyone or anything is a potential mentor. The mentee must take the initiative, tap into the source, and search for knowledge.**

> **Strong collaborators will continue to think of ways to help the weak team member. The best collaborators will try five or six ways to bring along a weak team member before going to a supervisor.**

WORKPLACE

By Sheri S. Williams and John W. Williams

In many schools and businesses today, the pressure to produce results is far greater than attention to employee learning. If continued learning impacts service for business customers and their communities, then what lessons can we learn from business to support and advocate for educator learning?

This article is a collection of lessons learned by an educator and a human resources professional over the course of separate careers in education and business. We share our individual perspectives and reflect on our experiences as a whole. We hope the lessons learned will be useful to those developing and supporting employee learning in business and education.

Our conversation raised important questions about what kinds of learning resources are the most relevant and useful in both environments. We wanted to identify lessons learned from business and education that could help improve outcomes, specifically how employees acquire the knowledge and skills to serve customers and communities in business and how educators acquire the knowledge and skills to support student achievement in schools. We found some common practices that could be used to a greater extent to sustain professional development in the school and workplace.

Lesson 1
MENTORING MATTERS IN SCHOOLS AND THE WORKPLACE.

A business perspective

Google "mentor and mentee in business," and you will instantly receive over 600,000 examples of how-to tips, road maps, programs, and agreements. With luck, one may ferret out some truth about successful mentoring. Here are two truths, buried in those 600,000 Google hits, that stand the test of time.

First, mentoring is the result of a persistent mentee. In fact, the mentoring process is by and large the responsibility of the mentee.

Most potential formal business mentors are already too busy to take on a mentoring responsibility. If asked, many say yes and then the process slowly unravels, with meetings cut short, rescheduled, then cancelled altogether.

What works is when a mentee identifies an informal mentor and then stops by the office to ask a question or

Respect at the individual level is paramount. Lack of respect is often the root cause of unhappy employees, not to mention grievances and complaints of discrimination.

The greatest pitfall for managers is to take personally the resistance to change.

Collaboration is essential in business.

WISDOM

WHAT EDUCATORS CAN LEARN FROM THE BUSINESS WORLD

get advice on a situation. (Note: The best times are before the day gets rolling or after others have gone home.) When turned away, mentees persist. They keep coming back, with a smile, curiosity, and a desire to tap the mentor's wisdom.

Jack Welch, former CEO of General Electric, describes the second of the two truths. He suggests *anyone or anything* is a potential mentor. The mentee must take the initiative, tap into the source, and search for knowledge (Welch, 2011).

An education perspective

This business lesson reinforces what educators have learned through in-depth examinations of mentoring and coaching support in school. A study of 116 instructional coaches in a large urban school district in the American Southwest explored factors in the mentoring relationship that impact change in educator practice (Williams, 2013). The study found that mentoring contributes in important ways to continuous educator growth and a focus on instructional improvement.

New teachers, looking for a nonthreatening, trusting, comfortable, and safe place to reflect on their practice, flock to coaches. Coaches, in turn, provide the mentoring needed to develop teacher knowledge and skills, stimulate personal reflection and clarification, and facilitate student understanding and connections (Petriglieri & DeRue, n.d.). When approached by mentees, coaches say they are more motivated to use what they have learned to deepen and accelerate teacher practice (Williams, 2013).

Lesson 2
COLLABORATION GETS RESULTS IN THE WORKPLACE AND IN SCHOOL.

A business perspective

Collaboration is essential in business. Human resource recruiters are good at detecting collaborators. During an interview, recruiters often probe for a candidate's commitment to teamwork and collaboration.

Through a series of questions, recruiters ask candidates to "think of a time when you were on a team. What was your role and the outcome of the team effort? If team members were not carrying their weight, what would you do?" To probe deeper, the recruiter says, "Let's say things get better, then a few days later, the weak behavior returns. What do you do?" Typically, the candidate will say, "I'd talk to them or have the team talk to them. If that didn't work, I would go to my supervisor." With the teamwork question, recruit-

ers find that weak collaborators typically give up and quickly hand off the problem to the supervisor.

Strong collaborators will continue to think of ways to help the weak team member. Each time the recruiter asks, "If that action didn't help, what do you do?" the candidate will offer a collaborative suggestion such as, "Do the work with the person; teach them to do the work; ask a trusted friend for advice on how to help them; get a team member they trust to help." The best collaborators will respond with five or six rounds of alternatives before going to a supervisor.

The most important collaboration in performing a job is safety-related. For example, a maintenance task to be performed by two or more people is reviewed before the work begins. The collaborative discussion includes how to do the job correctly, the skills and tools needed, the potential hazards, and the plan to avoid the hazards. The discussion is driven by trust among the collaborators. The consequences of injury, lost time, lost pay, and even death are equally real. Collaboration is essential for safe job performance.

An education perspective

Collaboration is indeed fundamental to business and school success. Educators are advised to learn the lessons from business recruiters and safety specialists. Hiring strong collaborators who make the safety and well-being of students first is essential in establishing a positive learning culture. Working collaboratively helps maintain and advance educator knowledge and skills and can lead to breakthroughs in practice by promoting cutting-edge procedures, improving collaboration across units, or seeking new ways to streamline operations (Boyep, 2013).

School leaders must take the act of working and learning together to the next level. One way to do this is to provide educators with Garmston & Wellman's (2013) strategies for fostering collaboration, including the development of norms, the concept of adaptivity, and mental maps for planning, reflecting, and problem solving.

Promoting valuable exchanges that improve educational practice and student learning requires that supervisors provide time and resources for collaboration. In the study of instructional coaches (Williams, 2013), we found that the capacity of educators to make dramatic improvements in instruction is more likely to increase when coaches and teachers trust each other to give and receive useful and actionable feedback, when they focus attention and choice on their own learning, and when they commit to collaborate together to solve problems of practice in their schools.

A majority (68%) of the coaches said they wanted "to spend more time in collaborative work with classroom educators" and "to develop and use assets to build a culture of collaboration in the schools" (Williams, 2013).

Respect at the individual level is paramount.

Lesson 3
LEADERSHIP CULTIVATES RESPECTFUL CULTURES IN BUSINESS AND EDUCATION.

A business perspective

Building a culture of respect in a business organization starts with awareness and understanding of a group's cultural values and ends with belief in the culture of the individual. Businesses that honor the cultural values of a group pay attention to language, holidays, appreciation for clothing, dress, and food, and respect for social roles and conventions.

An example of the latter occurred when this human resources consultant conducted a sales training session for a U.S. company in Hong Kong. The participants in the training were Japanese and Chinese employees. As often happens in group meetings, participants sit with their friends. Here, the Japanese sat with each other, and the Chinese did likewise.

The training exercise was designed for the first group to give an objection to the product and the second group to answer or overcome the objection.

The groups were formed by dividing the room in half, which inadvertently placed the Japanese in group one and the Chinese in group two.

When the Japanese group offered an objection to the product, they prefaced the objection with an apology. This was not the Chinese way to object to a product, but the apology was acknowledged, appreciated, and the training continued with the Japanese employees making beneficial and knowledgeable objections.

Respect at the individual level is paramount. Lack of respect is often the root cause of unhappy employees, not to mention grievances and complaints of discrimination. Human resources managers often deal with culturally based issues such as when an employee's performance rating is lowered based on the employee's accent, or when a male employee is accused of not making eye contact with a female manager, or even when the employee is faulted for being too short or too heavy to do the job.

In each case, the issue is perceived as personal disrespect. The short-term resolution to these instances of disrespect is an expression of regret. The long-term resolution comes about when leaders help employees experience constructive solutions and provide the conditions for employees to make meaningful connections with one another.

In the human resources office, a support structure helps employees become adept at respectful collaboration, problem solving, and communication. A critical component is to provide tools for employees to improve skills and knowledge and be able to apply them in all aspects of the corporate culture.

Human resources professionals are not only concerned about getting the work done, but also about how it is getting done. It's not just about acquiring a body of knowledge and practicing a set of required skills; it involves aligning the business mission with one's values, culture, and purpose.

An education perspective

Education leaders also recognize the profound impact leadership has on multicultural and diverse school environments. Leaders are responsible for developing and advocating for just and humane schools environments. They are constantly seeking new ways to stay true to the integrity of the school mission, paying attention to the equitable use of resources and culturally proficient practices.

In the study of instructional coaches (Williams, 2013), coaches served as part of the leadership team. In their reflections about the work, coaches said they must do more to create a supportive culture for differentiated learning.

Achieving equity and excellence won't happen in the absence of culturally proficient practices that are rooted in educator mindsets and beliefs. Coaches understood the limits of their knowledge and took pride in mobilizing diverse resources for professional learning across cultural differences. They saw their own investment in learning about language, culture, poverty, and disability as an important starting point for the effective support of teachers.

Lesson 4

MENTORING, COLLABORATION, AND LEADERSHIP ARE ALL ABOUT CHANGE.

A business perspective

The failure to manage change has dire organizational consequences. A recent documentary, *Silicon Valley*, is a case in point (MacLowry, 2013). In the late 1950s, Nobel laureate William Shockley left Bell Labs to establish his own company near Palo Alto, Calif.

He recruited some of the best technology experts in the U.S. to join him. Shockley, credited with inventing the transistor, focused the business on transistors. His employees eventually wanted to explore and develop microchips. Shockley resisted the change and insisted the focus be transistors.

As a direct result of this unwillingness to change, eight of his brightest engineers and chemists left to form their own company. Among them was Robert Noyce, second only to Shockley in knowledge of the applications for transistors. The new start-up company was funded by Fairchild Camera and Instruments.

At Fairchild, the work would be on silicon chips. When the group, under Noyce's leadership, went on to perfect integrated circuits, Fairchild resisted the product change. Many left, including Noyce, who would then begin a new and ultimately very successful start-up company, Intel.

From Silicon Valley, we learn that the most difficult part of change management is taking the resistance to change personally. A leader will get some resistance to change. Unfortunately, when resistance is perceived as personal, the leader tends to think, "This is such a good idea, so who in their right mind would oppose it? In fact, it is such a good idea, they must like it, but don't like me." Shockley and Fairchild took it personally.

An education perspective

The above lesson is particularly telling for educators. Failure to support teachers through the change process can prevent the best new ideas from being implemented. When mentors and leaders recruit creative candidates and collaborate with them in continuous learning, new innovations and start-up initiatives have a chance of taking hold.

New ideas get tested in small actions, in every classroom, week after week. It happens when educators adjust what they do to meet student needs, and when they reflect on what they think about and believe about learners and the learning process. Reeves' (2007) influential work on change reminds us that when the relationship between educators and mentors is characterized by agreement that "a change in performance will be useful," then all are bound to "a clear commitment to action" (pp. 89-90).

Readiness for change in implementing a new program varies widely across schools. When equipped with the skills and knowledge to develop and facilitate the adaptive work of the schools, leaders can build capacity for the spread of best practices. Change requires de-escalating the power differential and breaking down the barriers that impede employee productivity through mentoring, collaboration, and responsive leadership. One coach summarized the work by saying, "We are refining our coaching skills to guide teachers rather than to force a change."

PUTTING THE PERSPECTIVES TOGETHER

The lessons learned from the business sector speak less about how professional learning is conducted and more about why it is essential to keep the focus on employee learning and growth. While specific learning practices differ in business and education, leaders in both fields emphasize the importance of sustaining a learning culture that impacts results.

The business approaches described here emphasize the relationship between mentors who value their customers' and community's needs and the mentees who hunger for knowledge. Mentors are powerful socializing agents. They provide time and space for employees to examine their experiences from multiple perspectives. Mentors provide a safety net for employees who work in changeable and even chaotic workplaces. They provide strategies for accelerating or redefining career goals and support for employee aspirations and efforts (Petriglieri & DeRue, n.d.).

Solving the urgent problems that face our nation's schools requires that we reset our priorities and resources on continuous educator learning, where educators solve problems together in facilitated leadership teams and learning communities.

Educational practices that leverage mentoring and collaborative leadership can be used to a greater extent to build educator capacity and respond to the needs of diverse students. Rigorous organizational direction and support is needed to make continuous learning a part of the daily work in our schools.

9 AREAS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

1. Explicit instruction in comprehension strategies.

2. Scaffolded instruction from direct instruction through independent practice.

3. Standards-based grade-level expectations.

4. Reading nonfiction and informational text.

5. Monitoring with classroom data.

6. Thinking and complexity above knowledge.

7. Accountable independent reading.

8. Data-informed instructional differentiation.

9. Classroom environments with smooth routines.

4 SCHOOLS, 1 GOAL

UNIVERSITY-DISTRICT PARTNERSHIP NETS RESULTS FOR STRUGGLING READERS

By Rosemarye T. Taylor and William R. Gordon II

High school students who are not proficient readers struggle in content classes and often do not graduate from high school. However, they have promise to do so with well-designed and implemented reading curriculum and effective instruction. Without it, they may have difficulty competing in the global workplace (Gordon & Oliva, 2012).

One solution is to form university and school district partnerships that provide aligned, job-embedded professional learning. An example of this is Florida's East Learning Community High School Reading Initiative.

The East Learning Community, in central Florida, is a division of a larger public school district that serves 187,000 K-12 students. The learning community supports 38 school sites, including 25 elementary schools, one K-8 school, seven middle schools, four high schools, and one 9th-grade center.

As the community's area executive director and the university partner, we worked together to design and implement professional learning that would serve as a model of continuous improvement. Our focus was the lack of growth in student reading in the four high schools. Unacceptable learning gains from 2007-08 through 2009-10 on the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) across the four high schools pointed to a need for systematic and continuous change to improve reading intervention instruction.

The overall goal was to create common language,

knowledge, and skills among intensive reading teachers, literacy coaches, and assistant principals — all responsible for reading achievement in the high schools. Collaborative, ongoing professional learning was accompanied by continuous walk-throughs by school and district administrators to provide feedback and implementation accountability.

IDENTIFY TRENDS

Our first task was to observe reading classrooms in each high school to identify trends in instructional practices. Generally, classroom environments were positive, with good classroom management. Students were on task, trying to do their work, but often without success.

Teachers showed care and concern for students' learning and patience with their challenges. In a few classes, the relationship between the teacher and students appeared strained by students' lack of success on the learning task.

Using data from those school visits, we identified nine areas as content for the professional learning. (See box on p. 16.)

To address the primary goal of increasing student reading achievement, we created a super professional learning community (Taylor, 2010) comprised of a team from each of the four high schools that included all reading teachers, literacy coaches, and the assistant principals responsible for reading.

Eight full-day collaborative sessions were embedded in schools across two academic years for the super professional learning community. In the first session, we shared the purpose and parameters of the learning and gave an

overview of adolescent literacy to create a mental model of a reading intervention classroom.

