

WISDOM *from the*

FACTORY FLOOR

FOR BEST RESULTS, LIMIT INITIATIVES, BUILD CAPACITY, AND MONITOR PROGRESS

By Chad Dumas and Craig Kautz

Imagine you are on a tour of an assembly line factory that makes air conditioners for large vehicles. Assembly line workers wearing hard hats, safety goggles, and ear protection are arranged in “pods” (similar responsibility teams): one for welding, another for electrical components, yet another for painting. Dozens of pods fill the immense factory floor, and each area has a designated time for completing its assigned tasks.

During the tour, the manager-turned-tour-guide emphasizes a process of continuous improvement. This process, basically the plan, do, study, act process from Deming (1986), catches you off guard. As a thought leader and worker, you are surprised to find such a process in a place characterized as routine and repetitive. You ask about the company’s improvement processes, how it measures improvement, and how it engages workers in improvement.

Finally, the manager says: “Don’t tell our workers, but they really don’t need us in order for them to do their job. Our job, as managers, is to build their capacity to make the needed improvements on their own.”

This is a true story, told here to emphasize that the job of management — whether at an assembly line factory or in the central office of a school