Subsequent sessions began with class visits for the visiting school teams planned by the host teachers. The host teachers identified specific items on which they wanted feedback. For example, teachers from one of the high schools asked colleagues to look for data-informed differentiation, small-group work, and student stations and to provide helpful feedback. To encourage reflection, peer feedback was provided in the form of: "I like the way you or the students … and I wonder … "

Follow-up support included monitoring, feedback, and coaching from the literacy coaches and assistant principals.

DEVELOP EXPERTISE

During year two, the super professional learning community built on the first year with practice in data disaggregation, data monitoring, and developing expertise in instructional differentiation. Additionally, Bloom's Taxonomy (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001) and Webb's Depth of Knowledge Taxonomy (Hess, Carlock, Jones, & Walkup, 2009) were used to increase rigor and thinking in student learning tasks.

Lesson study (Lewis & Hurd, 2011) provided the process for collaborative support and capacity building for continuous improvement. In the lesson study process, teachers worked together to develop standards-based lesson plans, implement those plans, and reflect on their success and needed changes.

Throughout year two, school teams developed learning scales (Marzano, 2006, 2007) and standards-based assessments for their instructional plans. Students used learning scales to monitor their own progress on learning goals (Marzano, 2007), and teachers used them to adjust instruction.

Teachers created assessments together to assure common expectations of students, allow comparison of results, and provide common data for teacher reflection. According to administrators, at the end of year two, collaborative professional learning and data-informed lesson plan development with learning scales and common assessments had become normal practice.

As a result of follow-up observations and discussions with the administrators, we concluded that the project was successful and sustainable. Of the nine areas addressed through the

professional learning, we observed that teachers had moved to proficiency in all but three: thinking and complexity above knowledge; data-informed instructional differentiation; and accountable independent reading.

While there was more evidence of higher-level thinking expected from students, consistency was lacking. Teachers reported difficulty in finding time for independent reading because they were focused on the standards measured on the reading portion of the state assessment test. Although teachers used data to inform their instruction, differentiation remained an area for continued development.

Classrooms were more literacy-rich with student-made word walls reflecting research-based vocabulary instruction. Evidence of grade-level, standards-based instruction included student work displays along with student-friendly accountability measures such as exit slips.

Students were engaged in their work and were successful even with more challenging tasks. More teachers scaffolded instruction with modeling during direct instruction before moving students to guided practice.

An increase in effectively implemented pair and triad student-guided practice before independent practice allowed teachers to clarify misconceptions and reteach. Students received explicit instruction in comprehension strategies. Teachers in all classes employed visuals and prompts related to comprehension strategies and use of academic language. Teachers monitored student learning data as students read nonfiction and informational text.

Teachers posted learning scales in classes for students to use to monitor their own learning. Teachers used the learning scales to provide feedback and plan instruction responsive to students' needs. School district and school leaders collaboratively reviewed data and discussed its implications with the school teams while supporting adjustment in instruction.

POSITIVE CHANGE

The first year of implementation showed disappointing results as measured by the reading portion of the state assessment test. In two of the four high schools, a reduced percentage of students in the lowest 25% of 9th- and 10th-grade readers made learning gains; in the third school, students in the lowest 25% made a 2% improvement in learning gains; and in the fourth, students in the lowest 25% showed a 3% improvement.

In the second year of the initiative, during which teachers were fully implementing changes to their reading instruction, reading improvement grew. From the first to the second year of the initiative, the changes in the percentage of students in the lowest 25% making learning gains were:

- High school 1, from 41% to 56%;
- High school 2, from 43% to 67%;
- High school 3, from 40% to 68%; and
- High school 4, from 45% to 63%.

COMPONENTS OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SESSIONS

Generally, sessions included these components:

- Presentation of specific items for feedback.
- Class visits.
- Written and verbal peer feedback.
- Facilitated reflection on being observed, giving, and receiving feedback.
- New content/skill focus.
- Practice on a new focus.
- Job-alike group problem solving.
- School team planning.
- Reflection on the day's learning and next steps.

Additionally, the two years of the initiative resulted in increases in reading proficiency for all 9th- and 10th-grade students. From 2011 to 2012, the mean increase in reading proficiency on the state assessment test for all students in the four high schools was 4%.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The challenge of achieving reading proficiency for high school students is one that needs to be addressed continuously. Although this case uses state assessment data, the contents will also apply to Common Core State Standards-based assessments.

There is no simple fix, as success is contextually based on student, teacher, and leadership factors. Through partnerships among universities, school districts, and schools grounded in continuous improvement in teacher, literacy coach, and leader expertise, along with capacity building, there is promise of improvement in reading proficiency.

These data show that when teachers, literacy coaches, and administrators engage in high-quality and respectful professional learning over time, with accountability for implementation, their practices can become more effective.

Learning new professional practice and ways of work, such as collaboration in planning and assessing, takes time and commitment. Immediate results may not show in student achievement as measured by formal assessments. Patience is required for those charged with the responsibility of improving teacher and leader effectiveness. Observable changes in teaching practice and in student responses to the teaching precede measurable increases in student achievement on formal assessments.

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Workplace wisdom

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BRIDGE BUILDERS

TEACHER LEADERS FORGE CONNECTIONS AND BRING COHERENCE TO LITERACY INITIATIVE

By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, and Megin Charner-Laird

An initiative to improve the content-area literacy skills of all students at a Massachusetts high school demonstrates the important role teacher leaders play in bridging the various elements of school improvement efforts.

The Content-area Reading Initiative is a cross-departmental initiative (see box on p. 23) launched in 2012 at Brookline High School in Brookline, Mass. More than 140 teachers serve about 1,700 students, who represent 76 nations and speak 57 languages. The increased diversity of students entering the school — 28% English language learners, 15% free or reduced lunch, 16% students with special needs, 8% African-American, 15% Asian, 10% Hispanic, 7% multiracial, and 60% white — called into question business as usual.

Meeting students' language and literacy needs within content-area classrooms is becoming ever more challenging. Thus, in 2012, the school called on university-based consultants to help teachers and leaders focus on disciplinary literacy instruction, exploring discipline-specific ways of reading, writing, and communicating (Galloway, Lawrence, & Moje, 2013). With funding from the Brookline High School 21st Century Fund, the Brookline Education Foundation, and the Brookline Public Schools, a multiyear professional learning initiative began.

The initiative included four essential components:

1. **Content-area teacher**s would apply to participate in discipline-based professional learning communities.
2. **Faculty-elected teacher leaders** would convene the professional learning communities and work collaboratively with each other.
3. **A site-based project leader** would be designated.
4. **University-level instructional coaches** would act as outside consultants.

While each component is important, teacher leaders

emerged in early project evaluations as most critical in building useful professional learning communities and connecting to the work of the external coaches.

THE WORK OF TEACHER LEADERS

Teacher leaders were essential to the project's early success because they served as bridges between various personnel and components in the project: between participants within content-area professional learning communities, between content-area professional learning communities, between teachers and the university-based coaches, and between participants and the new research and practices explored throughout the initiative.

Though the initiative was designed to include teacher leaders as key facilitators within content-area professional learning communities, their role as bridges *between and across* individuals and groups served to bring coherence and a deeper level of learning to the initiative as a whole.

Here are the various ways in which teacher leaders supported professional learning. Each section begins with a quote from a teacher leader about her work, illustrating both the power and challenge of the role.

BRIDGING BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS

■ *"A little less teaching, a little more talking."*

In one-on-one interviews and focus groups, teacher leaders repeatedly discussed the challenges of moving from the traditional egg-crate model of teaching (Tyack, 1974) to a new collaborative approach. As world languages teacher leader Astrid

Photo by JACY IPPOLITO

Teacher leaders, from left, Astrid Allen, Jenee Ramos, and Kate Leslie forged connections between learning communities to improve content-area literacy skills at Brookline High School in Massachusetts.

Allen noted, the transition from "a little less teaching" to "a little more talking" with colleagues pushed against a school culture that valued individual autonomy and a laser-like focus on each teacher's classroom.

Early professional learning community interactions were challenging, and teacher leaders knit the groups together. Kate Leslie, the social studies teacher leader, described her team as one comprised of "some really dominant personalities." As a result, she had to develop strategies to bridge personalities and focus on collaborative work.

For her, this involved the creation of tight agendas for meetings: "I think one of my biggest roles as team leader has been to come in with a very strict agenda with time caps on it. ... I keep a strict meeting … and pull people back in if we start to stray."

■ *"Meetings went really well sometimes and other times — crickets."*

Teacher leaders had to grow into their roles as facilitators to serve their groups most effectively. Initially, all three teacher leaders had to help build relationships among professional learning community members, who — despite working in the same content-area departments — did not necessarily have previous experience collaborating.

Teacher leaders needed to find effective routines for running meetings, setting agendas, and keeping the work moving forward, while simultaneously balancing work as teachers experimenting in their own classrooms. Success in this area was initially mixed.

To develop rapport among team members, teacher leaders used different means of interaction, including face-to-face meetings, peer observations, and communicating online. All three teacher leaders sought facilitation advice from the university coaches and experimented with using protocols for running meetings until they found structures that worked particularly well for each group.

■ *"If one person's doing somersaults and the other person's learning how to walk, I'm OK with that."*

Another challenge facing teacher leaders was the varied levels of teacher engagement with implementing instructional change. Teacher leaders worked hard to ensure that all teachers were feeling well-served by the work while also allowing them to learn and change at their own rates.

Teacher leaders were instrumental in assessing where individual teachers were in experimenting and implementing change in their classrooms and negotiating situations when teachers were struggling to find ways to participate.

All three teacher leaders assessed team members' readiness to take on the initiative and met them where they were — supporting some in taking first steps (e.g. spending time reading literature and planning lessons) and supporting others as they leapt ahead into new and unknown territory (e.g. audiotaping class discussions to help colleagues reflect on the nature of students' use of academic vocabulary).

■ *"[The initiative] has given me license to experiment in ways that I wouldn't have before."*

Teacher leaders also supported the work of the initiative by modeling experimentation. Through modeling risk-taking with new disciplinary literacy practices (e.g. designing close-reading guides), teacher leaders not only offered group members the freedom to experiment, but their own classroom-level work provided a focus for collaborative conversations and reflections.

Seeing teacher leaders go first helped teachers know that they would be supported in a safe environment when reflecting on their own new work. Jenee Ramos, leader of the English professional learning community and overall project leader, described her dual focus on her roles as a leader and a role model: "I know it's true for me that this gave me the license … oh, now I'm going to try this. I had always wondered about this, but I didn't think I was going to try it. But now I have to because I'm accountable to these people and, yeah, let's do it."

BRIDGING BETWEEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES AND OTHERS

■ *"Serving as reporter."*

Teacher leaders played key roles in helping teachers across the entire project to see connections among the varied individual and group inquiry cycles and to connect to the coaches.

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Without this bridge, it would have been all too easy for the small teams to conduct their work in a vacuum and not connect their efforts to the larger project. Content-area groups were naturally curious about the work of other disciplines, and because the teacher leaders met weekly, they could quickly share results of classroom experiments.

Teacher leaders saw communication across teams as a means of support for their own work. Kate Leslie, the social studies teacher leader, said, "I felt like I could go to Jenee (Ramos) or I could go to Astrid (Allen)," pointing out the support that she felt among the team of teacher leaders.

In fact, conversations among teacher leaders served as a means to gain important skills and ideas for leading the teams, as well as insight into the similarities and differences across groups.

■ *"Direction and guidance."*

Teacher leaders served as conduits between the university-based coaches and the project teachers. Teacher leaders sought direction from the coaches when assembling resources and beginning inquiry cycles and looked to them for ideas about effective facilitation techniques.

Leslie noted that monthly in-person and weekly phone meetings with the university coaches, and, in particular, the focus on how best to facilitate meetings lessened her stress.

In turn, teacher leaders provided support to the outside coaches. They provided key information to help the coaches understand team members' classrooms, concerns, and interests more effectively. This feedback loop formed a bridge that was key to tailoring the project so that the outside coaches could more precisely meet teachers' needs.

■ *"Doing that big-picture planning ..."*

Teacher leaders were also key to keeping the professional learning communities connected to the vision that each group built for its respective inquiry cycle. Teacher leaders remained focused on the big picture, ensuring that groups were not bogged down in too much research or discussion without translating that thinking into experimentation in the classroom.

As teams designed ambitious projects, such as creating a historical literacy diagnostic, teacher leaders helped form the steps to accomplish those tasks. Allen, the world languages teacher leader, described the clear structures that she enacted to move along the work of her team: "We were super-productive at the beginning of the year. We created these team documents, and we moved from cycle to cycle pretty quickly."

After initially worrying that her group would struggle to work together, Allen focused on structure and being transparent about the products produced: "That's the part that I bring to the group. I want to put something out there. I want to show the other teams, the world languages department, and the school what we're doing."

MAKING THE CONNECTION

As Roland Barth (2013) writes, "Despite … formidable challenges [to teacher leadership], the time may be ripe for change" (p. 11).

As project evaluation work is underway to assess teacher and student learning as the result of the first year of the initiative, qualitative data (interviews, focus groups, surveys, and student work) demonstrate that the work of teacher leaders is paying off.

Not only are teachers working together within professional learning communities — a structure that is new in a school that values and rewards individual autonomy and creativity — but Spanish teachers are now consulting English and social studies teachers about best vocabulary and comprehension practices.

Students across departments are using similar interactive reading guides to scaffold close reading. The interconnectedness of the teachers and the depth of their work would not have been possible simply through the creation of professional learning communities or the involvement of consulting coaches.

By connecting the work of outside coaches to the effective professional learning community structures they built, teacher leaders have forged new connections within and across groups and are pivotal in making instructional experimentation not only possible, but also productive. This is the first monumental step toward realizing Barth's vision of a school as a "community of leaders" (p. 16).

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THE SECRET TO GREAT COACHING

**INQUIRY METHOD HELPS TEACHERS
TAKE OWNERSHIP OF THEIR LEARNING**

By Les Foltos

A common question raised by new coaches is: When can I share my experience and expertise with teachers I am coaching to help them improve?

It is a logical question. Many coaches know that they were chosen for the role in part because their peers respect them as a teacher. They know the instructional strategies they have used give them credibility with other teachers at their school, and their training as a coach helped them develop more expertise. Naturally, they wonder, why not take on the role of expert?

The answer to their question is critical to the success of all coaches, no matter how much experience they have coaching, and that answer is shaped by research on educational reform and the experiences of thousands of coaches.

Research by Fullan and others has demonstrated that improving teaching and learning requires that schools build the individual and collective capacity of teachers, and collaboration among teachers is one of the key strategies to build capacity (Fullan 2011; Fullan & Hargreaves, 2012). Coaching unlocks the power of collaboration. While coaching is a powerful tool, coaches often wonder how best to tap into that power.

Successful coaches realize that routinely taking on the role of the expert with the answers is the wrong path toward collaboration and capacity building. As Anna Walter, a peer coach in Edmonds, Wash., observes, "If you want teachers to take ownership for learning, the coach can't be the expert" (A. Walter, personal communication, September 28, 2011).

Ken Kay and Valerie Greenhill (2012) reported on a group of coaches who played the role of expert so well and so consistently that they created a sense of "learned helplessness" on the part of the teachers they were coaching (p. 102). There may be some role for coach as expert, but

> **These coaches understand that their peers need a colleague who provides a safety net, the kind of support that encourages innovation. Instead of playing the role of expert too often, successful coaches call on strategies that ensure that their peers develop the capacity to improve their practice.**

clearly there must be more effective collaborative strategies for coaches to employ if they hope to build their peers' capacity to improve teaching and learning.

These more effective strategies can be derived from the attributes that coaches say make them successful. They strive to build relationships with their collaborating teachers by building trust and respect. These coaches report that their success rests on creating a relationship that is also friendly, personalized, manageable, supportive, and private (Foltos, 2013).

Coaches insist that all of these qualities are important, but when asked which of these traits is most critical to help peers build capacity to improve teaching and learning, many coaches focus on the importance of being supportive. They understand that their peers want to change, but the pressures of high-stakes standardized testing, new teacher evaluation systems, and the lack of effective support leave them reluctant to take risks and innovate.

These coaches understand that their peers need a colleague who provides a safety net, the kind of support that encourages innovation. Instead of playing the role of expert too often, successful coaches call on strategies that ensure that their peers develop the capacity to improve their practice.

INQUIRY OVER ADVOCACY

Grace Dublin, a peer coach in Seattle, Wash., says that she often could answer the questions her peers raise, but

she doesn't. Instead, she responds with questions designed to help them formulate their strategies. Following this approach, Dublin says, means, "It is ultimately their answer" (G. Dublin, personal communication, September 13, 2011).

Many coaches I have interviewed agree with Dublin's approach because they believe that the primary responsibility for learning rests on the shoulders of those learning and relying on inquiry is a powerful method to reach that goal. Assuring that the learner is taking responsibility for learning is a key strategy coaches use to help their peers develop the capacity to improve their teaching practices. In other words, the coach's role is to facilitate learning.

Coaches facilitate learning by using inquiry to encourage their learning partner to question current practices and to consider new practices and strategies. The coach may play an active role in helping the peer identify answers to the challenges they face, but ultimately the peer who is collaborating with the coach is making decisions and choosing a course of action.

As I work with peer coaches, I often ask them to compare coaching with teaching rock climbing. One coach from New South Wales who was discussing these two forms of teaching noted, "At some point, the person learning to climb has to be independent, so the instructor has to build the climber's capacity." Coaching is much the same. Teachers won't grow professionally, nor will they have the capacity to improve their craft, if their coach tells them what do to. Successful coaches build capacity, not dependence.

Garmston and Wellman (1999) argue that successful collaboration requires a balance between advocacy and inquiry. Effective peer coaches emphasize inquiry over advocacy. Inquiry builds capacity to improve teaching and learning by helping teachers to be more effective at designing and implementing learning activities that meet the needs of their students. The building blocks of effective inquiry are collaborative norms and probing questions.

NORMS, PROBING QUESTIONS, AND EFFECTIVE INQUIRY

To avoid taking ownership of the learning, successful coaches discuss and develop the roles they will play with their peers and school leadership. These same discussions should help the coach's learning partner to define the roles and responsibilities he or she will assume while working with a coach.

By defining these roles and responsibilities, coaches and their learning partners also create individual and collective accountability for learning in a way that assigns the primary responsibility for learning to the collaborating teacher.

This basic set of roles and responsibilities — something we might define as norms for collaboration — are critical to building an effective supportive coaching relationship. Without

> **To avoid taking ownership of the learning, successful coaches discuss and develop the roles they will play with their peers and school leadership.**

> **Think about the comparison between coaching and teaching rock climbing. Coaches need to understand that their learning partners, like rock climbers, need to be able to act on their own when they reach the crux of the problem. There is more to effective inquiry than creating collaborative norms. Coaches use a variety of communication skills to make inquiry work.**

agreement on roles and responsibilities, coaches and their peers may find that coaching can founder or fail.

Collaborative norms shape coaching conversations in ways that build trust and respect; they define accountability and build capacity. Collaborative norms are essential for effective coaching. When teachers come to a coach to discuss an issue they are grappling with, the coach helps them puzzle it out.

There is both individual and collective accountability. Jim Knight's research (2011) on instructional coaching led him to conclude that joint accountability is an essential element of successful partnerships (p. 30).

While joint accountability is important, ultimately the collaborating teacher develops the answer that he or she brings back to the classroom to implement. The teacher has drawn on what he or she learned with and from the coach and taken that learning to shape a solution.

Think about the comparison between coaching and teaching rock climbing. Coaches need to understand that their learning partners, like rock climbers, need to be able to act on their own when they reach the crux of the problem. There is more to effective inquiry than creating collaborative norms. Coaches use a variety of communication skills to make inquiry work.

Probing questions are tools coaches use to encourage their learning partners to solve the issues facing them. Probing questions get the teacher to think more deeply about and develop answers to the issues important to him or her. They can offer teachers a different perspective that helps them draw alternative conclusions on how to approach a problem. Probing questions are at the core of the inquiry method of learning and build the collaborating teacher's capacity to create and offer students powerful learning activities.

What makes a good probing question? First, it must be a question. This may seem obvious, but many people who use probing questions already have an answer in mind when they ask the question. If the questioner knows the answer he wants, he is simply masking his solution with a question mark.

The National School Reform Faculty produces a *Pocket Guide to Probing Questions*. It recommends that the questioner start by determining if "you have a 'right' answer in mind. If so, delete the judgment, or don't ask it" (Thompson-Grove, Frazer, & Dunne, n.d.).

Effective probing questions usually start with a paraphrase, and they are often open-ended. Stems or sentence starters might include the following:

- You said …; have you ever thought about …?
- Why …?
- What might the next step be?
- Are there other strategies that you could use to …? (Meyer et al., 2011).

Don't underestimate these questions because they seem so simple. One of the most powerful probing questions I have heard is also one of the simplest. "So you tried … with your students. What did you learn from that?" Or the question might be asked a slightly different way. "So you tried … with your students. What did they learn from that, and what is your evidence?" Remember, the purpose of the probing question is to get teachers to think more deeply about their practice. Simple probing questions can be incredibly powerful reflective tools.

Probing questions are the key to inquiry-based learning and are essential for coaches who want to avoid advocating for a solution based on their ideas and experiences. Mary Lou Ley, who directs the Wisconsin Peer Coaching Collaborative, says, "Professional growth occurs when we engage in focused conversations around evidence of teaching and learning" (Ley, 2011).

Ley offers coaches a colorful metaphor to put this belief into practice and to focus and sharpen their probing questions. Getting to an effective probing question, Ley says, is like peeling back the layers of an onion one at a time (Ley, 2011; M. Ley, personal communication, July 16, 2012).

Coaches peel away the layers of the learning activity until they have exposed what the teacher wants students to know and be able to do. Once they have peeled back the layers, the coach will be more likely to raise probing questions that focus on student learning.

Using probing questions that emphasize what the students are doing and learning is critical. These questions keep the conversations focused on student learning and help to avoid discussions about the teacher than can quickly become personal and unproductive. These kind of probing questions focus collaborative discussions on learning, not the teacher.

Experienced coaches aren't the only ones who place a premium on this approach to effective collaboration. After reviewing many evaluations of coaching written by teachers who collaborate with coaches, I have yet to find one that says, "Thank goodness I have someone to tell me what to think or do."

Instead, they talk about the value of working with a coach they can learn with and from. They clearly want support, but a particular type of support from a friendly peer.

What coaches need to take away from the idea of these collaborating teachers is straightforward. Effective coaching requires that coaches develop collaboration and communication strategies designed to play the role of a friendly peer working to help his or her learning partners solve the issues challenging them.

> **Coaches peel away the layers of the learning activity until they have exposed what the teacher wants students to know and be able to do.**

Coaches who know how to shape strong collaborative norms and use inquiry effectively will be most successful at helping their colleagues develop the capacity to improve teaching and learning. Effective coaches need to remember that taking on the role of expert can help create learned helplessness. Inquiry helps teachers build the capacity to improve teaching and learning.

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Photo by ADAM PEREZ

Joesiah Saunders, left, works on a project with teacher Joe Edwards-Hoff in woodshop class at Grandview High School in Washington.

BEYOND THE CORE

PEER OBSERVATION BRINGS COMMON CORE TO VOCATIONAL AND ELECTIVES CLASSES

By Harriette Thurber Rasmussen

Districts everywhere are ramping up professional learning around the Common Core State Standards, and Washington's Grandview School District is no exception.

Known for strong instructional coaching and a wall-to-wall professional learning calendar, Grandview has held steadfast to its instructional philosophy for almost a decade with encouraging results.

Despite a demographic of first-generation would-be college students (83% free and reduced lunch and 92% students of color), this small, rural district has achieved steady growth in student achievement at critical junctures and exceeds the state average in the percentage of students it sends directly to college.

The district's secret? Lots and lots of professional learning. And for the last several years, most of Grandview's teachers have been immersed in learning about the Common Core and designing instructional strategies that will help students meet these new and higher expectations.

Grandview High School is no exception. Every one of its core teachers is involved in professional learning around Common Core, with particular attention to literacy.

Principal Mike Closner, well-versed in the details of Common Core, is pleased with teachers' investment in the standards but sees a growing gap between those teaching core classes and those teaching career and technical education and electives.

"One of our challenges has been that we have no established way for our career and technical education and electives teachers to learn and apply Common Core in their classes," Closner says. "Our students really need us all to be on the same page to get that repetition and practice they need to master the standards."

Closner reasoned that weaving Common Core literacy standards into vocational and electives classrooms would give students the practice they needed with the standards while making class content more accessible by using the strategies.

Closner used a special district resource allocation designed for collaborative peer observation to help close the professional learning gap and, in turn, help his students master Common Core's expectations. His plan? To have career and technical education and electives teachers observe how Common Core literacy strategies are taught in non-English language arts content areas.

Social studies and science teachers were already infusing Common Core literacy strategies into their lessons. Certainly these strategies could be used just as successfully in other disciplines. Closner also wanted to expand a schoolwide collaborative professional learning culture that has become the hallmark of the Grandview School District.

PEER OBSERVATION

The distinction between literal and interpreted notes is especially important during peer observation. Success is predicated on teachers realizing that their colleagues are not judging their teaching skill, but instead collecting raw data to be collectively analyzed, with the observers and host teacher as equal partners in the learning process. Peer observation then becomes a valuable resource for everyone involved.

COLLABORATIVE PRACTICE

Grandview's commitment to collaborative practice began in 2006, when Superintendent Kevin Chase invited Harvard professor Richard Elmore to Yakima Valley to launch a superintendents' instructional rounds network.

Although the practice of instructional rounds is now

well-documented (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Roberts, 2012; Teitel, 2013), only a few such networks existed then, and Chase was intrigued. He believed it was important to lead by example, learning firsthand the potential and pitfalls of collaborative peer interaction before asking that of his staff.

In 2012, Chase decided it was time to build the same type of collaborative practice among Grandview's teachers. His theory of action was that peer observation followed by professional data-driven conversations would lead teachers to explore and implement new practices in their classrooms related to Common Core.

Principals in the district were enthusiastic, and five of Grandview's seven principals accepted Chase's offer of resources to support school-based collaborative practice networks in their schools.

While the high school didn't participate that year, Closner invited Grandview's alternative high school teachers to observe his staff and watched the process unfold, listening carefully as his colleagues described teachers' positive responses and dramatic pedagogical shifts with increases in student outcomes.

> **His briefing allowed the career and technical education teachers to visualize how Bunker planned to home in on a literacy skill while still teaching social studies content. They were intrigued.**

When Chase offered resources to his principals for another year, Closner saw it as a way to involve his career and technical education and electives teachers in the Common Core and reinforce much-needed literacy strategies for Grandview students across all classes.

Teachers at Grandview High School are organized into departmental professional learning communities to collaboratively design lessons, consider resulting student performance data, and refine their practice.

Career and technical education and electives teachers have their own professional learning communities but struggled with how to support each other across very diverse content areas.

The teachers that gathered in late September 2013 were uncertain about how the social studies lesson they would be observing could be any more relevant to their content areas than those of their career and technical education colleagues. Where did this really fit with the student outcomes for which they were responsible?

Closner briefed them on the origins of the Common Core standards movement, noting how the ability to understand informational text will be critical to students.

"We know our students are struggling with the literacy standards. We want to have a consistent approach in our district on how we approach reading in the content areas, and we expect teachers to be using shared reading as a strategy," he told them.

Closner's comments struck a chord with teachers as they

BRINGING STUDENTS TOGETHER

In automotive shop, finding a way to engage a broad range of student abilities and interest has been historically challenging for auto/wood instructor Joe Edwards-Hoff, as some kids would "fly through some of this stuff when working individually, while others would just sit and stare at a page."

He found that, when left on their own, kids would struggle with reading, especially those who were not as interested or had reading challenges. The shared reading brought the class together, and they were able to "move forward as a team."

---

made that connection between success in reading and success in their courses.

Closner wanted teachers to begin their exploration of Common Core with Reading Standard 2, an anchor standard for literacy in science and technical subjects.

For 9th and 10th graders, this standard involves the ability to extract central ideas, conclusions, and accurate summarizing. Social studies teacher Chad Bunker volunteered to host the observers, modeling shared reading in his unit on the exploration and colonization of America.

During a briefing session with teachers, Bunker described the lesson he was about to teach, reviewing some of the text features he wanted students to distinguish, and explained his thinking behind his choice of text: a correlation to both literacy and social studies standards, but with priority given to the article's ability to support literacy goals.

Bunker shared his chosen article on Aztec sacrifice, predicting that its provocative topic would capture students' interest, but said the biggest challenges he expected to encounter would be student participation. He explained his planned instructional moves in detail, including where he planned to pause in the reading, which questions he would ask, and how he would know when it was time to move on.

His briefing allowed the career and technical education teachers to visualize how Bunker planned to home in on a literacy skill while still teaching social studies content. They were intrigued.

OBSERVERS AS LEARNERS

As observers and learners, teachers had a specific role during the lesson: to record, literally and without judgment, what they saw taking place. What were students doing and saying? How did they respond to Bunker's planned questions that helped to unpack the text? What exactly did Bunker do to elicit the those responses?

These observations would orient their debriefing discussions and enable a shared understanding about what they witnessed

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before applying any analysis to the lesson.

Bunker was very specific about the data that *he* needed them to gather. Given his concern that some students would not participate, he wanted to know who was doing the talking. He was curious about his use of wait time after posing questions, admitting that silence in the classroom makes him uncomfortable. And he told the group that he was going to try sitting while leading the discussion to see how that might promote more student response.

Being in control of the data adds a measure of safety for the host teacher in a process that can be fearful. And it solidifies the framing of the process as professional learning — for the observing teachers and for those who host the visits.

MINING THE DATA

The career and technical education teachers arrived at the post-lesson debriefing with a different air about them. Any confusion about why they had observed a social studies lesson seemed to have been resolved by their time in the classroom. They were eager to share what they had observed, but Bunker had the floor first as he reflected on the lesson.

"I feel good about it. We were able to get through the entire text, and, from our group discussion, it seems to me that they were able to extract the big ideas from the article, which was the whole point of the lesson. And they talked! All the worry I had about a lack of participation came to nothing. I wonder why today was so different?"

> **Often after powerful professional learning experiences there's a drop in momentum. But Grandview runs a tight system, and teachers are expected to take what they learn into the classroom and try it on.**

Bunker's comments set the stage for the debrief with a quick reminder of the learning target and the data he'd asked them to collect along with a question he now had about the lesson. As the observing teachers got ready to share their data, they were also reminded of the process norms around judgment and that they could help each other, as learners of the process itself, to stay in descriptive mode.

The first teacher gave everyone an opportunity to observe that kind of help as she shared her observation that the lesson was fast-paced. "What did you see that made you think the lesson was fast-paced?" she was asked. Backing down into her data, she was then able to describe that Bunker moved through each section of the lesson with little or no wait time.

As other observers chimed in, Bunker learned that, on average, he allotted 15 seconds for students to respond to a question before moving on to the next. He also gained specifics about what students were actually saying during their "turn and talks" — a window into their thinking and the value of turn and talk as an instructional strategy to his students' learning.

The observer-learners also had some takeaways from the lesson. They noticed how actively students engaged with the routines Bunker modeled to support full participation. They saw how different types of questions elicited different kinds of thinking from students. And, perhaps most important, they decided that bringing this literacy standard into their classrooms was possible.

A week later, the electives teachers came together with the same level of skepticism as their career and technical education counterparts about introducing Common Core literacy strategies into their classrooms. Where did literacy fit into weight training? How might automotive shop or an art class incorporate shared reading? After watching shared reading in action and with a little nudging from Closner, they left that first meeting curious, anticipatory, and willing to try it.

A TIGHT SYSTEM

Often after powerful professional learning experiences there's a drop in momentum. But Grandview runs a tight system, and teachers are expected to take what they learn into the classroom and try it on.

So while the externally facilitated process takes place only four times this year, Grandview's career and technical education and electives teachers made Common Core the focus of their professional learning community time in a plan that came together as they reflected on the day's experience. This decision has brought coherence to their meetings and enabled the collegial support they sought across disciplines.

In preparation for the next professional learning community meeting, for example, career and technical education teachers found text related to their discipline that they thought would be appropriate for a shared reading as Bunker had modeled.

Together, and with support from career and technical education director Steve Long, teachers helped each other chunk their chosen text and create appropriate questions for each section so that students could practice extracting central ideas and preparing accurate summaries.

Teachers also predicted where students might struggle and brainstormed which instructional moves might further students' acquisition of literacy standards and mastery of the lesson's content.

Each teacher also committed to observe and be observed by one colleague while working with that text in a shared reading lesson, with Long as a part of the observing team. A rare component of peer observation, administrator involvement may be an integral part of ensuring that this process leads to real and sustained shifts in teaching practices, with resulting increases in student performance.

Closner and others at Grandview feel collaborative practices are not sufficient if treated as a stand-alone element of school improvement. Teitel (2013) documents the importance of a robust improvement strategy in which peer-based classroom observation is situated as an important, but not isolated, tool

in the improvement process.

Grandview has discovered that the presence of accountability for putting ones' learning into action, laced with abundant measures of support, is instrumental to moving the dial on instructional improvement and student performance.

As Grandview Elementary School principal Jared Lind explains, "We've found a positive energy that stems from what we're now calling a 'good uncomfortable.' Nobody wants more for our students than their teachers. These are systems that help teachers reach their goals in a culture that accepts no excuses."

TRYING IT ON

The next six weeks brought a flurry of literacy to Grandview High School's career and technical education and electives classrooms as teachers tried out shared reading, getting creative with text that related to their content areas but would still give students practice in chunking and analyzing text to extract important ideas and supporting details.

They learned that shared reading is an important literary scaffold and that the text itself can be above students' independent reading level, allowing exposure to critical content to which they might not otherwise have access. And while not every teacher managed to try on or observe a lesson by the time they met again, many had received specific feedback on their first attempts, and two teachers volunteered to demonstrate a shared reading in front of all their peers.

Career and technical education teachers watched a class of marketing students dissect text around effective presentations in readiness for their final project. Elective teachers watched guitar students grapple with the accomplishments of gypsy guitarist Django Reinhardt.

By the second semester, teachers came to their meeting more confident about the shared reading process but more curious about literacy development itself and how to support the proficiency of their students. Literacy expert and vice principal Elyse Mengarelli explained the differences in how literacy could be supported in their classes — by accessing critical content — and English language arts classrooms, where students are guided toward higher levels of independent reading.

Teachers talked about surprising changes they're noticing with students as they've introduced shared reading into their classrooms, such as a greater comfort with asking questions instead of exhibiting a "please don't call on me" attitude.

Overall, teachers agreed that introducing shared reading into their classes has made students take their content more seriously.

As more career and technical education and electives teachers find ways to link text directly into the content they teach, they are discovering common challenges, one of which was how to navigate new vocabulary. Should they front-load new vocabulary, or should they use a discovery process driven by students' background knowledge? Can challenging vocabulary be an occasion to teach alternative comprehensive strategies,

such as the use of contextual clues?

Teachers also shared examples of opportunities that arose from text-based discussions. Weight-training teacher Matt McKinstry discovered misconceptions about the word *supplementation* among his weight-training students, which led to a discussion that challenged preconceived notions about steroid use. McKinstry reported that this has "allowed me to address things I might not have known needed to be discussed."

PROFESSIONAL PRESS

Although it's the beginning of the process, Closner is optimistic. "We've talked integration of disciplines for the last 30 years in education, with not much to show for it. Noncore teachers everywhere are seeking connections to their colleagues for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the fact that our students need us to all be on the same page. And the Common Core is an ideal tool to have that happen because those standards represent the kind of academic press all of our students will need as they enter the adult world and encounter the expectations Common Core represents."

Also present in Grandview is the expectation of professional press for staff in the way they learn and apply new practices. Says Chase, "Preparing students for the Common Core is all about our own learning as the adults responsible for our students' academic success. It makes sense that, as we increase our expectations for students, we must also increase our expectations of ourselves as learner practitioners. Only after we experience this type of rigor for ourselves can we really understand the implications of Common Core for our students and how to make that those targets a reality."

> **By the second semester, teachers came to their meeting more confident about the shared reading process but more curious about literacy development itself and how to support the proficiency of their students.**

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One person's Academy experience shifts a district's approach to learning

Photo by LIFETOUCH STUDIOS

"One of my most significant learnings was my need to transfer my learning to those who actually do the work," said Cynthia Cash-Greene.

By Hayes Mizell

In South Carolina, the lower half of the state is called "the lowcountry." Though it includes the familiar tourist destinations of Myrtle Beach, Charleston, and Hilton Head, most of the lowcountry is rural. Its citizens live in small towns and sparsely populated communities that struggle with high rates of unemployment and poverty. At the very heart of the lowcountry, near the intersection of two interstate highways, is Orangeburg County Consolidated School District Three, a school system of 3,000 students and seven schools.

From 2009 to 2013, Cynthia Cash-Greene served as superintendent of Orangeburg Three. She grew up in Orangeburg County, attended several of the state's institutions of higher education, and in 1990 earned her doctorate in educational administration. Before becoming superintendent, she rose through the public education ranks of teacher, assistant principal, and principal, then served in one of the state's largest school systems, where she was responsible for supervising 20 principals.

In 2009, there was fortuitous alignment among the interests of Cash-Greene, the Learning Forward Foundation, and an individual funder. A South Carolina resident, Rowena Nylund, was seeking a way to honor the memory of her late daughter by supporting the development of an education leader in the state's lowcountry.

When she learned of the work of the Learning Forward Foundation, Nylund saw the potential for a partnership that would enable an educator to participate in Learning Forward's Academy. She subsequently identified Cash-Greene as an appropriate candidate, brought the Academy opportunity to her attention, and encouraged her to apply. Learning Forward accepted the application, and with Nylund's financial support, the Learning Forward Foundation awarded Cash-Greene an Academy scholarship.

Before Cash-Greene was approached by Nylund, she

had never heard of either Learning Forward or the Academy. But as the new superintendent of a very challenged school system, she realized she needed help. "I knew that, in order to bring about change, I needed to expand my professional network and strategically develop a plan of action," Cash-Greene says.

She was concerned about her periodic absences from the school system that Academy participation required, but by the end of her Academy experience, she concluded, "I could have stayed [in my school district] and not understood the need for the staff's quality professional learning."

Participating in the Academy was a leap of faith for Cash-Greene. She acknowledges that the networking experience was somewhat intimidating at first. "I didn't want to share too much for fear of creating a negative perception of small rural school districts and their lack of resources," she says.

Soon, however, she realized, "I had to trust the experience of the Academy and embrace its purpose. After the first two sessions and the chance to bond with other professional educators regardless of their positions, I was eager to share my discovery of how purposeful professional development supported the overall vision and mission of the system."

Cash-Greene explains how the Academy advanced her learning: "While I always knew that my professional learning should support the work that impacts student growth, I did not realize that this work really involved a change in adult behavior. ... One of my most significant learnings was my need to transfer my learning to those who actually do the work."

Cash-Greene began to think about professional learning differently. When she became superintendent, she found a school district mired in ineffective approaches to professional learning. One-shot sessions without follow-up were the norm. Central office staff rarely participated in professional learning and lacked the expertise necessary to provide schools with useful support. Principals did not visit each other's schools to share experiences and knowledge.

Over time, Cash-Greene instituted practices that were new to the school system. She organized leadership teams

and shared with them what she learned from the Academy as well as resources she obtained there. She implemented districtwide coaching, peer mentoring, vertical and horizontal cluster meetings, and annual leadership team institutes. These initiatives did not always come easily, and Cash-Greene says, "The support I received from the Academy was my source of feedback and reflection."

An excerpt from Cash-Greene's final report to the State Department of Education illustrates the consequence of her leadership and, indirectly, the impact of the Academy and the Learning Forward Foundation:

"District and site-based leadership teams have collaborated and have formulated a plan to overcome the academic deficits that may have existed. The team has led the entire district to adopt the grant-funded Teacher Advancement Program (TAP) as the reform model toward improving instructional practices through professional learning. This grant brings over $6.3 million for three years. This weekly TAP professional learning occurs at the school level with the support of mentor teachers and master teachers."

In 2013, Cash-Greene left the school system to become an education associate with the Office of School Leadership at the South Carolina Department of Education. In this capacity, she continues to draw on her Academy learnings as she works with three different groups of educators: aspiring superintendents, district-level administrators seeking to strengthen their leadership skills, and selected principals from low-performing schools.

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HAPPY
WITH YOUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING? THAT'S NOT ENOUGH

By Frederick Brown

One of my favorite commercials is from Esurance, the online car insurance company. The commercial begins with a woman named Beatrice standing in her living room discussing her recent vacation with two friends. She proudly states, "Instead of mailing everyone my vacation photos, I'm saving a ton of time by posting them to my wall."

Next, the camera zooms out, and we see Beatrice has actually posted all her vacation pictures on the wall of her living room. One friend looks impressed, while the other is quite confused. Later in the commercial, the questioning friend says, "That's not how this works. That's not how *any* of this works!"

So much comes to mind when I see the commercial, but high on the list is the issue of knowing just enough to be dangerous.

I heard the following statement recently from someone who was very proud of the shifts his school had made in its professional learning program: "We now do a much better job of delivering professional learning." The individual went on to describe how happy teachers were upon leaving the building's new and improved professional learning sessions.

When I pushed for an explanation of what was meant by the words "delivering," "happy," and "new and improved," I quickly realized this was a school that had simply freshened up its old professional development days

with a very thin coat of professional learning paint. The reality was that not much had changed. In the spirit of my new friend Beatrice, let's unpack these words just a bit.

DELIVERING

As National Staff Development Council transitioned to Learning Forward, the organization also shifted its language from staff and professional development to professional learning. There were many reasons behind that shift, but high among them was the notion that we shouldn't be trying to deliver professional learning and "develop" teachers and leaders.

Frederick Brown

Instead, Learning Forward advocates for a form of professional learning where the individual is actively engaged in his or her own learning. Often this means the most powerful professional learning happens among grade-level teams that are taking collective responsibility for the students they serve, collecting data that will inform their practices, and assessing their progress. A workshop isn't happening, and a speaker isn't being hired. In this form of professional learning, nothing is being delivered — except maybe some pizza.

NEW AND IMPROVED

On the surface, new and improved sounds wonderful. Perhaps it's a new professional learning computer lab where teachers have access to a wide array of online courses. It might also be a district professional learning center full of comfortable seats, round tables, and giant screens.

The truth is that I've seen some of the worst professional learning in some of the most state-of-the-art facilities. Yes, there are times when it's necessary to bring large groups together to share information, but it's not effective professional learning simply because it's happening in a new building with plenty of plugs and online access.

Instead, imagine a district that brings together its staff to provide an overview of a new initiative or districtwide strategy. Recognizing that job-embedded and team-based professional learning is the pathway to the actual implementation of new practices, this district uses its opening meeting to share information and give teachers and leaders a taste of the new program.

However, this district relies on its standards-based professional learning systems to ensure scaled and sustained implementation. The real work will occur in schools among grade-level and subject-area teams.

HAPPY

Singer-songwriter Pharrell Williams and I like being happy (ask your kids about that reference if it's not ringing a bell), and I love seeing others having pleasant learning experiences. However, it's not enough for teachers or leaders to exit a professional learning experience just feeling happy.

I'd rather they feel challenged, determined, focused, and ready to practice their new learning. I urge schools and districts to measure the effectiveness of their professional learning not by worrying about how content people are but by assessing the actual implementation of newly acquired skills.

If Beatrice were in charge of professional learning, she might say, "Our district is saving a ton of time by delivering new and improved professional learning, and our people couldn't be happier." Well, that's just not how this works. That's not how *any* of this works!

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Frederick Brown (frederick.brown@ learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's director of strategy and development. ■

THE INSTRUCTOR'S BALANCING ACT

WHAT QUALITIES ARE CRITICAL FOR EFFECTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING?

This article is adapted from a blog post on the Learning Forward Exchange. You can read more blog posts or add your own at **http://community.learningforward.org/blogsmain.**

By Jenni Iwanski

I work in a school with a bilingual program. Last week, I attended a workshop for bilingual teachers presented by a phenomenal instructor.

My learning curve is steep. I do not have much personal experience teaching English language learners, and I have only observed in bilingual classrooms.

Much of the workshop was presented in Spanish. At times, the room would erupt in laughter as the instructor also had a great sense of humor — I guess. I don't know Spanish, so I can't say for sure.

But I can tell you this: I was fully engaged the entire time. So how was it that I was so focused as a learner, even though the day's outcomes were clearly well above my current knowledge and skills? And, given that the workshop was designed for bilingual teachers, how was I able to walk away with valuable new information that I could put to use?

Learning happens by design. The workshop leader was purposeful in her work with us that day. Though I struggled to retrieve my limited Spanish vocabulary in order to participate fully in the learning, I couldn't help admiring a presentation that even a novice learner could benefit from. At the same time, experienced teachers were equally engaged, clearly acquiring new learning.

Because I often lead professional learning myself, the experience was a great opportunity for me to reflect as a learner what made the day successful. The instructor used a variety of facilitation strategies, but the workshop was more

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Great professional learning can happen in so many ways. Next semester, I'll be designing a course for my district to support teacher leaders in creating effective professional learning. Brainstorm with me! What qualities do you think are critical for supporting the learning of our colleagues?

jennifer.iwanski@d303.org

than a series of well-orchestrated activities. Her workshop reflected her beliefs about effective adult learning by:

Balancing teaching with learning: The instructor had a lot of information to share about bilingual education. She was an expert on the topic — she had recently published a book — and it was clear that she could speak for hours on the topic. But she didn't.

She masterfully balanced her sharing of new information with opportunities for us to digest and connect it to our own practice. Rarely did 10 minutes pass before we had a chance to turn and talk and process in our groups. There was great potential for a day of information overload. Instead, the new information both educated and inspired me in understanding bilingual instruction.

Accepting all learners: While the instructor encouraged my participation throughout the day, never did she question my level of participation, which was uncharacteristically less than that of my colleagues. While Spanish conversation flowed, I quietly listened.

At times, I attempted short phrases and words in Spanish, coupled with gestures, to enter into the conversation. The instructor knew I was monolingual and encouraged whatever I could contribute. She made me feel as though I belonged.

In the wake of this experience, I wonder what assumptions I make about participants who appear to not fully engage in professional learning. Do I remember that even adults enter into learning at different points? Do I focus on a lack of participation, or do I focus on what participants give? As a learner who felt very much out of place, an instructor who clearly focused on what I could do was critical for my success, even as a novice.

Putting teachers in the role of a student: This instructor is known for her demonstration of instructional techniques. She puts the group into the role of young learners as she steps through her instructional process.

The insight gained from this is remarkable — all of a sudden you begin to understand learning the way your own students might experience it. You become aware of your feelings and the effects of the learning, elevating your commitment for a change. Designing adult learning in ways teachers can better understand the work we ask students to do is incredibly powerful. We don't do this enough.

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Jenni Iwanski (jennifer.iwanski@d303.org) is an instructional coach in St. Charles (Ill.) Community Unit School District 303. ■

CINDY HARRISON

This was a thought-provoking post. You analyzed a great learning experience in a way that will help us all as workshop presenters. I sometimes wonder if I can be as effective as you describe her to be.

I loved the description of ways she accepted you as a learner even though you could not speak the language. I wonder if and how we do that in classrooms with our second language learners. I hope we welcome them with open arms and make them feel included.

The discussion of teaching and learning balance is often a dilemma for us as workshop facilitators. Remembering that all of our adult learners come with lots of knowledge and experience should make us very willing to start with current knowledge and then move to adding to that knowledge. Using a variety of ways to have participants process is a challenge in that it needs to be meaningful and frequent.

Thanks for making me think and reconsider my own practice.

JENNI IWANSKI

Designing professional learning for adults is changing as rapidly as classroom practices are changing. I'm lucky to have had so many examples of meaningful professional learning on which to reflect, too!

CHRIS BRYAN

I think you identified some key characteristics of adult learning. You identified balancing teaching and learning. I think this is such an important thing for us to remember. It reminds me of the idea that the person who does the talking does the learning.

Also, acknowledging that adults bring so many varied experiences and levels of readiness to the professional learning experience is important for us to remember. When we ask our learners to identify a personal learning goal for a session, we help them find a way to make the learning meaningful for themselves. I love that you found a way to make meaning of the session you engaged in by relating it to what you know about effective professional learning.

JENNI IWANSKI

"The person who does the talking does the learning" is such a powerful mantra for us to remember when we design professional learning. Thanks for adding your ideas to my running list of characteristics of effective professional learning.

TRACK DATA. TWEAK INSTRUCTION. REPEAT.

A CONSTANT FOCUS ON STUDENT PROGRESS BOOSTS ACHIEVEMENT IN TEXAS DISTRICT

By Valerie von Frank

What kind of data does the Aldine (Texas) Independent School District collect on each of the 64,000 students in the system? Raymond Stubblefield just laughs.

"Really, anything you want to know about a child," the Stephens Elementary School principal said. "We work hard at making sure we're looking at the high leverage points that affect student learning and making sure we have multiple sources of data."

These include traditional information: progress reports, grades, and state assessment results, including a statewide reading inventory given three times a year and state language acquisition tests. The school has a chart for each student with longitudinal data, such as whether the student has ever been retained, school history, and pre-K attendance.

In addition, the school data sheet includes teachers' running records of the child's fluency, comprehension, and campus formative assessment information updated every three weeks, and districtwide common assessments from every subject benchmarked every 18 weeks. Teachers have additional progress information from student portfolios and writing folders.

In a test-barraged culture, Aldine stands out as a district that has continually adjusted how and what student data it uses. More importantly, as Priscilla Ridgway, assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction, points out, "We don't just collect the data. We do actually look at it."

Aldine ISD uses what it sees to constantly adjust — to plan what teachers need to know to better instruct students and to offer additional support where schools are lagging.
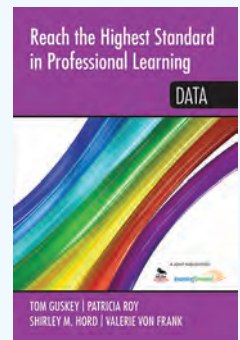
A NEW BEGINNING

Superintendent Wanda Bamberg recalls the late 1990s, when Aldine did not have the positive reputation it now
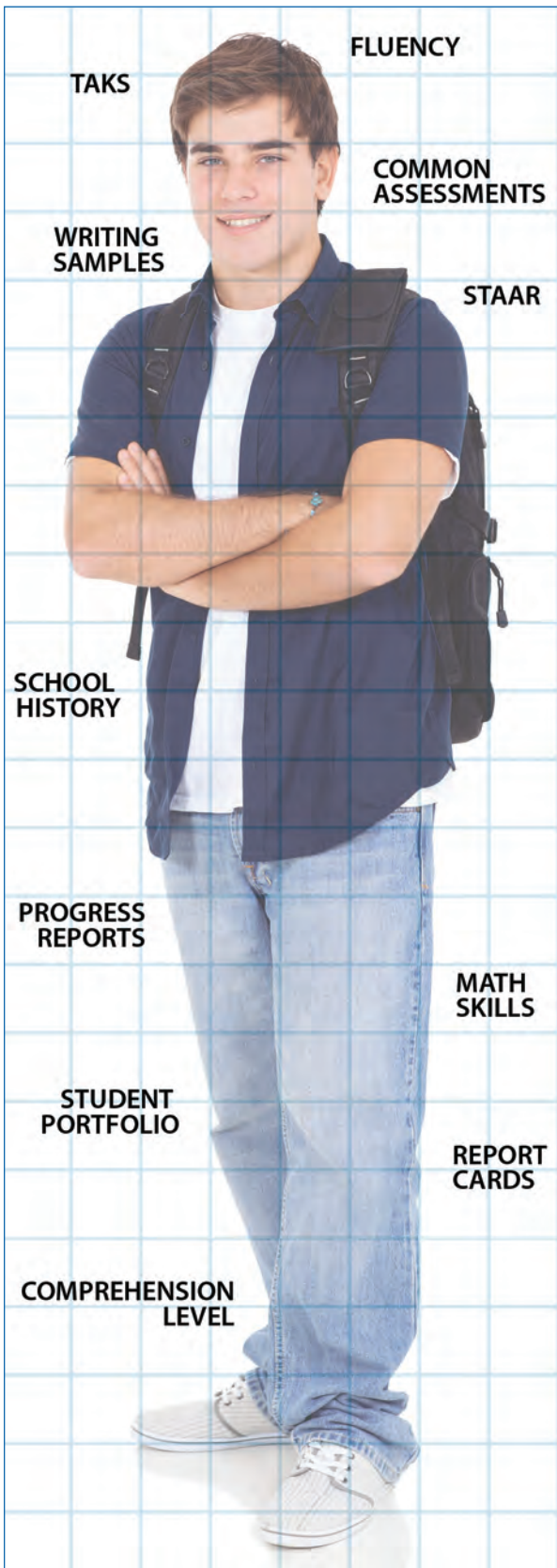
has. Student proficiency was low. Bamberg was then in charge of curriculum and instruction. In a meeting with the superintendent and deputy superintendent, the three reviewed what information they would need in order to use a scorecard based on the Baldrige quality framework.

"I'm looking at all this, and I remember leaning over to (then-deputy superintendent) Nadine (Kujawa) and saying, 'This looks like a whole lot of work,' and she said, 'It does,' " Bamberg said. "But once we started it and started looking at goals and targets and asking questions, we realized it made a difference in what we were able to do as a district.
"You realize you perform better as a system because you're constantly looking at things that will make you say either, 'Hey, this is good; it's working,' or 'What are we going to do now? This is not going very well.' And if you wait until the year's over to look, it'll all come back and bite you."

Aldine's proactive approach to using data has resulted in steadily improving student achievement for a decade — with a student population that is mostly poor, highly mobile, nearly all students of color, and includes a large number of English language learners. Those characteristics, though, don't define the way the district sees "our kids," the phrase the educators there consistently used.

"The first thing I have to say is, our students are quite capable of learning," Ridgway said about her district.

Indeed, students' achievement has been acknowledged repeatedly at the state and national levels. Aldine won the

Broad Prize for Urban Education in 2009, chosen from among the 100 largest urban districts in the country, for demonstrating "the greatest overall performance and improvement in student achievement while reducing achievement gaps among low-income students and students of color" according to the organization website (www.broadprize.org). The district had been a finalist for the prize three times before — in 2004, 2005, and 2008.

Broad selected the district because students exceeded the level of achievement predicted based on their socioeconomic status, and African-American and Hispanic students narrowed the performance gap with white students in reading and in math at the elementary and middle grades. The district outperformed other Texas districts with similar demographics in 2007 in both reading and math at all grade levels.

The Texas Education Agency, the state agency responsible for public education, featured the district for its "collaborative monitoring and intervention" in its Best Practices Clearinghouse, reporting that the achievement levels of the district's at-risk, limited English proficient, and economically disadvantaged students on the state standardized exam were statistically significant compared with similar students in peer districts (Texas Education Agency, n.d.).

These recognitions are the result of a clearly articulated curriculum aligned with state standards that is continually monitored at all levels, from teacher to principal to area superintendents and central office administrators. When data show students aren't meeting expectations, the system kicks in with

ALDINE ISD GRADES 3-11 SCORES
TEXAS ASSESSMENT OF KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Percentage proficient and above					
School year	Reading	Writing	Math	Social studies	Science
2006-07	88%	94%	78%	91%	67%
2007-08	90%	93%	81%	93%	69%
2008-09	90%	93%	83%	95%	76%
2009-10	90%	94%	86%	97%	84%
2010-11*	87%	90%	85%	96%	81%

*Texas switched its state assessment in 2011-12 to STAAR, a more challenging standardized exam that resulted in fewer students across the state reaching levels considered acceptable by the state. In 2013, 71% of all students in the Aldine district achieved at satisfactory or above on STAAR, an increase from 66% in 2012.

professional development for teachers to improve those weak areas. The data don't drive the district's success, but the information is the reason educators are able to continually improve, the superintendent said.

"Using data has helped us catch students (who are not succeeding) faster and earlier, and it's helped us be able to monitor our instruction better," Bamberg said.

CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

The change in the system began with an emphasis on curriculum, Bamberg said. District leaders formed teams of teachers to develop a common, districtwide curriculum. Teachers studied state expectations at every grade level in all content areas to create a set of grade-level expectations. They also met in vertical teams so each grade continued to build student knowledge, and the district created pacing guides so teachers would address the same skills at the same time during the year.

"We recognized that we have kids who move around, sometimes four or five times a year," Bamberg said. "If one school was following one scope and sequence and another school was following another scope and sequence, even kids moving within our own district would have gaps in what they were learning."

While the pacing is nonnegotiable, teachers have leeway in how they present the lesson. They all need to teach the targeted skills using district-approved materials, but how they work with the materials and how they meet the needs of their own students is up to them.

"We don't script the teachers," Ridgway said. "What is taught is spelled out, and we use a lot of the strategies that are best practices and research-based strategies across the district. But my chocolate cake might be a different recipe from your chocolate cake. It'll still be a chocolate cake. We don't take away the teacher's creativity or tell them every word to say and how to say it. That's why they're teachers."

ALIGNMENT

Once the district had curriculum guides in place for every subject K-12 and aligned with state standards, teachers had several years to work with the new expectations and develop lessons. Then they were back to work again on a new challenge — common districtwide assessments. Teams developed the assessments based on the outlined grade and subject expectations. Teachers also collaborated by subject and grade level at some schools to develop campuswide tests to augment the districtwide assessments.

ALDINE ISD STATISTICS

- Aldine Independent School District is in Harris County, Texas, just north of Houston.
- The district has **five** high schools, **five** 9th-grade schools, **10** middle schools, **11** intermediate schools, **33** elementary schools, **eight** early childhood/pre-K schools, and a pre-kindergarten campus.
- Total enrollment is about **67,500** students, with **86%** eligible for free or reduced-price meals.
- A handful of students speak one of five languages other than English, and an additional **31%** are Spanish-speaking English language learners.
- Its student population is **2%** white, **1%** Asian/Pacific Islander, **70%** Hispanic, **26%** African-American, and **1%** other.

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THE VIEW FROM THREE LEVELS

WANDA BAMBERG, superintendent

"We had to ensure all kids were getting the instruction they were supposed to have as the first step. We said, 'We're all going to teach this,' and outlined strategies. After one year, people saw what a difference it made for kids, and teachers were looking at their own data that showed our kids did so much better that year than they did the prior year. When they realized our kids really could do it, they were willing to do anything. Then we moved on to creating common assessments."

RAYMOND STUBBLEFIELD, Stephens Elementary School principal

"We've always done data analysis in our teams, but now we are really being intentional about drilling down to student work and student thinking and student learning instead of just working on the planning and preparation side. As a campus, we have collective targeted areas. Any decision that we make on our campus is always based on data. It's always based on student needs that we identify through data analysis."

BRENNA DORGAN, 4th-grade language arts teacher

"Third- and 4th-grade language arts teachers plan together, and within that team is where we do most of our data analysis. We keep one spreadsheet for each student where we're trying to see the kid's progress, benchmarks, report card grades, progress reports, comprehension levels, fluency. We're trying to make sure it all aligns and that we're being responsive to the students' needs when we're planning together, when we're planning in our own classrooms, and in the conversations that we're holding with students. It's all based on evidence and data. We're being proactive as well as reactive in our analysis."

Early on, Bamberg said, testing was more frequent and depended on how students performed. When the district found a weak area, for example, students would be monitored every few weeks to determine whether teachers were keeping on top of the planned curriculum.

"Until you get your curriculum out there and everybody is following it, assessments are no good," Bamberg said. "We have to ensure that every child is getting access to what's supposed to be taught at that grade level. Then we have to be sure it's assessed appropriately.

"When we first started giving the districtwide tests, the teachers would complain and say, 'That's a bad item,' " she continued. "From time to time, we did have a bad item, and we'd throw it out. But what more often happened is we discovered the teacher wasn't teaching that concept to the level of difficulty we were testing it on. We were following the state expectations for that concept, so it was truly a matter of our instruction not being aligned with what was written in the curriculum and what we were testing. That has helped us focus on improving instruction, and we use the data to improve instruction.

"It also helped us use the data to keep up with students and not wait until they got an F on their report cards to intervene and give them some assistance."

TRACKING DATA

To keep track of all the data, the district purchased eduphoria!, an online application that can be used to track teacher appraisals, professional development, facilities usage, lesson planning, and student achievement data. A second system tracks additional student information, such as discipline and attendance.

Through eduphoria!, educators have nearly instant access to student assessment results and can have the data disaggregated and results color-coded. The idea is that a teacher can give a class a test, walk the answer sheets down to a scanner, and by the time the teacher returns to the classroom, have the assessment results waiting online.

The teacher then knows how many students missed any one question; how students performed by gender, socioeconomic status, race, and ethnicity; and can have results broken down by students receiving program services such as English language learner or special education. The information allows the teacher to immediately address concerns and reteach content to students who need reinforcement.

"We wanted that teacher to be able to look at that data and be able to make changes in classroom instruction the very next day," Bamberg said.

In addition to classroom teachers reviewing the data, principals are responsible for monitoring student progress in order to support teachers and students. Principals in each feeder system within the district meet every six weeks with an area superintendent to review the data from their schools. They look at grade-level and subject results.

The district's curriculum directors monitor the data and pass reports to the superintendent's cabinet, comprising assistant superintendents and area superintendents. Bamberg looks at districtwide results two to four times a year in meetings with the area superintendents. She also checks informally in visits to schools.

"A really good principal is able to tell me which group is struggling and what they are doing to address that issue," Bamberg said. "They know who's struggling because they're looking at their data weekly or biweekly, whereas I'm not looking at that until it's been a grading period or a benchmark assessment. The most important pieces of the data are going to reside on our scorecard, and that's taken to the board, and then pieces of the scorecard wind up on my evaluation."

The superintendent also meets with principals in the summer to review their results. She asks the principals of schools

with standout scores in an area, such as middle school math or high school biology, to present to the group information about how they achieved that result.

"A lot of times," Bamberg said, "it's a matter of letting the schools know that this is important and we're looking at this data — that keeps it on their radar. One of the things that central office does is to support and remind people, and we always make sure the system's in place so a school can look at the data easily."

SUPPORT FOR STUDENT LEARNING

Bamberg said district leaders needed to change the culture so everyone understood the raised expectations and also needed to align teachers' professional learning with student improvement goals.

"One of the things we had to work through the culture to do was to create the expectation that there is going to be a common planning meeting, and it's a data meeting," Bamberg said. "Teachers had to get used to the idea that, 'We're going to come with our results, you're each going to have your results, and we're going to talk about what the kids did well on and what they did poorly on.' "

Teachers identify areas of student need, and then they work to develop the skills they need to address those specific areas. District support includes staff at all levels working continuously on learning ways to improve instruction.

"Using data has changed professional learning in that we try to tie learning back to a specific issue," Bamberg said. "I remember when we would go through a needs assessment where teachers would give us all these topics they wanted to learn about. We don't do that anymore. We use the data to determine what the topics are. A teacher might say, 'I want some more professional development on manipulatives,' but we're going to use the data to tie our professional development more specifically to the concepts and the overall strategies that are good for math."

Several systemwide strategies for professional learning are in place.

Common planning time. District leaders encourage principals to schedule time for teacher collaboration during the day. Teachers also frequently meet on their own time after school. Secondary schools generally are able to schedule common meeting time, as do some elementary schools. As teachers review their data and plan lessons together, they share strategies.

Districtwide learning. District staff review state assessment data each summer to make curricular and professional development decisions. The district focuses on common goals, such as developing professional learning communities or a writing strategy, and provides districtwide professional learning. Educators are required to engage in 40 hours a year of formal professional development.

Educators have options to complete some district learning opportunities online. They can take a course and print a certificate at completion. The district also can evaluate the online professional development through tests of the content at the end of the course in addition to a brief survey of the attendee's response to the course effectiveness.

An intranet database allows teachers to access model lessons colleagues have created and the district's curriculum directors have screened for quality. "We need to make sure people understand what that standard said, what it looks like when you teach it, what products could look like," said Sara Ptomey, executive director of curriculum and instruction.

Curriculum directors and skill specialists. The district restructured central office staff to create program director positions, three each for math and English, specializing in pre-K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. Two directors each cover science and social studies, divided pre-K-6 and 7-12. Curriculum directors also are in place for visual arts, performing arts, dyslexia, and library media services. Program directors are responsible for the curriculum and instructional materials. They review the benchmark assessments and provide professional development.

"In many districts, you'll find a professional development department, an assessment department, and a curriculum department," Ptomey said. "But they don't talk to each other. Our district thinks that's ridiculous," and so created the curriculum director positions.

Curriculum directors offer professional development during the workday, evenings, and over the summer. They offer sessions at a principal's request; coach in the school, such as demonstrating guided reading to teachers; or facilitate a teacher team during teachers' common planning period. They visit classrooms to observe teachers and provide guidance and feedback.

A primary focus, however, is to coach schools' assistant principals for curriculum, the principals, and school skill specialists. Every campus has at least one skill specialist, and most have a specialist in language arts and one in math. Many campuses allocate Title I money to additional support to have a specialist who may focus on certain grades, such as just primary, pre-K-2, and have another for 3rd and 4th grades. Decisions are made at the school level.

Each nine weeks, curriculum directors meet for three hours with skill specialists in their content area for professional learning specific to what students will learn in the coming nine weeks.

To get everybody speaking the same language, Ptomey said the curriculum directors then meet for 45 minutes with assistant principals from the campuses in each content area, and with principals for a total of an hour, each director providing a 15-minute overview of what instruction should look like in the coming grading period.

District balanced literacy trainers and balanced numeracy trainers also provide school specialists with monthly professional development in those areas. The goal is that, with lead-

ership support, the specialists offer professional development to teachers at their sites. Grade-level or department chairs or a school skill specialist lead teacher data meetings and help teachers focus on strands that may need to be retaught.

Each curriculum director also is responsible for five "accelerated" campuses, schools that are showing signs of falling behind academically. The directors spend time weekly on each campus to provide additional instructional support in identified areas of need.

"We do a lot of training of trainers because we're so large (that) it's difficult to pull teachers out during the day," Ridgway said. "We depend a lot on campus leaders to learn and go back and provide support."

Learning for school leaders. School leaders meet with the curriculum directors additionally, in quarterly data meetings that also include area superintendents. They review common assessment data and decide next steps for curriculum and instruction. When these teams identify broader, districtwide strategies, Aldine makes sure that principals and assistant principals are trained first so they know what to look for to evaluate how teachers are implementing what they are learning, because the administrators "are the ones who are going to be walking in and out of the classrooms every day," Bamberg said. "You don't want your teachers to have more knowledge about an initiative than the people who are going to monitor their instruction."

LONG-TERM COMMITMENT

Using data is a long-term commitment, Bamberg said.

Bamberg said district leaders again are evaluating their student evaluations, looking at every grade level and subject to identify which might need additional assessment. In addition, she said the district is moving to project-based student assessments that are more seamless within the course of teachers' instruction rather than the paper-and-pencil, multiple-choice versions.

"We're trying to do a mix of things that will help kids do a better job with the rigor and the writing," Bamberg said. "We had to look at what every kid is having to do, so we're trying to stagger a lot of the exams. Our testing schedule has gotten a lot of revision over the years."

Ptomey said the district has reviewed its needs and is working to continue to improve some fundamentals — the graduation rate and reading. The state instituted a new standardized exam with more rigor, and the district's achievement scores dipped.

"We know we really need additional support for teachers on teaching reading," Ptomey said. "Our scores mean 30% of our kids can't read at grade level. That's not good. Although there are people who would be very happy with that (given the student population), that's inexcusable. It's a horrible sense of urgency to make sure every kid can read at grade level."

This focus on monitoring each student's progress and constantly tweaking instruction is what keeps Aldine moving forward.

"It's just a part of our culture," Ridgway said. "It's what we do."

REFERENCE

Texas Education Agency. (n.d.). *Collaborative monitoring and intervention model — Aldine ISD.* Available at www.tea.state.tx.us/Best_Practice_Summaries/Collaborative_Monitoring_and_Intervention_Model--Aldine_ISD.aspx.

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Valerie von Frank (valerievonfrank@aol.com) is an education writer and editor of Learning Forward's books. ■

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

The article, "Track data. Tweak instruction. Repeat," on pp. 44-50 illustrates how the Aldine (Texas) Independent School District uses data to improve teacher practices and raise student achievement. Use these questions to reflect on how your district uses data.

1. How do educators in the Aldine district use the data they collect to affect teacher learning in ways that will improve student learning? How does your district use the data it collects?

2. What does the case study demonstrate about how data can be used in professional learning at the school level? At the system level?

3. What is the district's role in collecting data? What do you see in the case that is noteworthy about the district's role? What drawbacks are evident in the district's data collection? What does your system do at the district level to use data?

4. Who should decide how much and what types of data to collect? How did Aldine make those choices? Who currently makes those determinations in your system?

5. What additional sources of data would help teachers, school leaders, and district administrators in your system make decisions about professional learning?

6. What evidence does Aldine use for how effective professional learning is for teachers? What evidence does your district have for the impact of professional learning?

IC MAPS

FOR EXTERNAL ROLES

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning establish the core attributes of effective professional learning. All people and entities with either direct or indirect responsibility for students' education could benefit from well-designed and effective professional learning, but understanding what the standards look like when they are in operation can be a challenge.

Innovation Configuration (IC) maps offer a solution to this problem. IC maps identify and describe the major components of new practice — in this case, the Standards for Professional Learning — in operation. The IC maps show a continuum of specific behaviors that facilitate the achievement of desired outcomes within each standard. The range of behaviors is displayed from left to right, with the most desirable at the left and moving to least desirable on the right. Naming these specific behaviors is intended to help educators move toward the highest levels of implementation.

IC maps have been created for 12 distinct roles in education that share responsibility for professional learning. These are presented in three volumes:

- **School-based roles:** teachers, coaches/teacher leaders, principals, and school leadership teams;
- **School system roles:** central office staff, director of professional learning, superintendent, and school board; and
- **External roles:** education agency providers, professional associations, institutions of higher education, and external partners.

The four groups in the external roles volume support professional learning beyond the local school and school system by establishing policies, providing resources and technical assistance, and preparing and supporting professional learning leaders so that professional learning achieves its goal of increasing educator effectiveness and student achievement.

The IC maps on pp. 53-56 outline for external partners the three key ideas of the Outcomes standard and how they look in practice. External partners include vendors, technical assistance providers, regional centers, public and private agency staff, individuals, and others that provide professional learning to support educators at all levels of the educational system.

MetLife Foundation
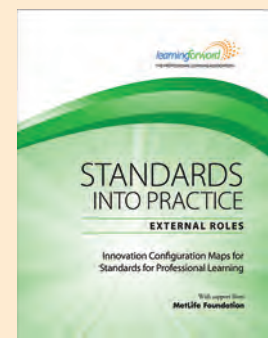
7.1 Meet performance standards

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Desired outcome 7.1.1: Uses educator performance standards to identify professional learning needs.					
• Deconstructs, with staff and clients, educator performance standards to identify the knowledge, skills, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors, with staff and clients, the content of professional learning for alignment with educator performance standards and goals.	• Deconstructs, with staff or clients, educator performance standards to identify the knowledge, skills, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors, with staff or clients, the content of professional learning for alignment with educator performance standards and goals.	• Deconstructs educator performance standards to identify the knowledge, skills, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors the content of professional learning for alignment with educator performance standards and goals.	• Deconstructs educator performance standards to identify the knowledge, skills, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals.	• Studies educator performance standards.	• Fails to use educator performance standards to identify professional learning goals.
Desired outcome 7.1.2: Engages in professional learning to meet performance goals.					
• Develops, with supervisor and colleagues, knowledge about education organization role expectations and responsibilities. • Develops, with supervisors and colleagues, team and individual performance goals. • Participates, with colleagues, in agency, team, and individual professional learning to develop knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices reflected in performance standards and goals.	• Develops, with supervisor, knowledge about education organization role expectations and responsibilities. • Develops, with supervisor, individual performance goals. • Participates, with colleagues, in agency, team, and individual professional learning to develop knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices reflected in performance standards and goals.	• Develops knowledge about education organization role expectations and responsibilities. • Sets individual performance goals. • Participates, with colleagues, in team and individual professional learning to develop knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices reflected in performance standards and goals.	• Sets individual performance goals. • Participates in individual professional learning to develop knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices reflected in performance standards and goals.	• Engages in professional learning unrelated to educator performance standards and goals.	• Fails to engage in professional learning related to performance standards and goals.

Source: Learning Forward. (2014). *Standards into practice: External roles. Innovation Configuration maps for Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

EXTERNAL PARTNER / Outcomes

7.2 Address learning outcomes

	Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
Desired outcome 7.2.1: Uses student learning outcomes to identify professional learning needs.						
	• Deconstructs, with staff and clients, student content standards and learning outcomes to identify the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors, with staff and clients, the content of internally and externally supported professional learning for alignment with student content standards and learning outcomes.	• Deconstructs, with staff or clients, student content standards and learning outcomes to identify the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors, with staff or clients, the content of internally and externally supported professional learning for alignment with student content standards and learning outcomes.	• Deconstructs student content standards and learning outcomes to identify the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals. • Monitors the content of internally and externally supported professional learning for alignment with student content standards and learning outcomes.	• Deconstructs student content standards and learning outcomes to identify the knowledge, skills, dispositions, and practices needed to achieve professional learning goals.	• Studies student content standards and learning outcomes.	• Fails to use student content standards and learning outcomes to identify professional learning needs.
Desired outcome 7.2.2: Engages in professional learning to increase student results.						
	• Engages, with supervisors and colleagues, in professional learning, coaching, feedback, and reflection to improve effects of own performance on student learning outcomes.	• Engages, with colleagues, in professional learning, coaching, feedback, and reflection to improve effects of own performance on student learning outcomes.	• Engages in professional learning, coaching, feedback, and reflection to improve effects of own performance on student learning outcomes.	• Engages in professional learning unrelated to student content standards and learning outcomes.	Fails to engage in professional learning to increase student results.	

Source: Learning Forward. (2014). *Standards into practice: External roles. Innovation Configuration maps for Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

EXTERNAL PARTNER / Outcomes

7.3 Build coherence

Desired outcome: 7.3.1: Develops capacity to leverage professional learning to strengthen coherence within the education system.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
• Engages staff and clients in developing knowledge and skills about coherence within the education system. • Provides coaching and other support to staff and clients to leverage coherence within the education system. • Disseminates the benefits, structure, and operation of coherence within the education system and research and evidence-based practices for developing it.	• Engages staff or clients in developing knowledge and skills about coherence within the education system. • Provides coaching and other support to staff or clients to leverage coherence within the education system. • Disseminates the benefits, structure, and operation of coherence within the education system and research and evidence-based practices for developing it.	• Develops own knowledge and skills about coherence within the education system.	• Fails to develop own and clients' knowledge and skills about coherence within the education system.		

Desired outcome 7.3.2: Builds coherence between professional learning and other system and school initiatives.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
• Develops, with staff and clients, understanding about the relationships between school and system initiatives and professional learning. • Promotes, with staff and clients, the integration of professional learning with other systems (data, assessment, curriculum, human resources, etc.).	• Develops, with staff or clients, an understanding about the relationships between school and system initiatives and professional learning. • Promotes, with staff or clients, the integration of professional learning with other systems (data, assessment, curriculum, human resources, etc.).	• Develops an understanding about the relationships between school and system initiatives and professional learning. • Suggests the integration professional learning with other systems (data, assessment, curriculum, human resources, etc.).	• Explains the relationships between school and system initiatives and professional learning.	• Fails to build congruence between professional learning and school or system initiatives.	

Source: Learning Forward. (2014). *Standards into practice: External roles. Innovation Configuration maps for Standards for Professional Learning.* Oxford, OH: Author.

EXTERNAL PARTNER / Outcomes

7.3 Build coherence

Desired outcome 7.3.3: Links professional learning with past experiences.

Level 1	Level 2	Level 3	Level 4	Level 5	Level 6
• Requires that staff and clients collect, analyze, and use data about educators' past experiences with professional learning, the content, and change initiatives when planning and implementing professional learning. • Collects, analyzes, and uses data about educators' past experiences with professional learning, the content, and change initiatives when planning and implementing professional learning.	• Recommends that staff or clients collect, analyze, and use data about educators' past experiences with professional learning, the content, and change initiatives when planning and implementing professional learning. • Collects, analyzes, and uses data about educators' past experiences with professional learning, the content, and change initiatives when planning and implementing professional learning.	• Collects, analyzes, and uses data about educators' past experiences with professional learning, the content, and change initiatives when planning and implementing professional learning.	• Fails to link educators' past experiences with professional learning.		

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Michael Ungar

Steve Gross
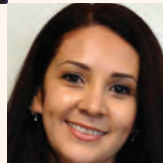
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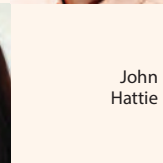
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HOW CHANGE HAPPENS

http://bit.ly/1ij4Vqg

Learning Forward Senior Advisor Joellen Killion says the process of learning to accomplish change doesn't happen overnight:

"Principals cannot perfect the implementation of new teacher evaluation systems within a single day's workshop. Nor can teachers revamp their instructional practices to place greater responsibility on students to co-construct knowledge and apply learning in authentic ways as a result of a two-day institute. While one- or two-day institutes may serve as a springboard for gaining baseline knowledge and skills, it is in the application of the learning that deeper understanding, meaning, and value emerge."

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TEACHER-COACH RELATIONSHIPS

www.learningforward.org/publications/tools-for-learning-schools

The Summer 2014 issue of *Tools for Learning Schools* examines the relationships between teachers and coaches. Joellen Killion, Cindy Harrison, Chris Bryan, and Heather Clifton outline six key elements necessary for strong, productive teacher-coach relationships: Create effective agreements, build capacity, communicate, allow teacher voices, encourage feedback, and manage resistance and conflict. Tools in this issue include a sample partnership agreement between instructional coach and teacher; a staff survey for coaches to collect data on teacher needs; and a sample description of coaching activities to guide coaches and teams.

LEARNING GUIDE FOR PRINCIPALS

www.learningforward.org/publications/the-principal-story-learning-guide

The Principal Story Learning Guide is a free web-based professional learning guide geared toward those who prepare and develop aspiring or current school leaders as well as for educators working to improve their own practice. Created with the support of The Wallace Foundation, the guide uses excerpts from the award-winning PBS documentary, *The Principal Story*, to illustrate five key practices of effective principals. *The Principal Story* is a one-hour film portraying the challenges principals face in turning around low-performing public schools and raising student achievement. Learners work through a progression of directed experiences using a mix of film clips and activities. View clips from the film, download a facilitator guide and site map, and find related resources.
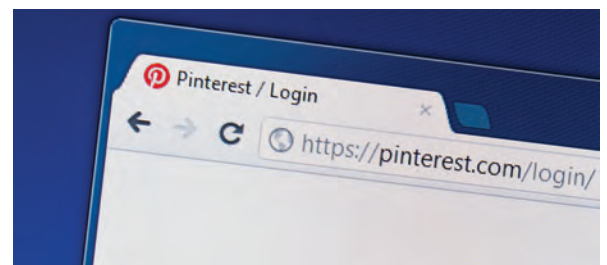
Research on K-12 math professional development falls short

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

Researchers conclude that schools and school districts have limited causal evidence on which to base decisions about mathematics professional development. This study identified only five studies from more than 900 that met all the criteria, including the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards, the highest standards for measuring the effectiveness of professional learning. The paucity of effective studies leaves practitioners and policymakers without clear guidance for decisions related to K-12 mathematics professional development.

Question

The study sought to answer a single research question: What does the causal research say are effective math professional development interventions for K-12 teachers aimed at improving student achievement?

Methodology

The authors established four criteria for conducting a literature search for K-12 mathematics professional

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Joellen Killion (joellen.killion@ learningforward.org) is senior advisor to Learning Forward. In each issue of *JSD*, Killion explores a recent research study to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.

At a glance

Researchers examined 910 studies of professional development to identify effective K-12 mathematics interventions. Overall, the study concludes that there is limited guidance based on causal research to guide mathematics professional development interventions for K-12 teachers.

THE STUDY

Gersten, R., Taylor, M.J., Keys, T.D., Rolfhus, E., & Newman-Gonchar, R. (2014). *Summary of research on the effectiveness of math professional development approaches* (REL 2014-010). Washington, DC: U.S. Department of Education, Institute of Education Sciences, National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, Regional Educational Laboratory Southeast. Available at http:// ies.ed.gov/ncee/edlabs/projects/project.asp?projectID=391.

development. The research:
1. Focused on mathematics professional development to improve K-12 teachers' content knowledge and instruction to improve student learning in mathematics;
2. Was conducted between January 2006 and June 2012 or identified in *Reviewing the Evidence on How Teacher Professional Development Affects Student Achievement* (Yoon et al, 2007), a study that examined 1,300 studies of the effects of professional development on student achievement to determine which met the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards;
3. Included K-12 math teachers and students only in the United States; and
4. Employed a randomized control or quasi-experimental research design.

Of the original 910 studies identified, 643 met the Phase 1 screening criteria. The second phase screening criteria included an intervention, program, or product for mathematics professional development for K-12 mathematics and employed either an experimental or quasi-experimental research design. After the Phase 2 screening, 47 studies remained.

Phase 3 screening criteria filtered out 15 studies that did not focus specifically on the effectiveness of math professional development and those that did not employ a quasi-experimental or experimental research design. Effectiveness studies examined whether the professional development led to improvements in student achievement.

Of the 32 remaining studies, five studies met the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards with or without reservation, meaning they

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

Researchers provide additional confirmation that practitioners have little guidance from experimental or quasi-experimental research studies to guide decisions about K-12 mathematics professional development. Studies that meet What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards are obviously limited. The number of studies failing to employ effectiveness measures that meet What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards calls to question both the quality and intensity of professional learning intervention and the usefulness of past and current research designs.

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies of professional development require substantial investments and will continue to be infrequent and produce limited effects without better designed interventions, additional investments, and more consistency among researchers on what effective professional learning is.

Additional experimental studies may be useful to provide deeper understanding about the effectiveness of professional learning, particularly if they are spread across content areas and employ professional learning interventions that meet all the Standards for Professional Learning.

Until these opportunities occur, researchers must continue to study the effects of professional development using other research designs. Practitioners must both analyze and implement effective professional learning. Practitioners, too, must commit to evaluate and share the results of professional learning to expand the field's knowledge and refine its practice.

used either a quasi-experimental or experimental research design. Of the five, two resulted in positive impact on student learning, one had limited impact, and two had no impact.

Analysis

Researchers used multiple screening phases to examine the pool of research studies identified. Researchers used the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards as a screening tool because the standards describe the highest quality in determining the effects of professional development.

In the third phase, What Works Clearinghouse-certified reviewers examined each study using the *WWC Procedures and Standards Handbook (Version 2.1)*. A second reviewer examined each study for compliance with the evidence standards with or without reservations. A senior reviewer verified the accuracy of each review and reconciled any discrepancies. The study, while using the What Works Clearinghouse criteria, is not considered a What Works Clearinghouse study.

Results

An initial identification of 910 studies resulted in five studies that met the rigorous evidence standards for determining effects on student achievement. Of the five studies, two demonstrated a positive impact on student math performance. One resulted in limited effects on student math performance. Two demonstrated no impact on student math performance.

Limitations

Several shortcomings of the study exist. Two of the reported professional development interventions that failed to impact teaching practices and student achievement were incorporated into a single study. In this study, researchers treat the two interventions as separate studies, noting that each intervention is a separate study.

The report is a significant limitation of this study. The depth of the report leaves questions about the research methodology and the review process. For example, did each phase of the screening employ two reviewers and a senior reviewer?

The report provides inadequate information about the professional development and assumes that all treatments of professional development were of equal quality and intensity. For example, did the professional development incorporate math content and pedagogy, modeling, coaching, implementation support, or other features associated with effective professional development? Including more information about the nature of professional development will not change the results of the studies, but it might provide information more useful to practitioners.

The report fails to specify if the five studies met the What Works Clearinghouse evidence standards with or without reservations. This information, if included, would provide guidance for both researchers and practitioners alike.

Both researchers and practitioners interested in understanding the effects of professional development would likely be interested in knowing how researchers measured the effects of professional development on student achievement.

The study question focused on causal research as the criteria. Researchers identified a considerable pool of studies. What conclusions can be drawn about the effects of mathematics professional development across all forms of research? What information can be gleaned from examining professional development studies that used other research designs?

A question lingers about the reason for this study not being identified as a What Works Clearinghouse study despite its use of the established evidence standards. ∎

WRITE FOR JSD

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Learning Forward is eager to read manuscripts from educators at every level in every position. If your work includes a focus on effective professional learning, we want to hear your story.

JSD PUBLISHES A RANGE OF TYPES OF ARTICLES, INCLUDING:

- First-person accounts of change efforts;
- Practitioner-focused articles about school- and district-level initiatives;
- Program descriptions and results from schools, districts, or external partners;
- How-tos from practitioners and thought leaders; and
- Protocols and tools with guidance on use and application.

WHAT WE LOOK FOR

When *JSD* reviewers read articles, here are the top considerations in determining if an article is a good fit.

- Does the article cover professional learning that is aligned with or supportive of the Standards for Professional Learning?
- Will readers gain information, ideas, or inspiration they can use to advance their own practice?
- Is the article geared towards practitioners working in or with schools or districts?
- Does the article show evidence that that the ideas or programs covered lead to changed practices for educators and/or improved results for students?

KEY TOPICS

Regardless of the theme of an issue, we are always happy to consider articles about these topics:

- Professional learning that leads to student success.

- Common Core and how professional learning supports effective implementation.

- Use of technology in professional learning.

- Content-specific professional learning — how your learning supports student advancement in mathematics, science, literacy, language arts, social studies, music, art, etc.

- Role-specific professional learning addressing the needs of principals, teachers, instructional coaches, administrators, etc.

- Population-specific professional learning — for example, what professional learning helps practitioners support English language learners, students in high-poverty areas, students with special needs, students in rural or urban areas, etc.

- How your professional learning aligns with or illustrates the Standards for Professional Learning.

See 2015 themes at www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.

abstracts

Workplace wisdom:
What educators can learn
from the business world.
By Sheri S. Williams and John W. Williams

What lessons can we learn from business to support and advocate for educator learning? A human resources professional and an educator offer a business perspective and an education perspective on common practices that could be used to sustain professional development in the school and the workplace and help educators acquire the knowledge and skills to support student achievement. Mentoring, collaboration, and leadership are keys to building educator capacity and responding to the needs of diverse students.

4 schools, 1 goal:
University-district partnership nets results
for struggling readers.
By Rosemarye T. Taylor and William R. Gordon II

After the East Learning Community in central Florida experienced unacceptable learning gains in high school reading on the statewide assessment test, the community's area executive director and a university partner designed and implemented professional learning that would create common language, knowledge, and skills among intensive reading teachers, literacy coaches, and assistant principals. Statewide assessment test data show that the two-year initiative led to increased reading achievement for the lowest 25% of 9th- and 10th-grade students and for the entire student population.

Bridge builders:
Teacher leaders forge connections
and bring coherence to literacy initiative.
By Jacy Ippolito, Christina L. Dobbs, and Megin Charner-Laird

An increasingly diverse student population at Brookline (Mass.) High School led the school to call on university-based consultants to help teachers and leaders focus on disciplinary literacy instruction. A multiyear initiative pulled together content-area teachers, faculty-elected teacher leaders, a site-based project leader, and university-level instructional coaches. Teacher leaders emerged as most critical in building useful professional learning communities and connecting to the work of external coaches.

The secret to great coaching:
Inquiry method helps teachers take ownership
of their learning.
By Les Foltos

Successful coaches realize that routinely taking on the role of the expert with the answers is the wrong path toward collaboration and capacity building. Instead, more effective strategies rely on creating a relationship that is not only built on trust and respect but also supportive — an important consideration when high-stakes testing and new evaluation systems leave teachers reluctant to take risks and innovate. Successful coaches use norms, probing questions, and effective inquiry to help teachers take ownership of their learning and develop the capacity to improve their practice.

Beyond the core:
Peer observation brings Common Core
to vocational and electives classes.
By Harriette Thurber Rasmussen

For several years, most of the teachers in Washington's Grandview School District have been immersed in learning about the Common Core and designing instructional strategies to help students meet the new and higher expectations. Grandview High School's principal noted a growing gap between those teaching core classes and those teaching career and technical education and electives. Using a special district resource allocation designed for collaborative peer observation, the school was able to close the gap by weaving Common Core literacy standards into vocational and electives classrooms.

features

One person's Academy experience shifts a district's approach to learning.

By Hayes Mizell

As superintendent of a challenged school system, Cynthia Cash-Greene realized she needed help. With a scholarship from the Learning Forward Foundation, Cash-Greene participated in Learning Forward's Academy, and the experience helped her implement high-quality professional learning in her district. Through it all, Academy support was instrumental and influential.

Happy with your professional learning? That's not enough.

By Frederick Brown

It's not enough to deliver new and improved professional learning that makes teachers happy. Powerful professional learning actively engages individuals in their own learning, uses a standards-based system to ensure scaled and sustained implementation, and leaves educators feeling challenged, determined, focused, and ready to practice their new learning.

The instructor's balancing act:

What qualities are critical for effective professional learning?

By Jenni Iwanski

An instructional coach attends a workshop for bilingual teachers and finds herself focused and fully engaged, even though much of the workshop was presented in a language she didn't speak and the day's outcomes were clearly well above her knowledge and skills. How was she able to walk away with valuable new information that she could put to use? The workshop reflected the leader's beliefs about effective adult learning by balancing teaching with learning, accepting all learners, and putting teachers in the role of students.

Track data. Tweak instruction. Repeat:

A constant focus on student progress boosts achievement in Texas district.

By Valerie von Frank

Aldine Independent School District in Harris County, Texas, stands out as a district that has continually adjusted how and what student data it uses. Aldine uses what it sees to to plan what teachers need to know to better instruct students and to offer additional support where schools are lagging. The district's proactive approach to using data has resulted in steadily improving student achievement for a decade — with a student population that is mostly poor, highly mobile, nearly all students of color, and includes a large number of English language learners.

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columns

Lessons from research:

Research on K-12 math professional development falls short.

By Joellen Killion

After examining 910 studies of professional development to identify effective K-12 mathematics interventions, researchers conclude that there is limited guidance based on causal research to guide mathematics professional development interventions for K-12 teachers.

From the director:

Learning from the heart this summer.

By Stephanie Hirsh

It isn't just the head that we need to reach in our efforts to achieve and sustain transformation. The heart is just as important.

@ learning forward

Learning First Alliance supports Common Core

Learning First Alliance, a partnership of leading education organizations including Learning Forward, has taken a stand in support of the Common Core State Standards and says educators need time to implement Common Core before accountability measures are in place.

"Rushing to make high-stakes decisions such as student advancement or graduation, teacher evaluation, school performance designation, or state funding awards based on assessments of the standards before they have been fully and properly implemented is unwise," the alliance said in a statement.

The alliance suggests a transition period to allow time for implementation. "Results from assessment of these standards then can be used to guide instruction and attention to curriculum development, technology infrastructure, professional learning, and other resources needed to ensure that schools have the supports needed to help all students achieve under the standards," the alliance said.

"Removing high-stakes consequences for a short time will release the pressure on educators and allow them to make adjustments to their instruction that will best support student learning. It will give parents and communities the opportunity to understand how they can better support the needs of children."

Learning First Alliance will also share success stories about standards implementation and showcase resources from member organizations.

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book club

THE POWER OF TEACHER ROUNDS
A Guide for Facilitators, Principals, & Department Chairs
By Vivian B. Troen and Katherine C. Boles

The practice of Teacher Rounds is a professional learning design that promotes teacher collaboration through making teaching practice public. *The Power of Teacher Rounds* traces the development of an effective Teacher Rounds group from formation to choosing a problem of practice, conducting the first round, observing, debriefing, making a commitment to a change of practice, and evaluating outcomes.
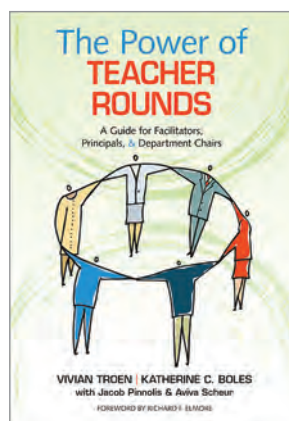
The focus is on the individual teacher's classroom, and there is a strong emphasis on accountability. A chapter on expected outcomes offers a "vision of the possible," with a realistic picture of what a successful rounds group may look like and what it will be able to accomplish.

Through a partnership with Corwin Press, Learning Forward members can add the Book Club to their membership at any time and receive four books a year for $69 (for U.S. mailing addresses). To receive this book, add the Book Club to your membership before June 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email **office@learningforward.org.**

Educators can learn a few things from Google

on board
JULIE BLAINE

As we use this issue of *JSD* to offer inspiration and ideas to fuel summer learning, I'm trying one of my favorite tactics to open my eyes to new perspectives — looking beyond education. Recently I heard Steven Butschi, from Google Education, talk about developing organizational strategies to help schools and their leaders deal with change.

Butschi spoke of the need to innovate new schools and classrooms to replace the traditional schoolhouse, where educators use the same materials, at the same time, in fixed locations. I agree with his premise. We have encountered transformational change in almost every aspect of our lives, yet schools are slow to follow. If educators are serious about preparing students to be college- and career-ready, then we need to get serious about design changes.

After I heard the speech, I wanted to know more about how Google changed its business practices to create one of the most desirable and innovative working cultures in the world. So I Googled, "What's it like to work at Google?" The Googleplex, I learned, is the ultimate fantasy in building design. An array of sporting and exercise amenities and other employee perks, such as free food and free transportation, create an Oz-like atmosphere for Google employees.

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

Internet cafes and conference rooms abound, each designed to encourage interactions between Googlers within and across internal and international teams. In the Googleplex, everyone is considered a hands-on contributor of ideas and opinions. Belief statements such as "Focus on the user and all else will follow" and "You don't need to be at your desk to need an answer" ground Google as the ultimate innovative corporation (Google, n.d; Ulanoff, 2009).

How does Google provide professional learning? A *Fast Company* article describes one of the company's most successful internal training programs, Googler-to-Googler. The program is designed to help employees with excellent technical backgrounds develop top-notch presentation and communication skills. Why? The greatest reward for Googler-to-Googler trainers is, they believe, understanding the impact they have on others, the importance of group collaboration, and the significant need to cultivate motivation (Kessler, 2013).

Schools and their leaders should take a lesson here. Schools deserve a new culture of expectations. While some aspects of the total Google experience may be a stretch for public schools, I'm still contemplating

Butschi's challenge to reimagine education:

- What if we could let go of the traditional schoolhouse?
- What if all teachers and students could become hands-on contributors of ideas and opinions?
- What if schools could purposefully design education to develop global problem solvers and risk takers that could change the world?
- What if the ultimate focus of professional learning could nurture an understanding of our impact on others, the importance of collaboration, and motivation?

What if we really could "Googlize" education? That's what I'll be pondering this summer as I develop new ideas for the educators with whom I work.

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LEARNING FORWARD'S IMPACT IN THE U.S.
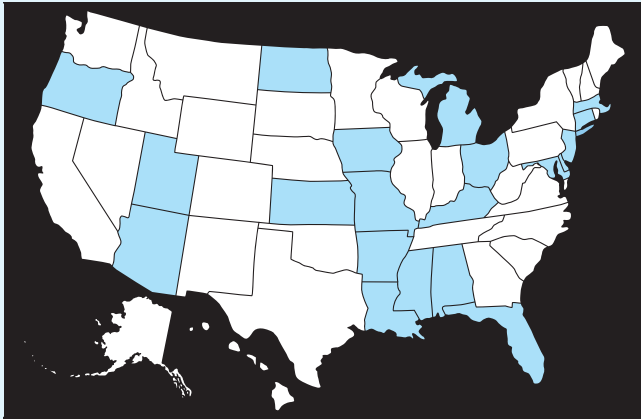
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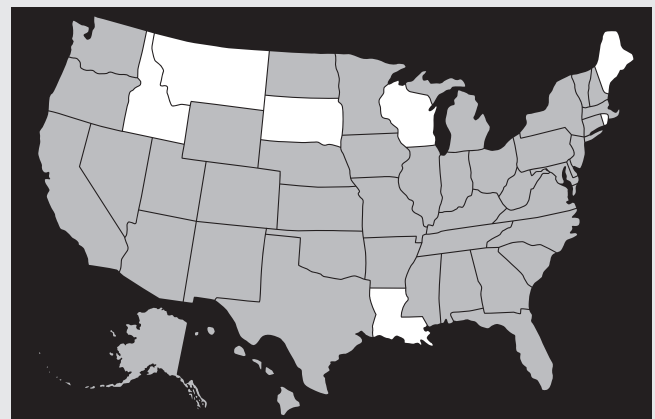Adopts/adapts/endorses/creates aligned standards.
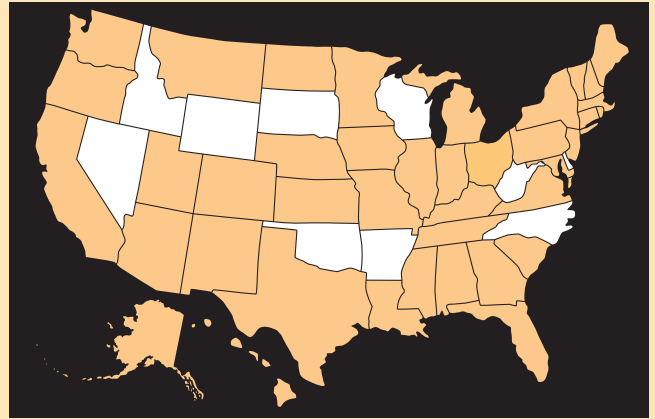
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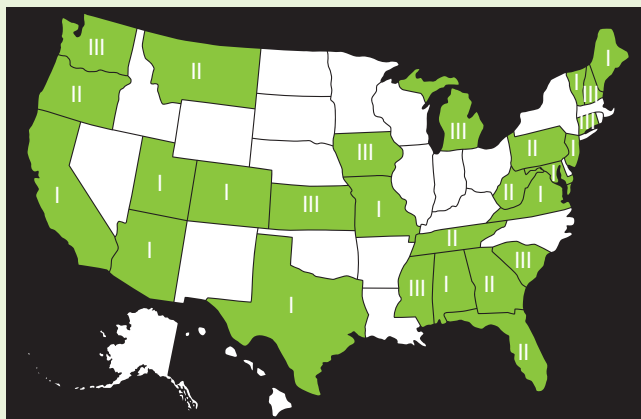
Learning Forward TPL I,II,III
Commits to different levels of collaboration and activity to transform professional learning systems tied to student content standards.

Learning Forward engagement
Receives technical assistance (audits, studies, assessments, etc.).

Learning Forward works with educators at the school, system, regional, state, provincial, and national levels, providing a range of services and supports. The maps above show the organization's impact within the U.S.

Since its inception, Learning Forward has provided members with informative, interactive annual conferences, institutes, and professional development programs; research-based and user-friendly publications; and opportunities for professional networking at national, regional, and state levels.

In addition, Learning Forward also engages in advocacy, provides contract services to states and school districts, and develops tools and resources for administrators, teachers, and professional development specialists.

OUTSIDE THE U.S.

Learning Forward's reach also extends to the Canadian provinces of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, and Ontario, as well as to the U.S. territory of American Samoa.

Free webinars for members

Learning Forward membership now comes with an added benefit: free webinars. Members also have access to Learning Forward's webinar archive, as well as additional resources, follow-up discussion, and more through Learning Exchange.

Nonmembers may also attend by paying $20 for individual webinars or three for $50.

Recent webinar topics include powerful learning designs, monitoring standards implementation, giving and receiving feedback, and conducting policy reviews. To see upcoming topics or view archives, visit **www. learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars.**

THE WALLACE FOUNDATION CONTINUES GRANT SUPPORT TO LEARNING FORWARD

Learning Forward will continue its efforts to disseminate valuable information from The Wallace Foundation's ongoing research in leadership, extended learning, and summer learning, thanks to a two-year grant from the foundation.

This long-term alliance has resulted in many articles, resources, thought leader lectures, and conference sessions that make the connection between the foundation's research and Learning Forward's core focus on effective professional learning.

Look for The Wallace Foundation's work at the Annual Conference in Nashville and in upcoming issues of *JSD*.

LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

June 30: Last day to save $75 on registration for 2014 Annual Conference Dec. 6-10 in Nashville, Tenn. **www.learningforward.org/ learning-opportunities/annual-conference**

July 17-20: Learning Forward Summer Institute in Chicago, Ill. Register today: **www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/summer-institute**

Oct. 1: Application deadline for the Shirley Hord Learning Team Award. **www.learningforward.org/get-involved/awards/hord-award**

Dec. 6-10: Learning Forward's 2014 Annual Conference in Nashville, Tenn.

Learning from the heart this summer

Even though I no longer follow an academic schedule, my years working in schools, along with Learning Forward's connection to practitioners, keep me aware of when the summer months start and end. So, staying in the rhythm of that schedule and echoing our intentions with this issue of *JSD*, I find myself planning my summer learning.

This year, I'm going to turn back to a favorite author, introduced to our staff years ago by former Executive Director Dennis Sparks. John Kotter of Harvard University writes about leadership and change. I intend to explore his ideas more deeply in the coming months. I encourage you to take a look at his writing if some of your work requires you to help others deal with transformation.

In two of his books, *The Heart of Change: Real-Life Stories of How People Change Their Organizations* (2002) and *Leading Change* (2012), Kotter explores an eight-step process to achieving transformation. The eight steps will resonate with anyone who has read much of what we write about at Learning Forward.

Kotter's eight steps cover establishing a sense of urgency, creating a guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communicating a vision,

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empowering employees, generating short-term wins, consolidating gains, and anchoring the changes within the culture.

While these are all valuable steps to explore more deeply, what fascinates me is the role of the heart in change efforts. As Kotter (and others) write, it isn't just the head that we need to reach in our efforts to achieve and sustain transformation. The heart is just as important. This means we need to think about the emotions at work in our schools and organizations when we ask those we work with to completely upend how they go about their day-to-day work.

For example, if we set out to create a sense of urgency to impel our change efforts, what emotions will play a part in how our colleagues respond? Not only might they experience fear, but we'll also be pushing against a sense of complacency. We also know that their deep passion for the work we do in schools will be a force. How can we tap into that passion?

Another key step in the change process is how we as leaders communicate what's happening in our systems and organizations. As Kotter writes, it is important to send simple and heartfelt messages that clarify the direction we're headed and help to

establish open lines of communication and trust.

As I work to deepen my leadership skills, I'll be examining how I talk about specific elements of change within and beyond Learning Forward. How can I make my messages more straightforward and keep them honest, straight from my heart to those with whom I am eager to connect?

These are just some of the questions I'll ponder as I embark on my summer learning journey in leadership. How might they apply in your situation? What else do you need to learn about leadership? I'll be eager to hear how it goes and happy to share what I find.

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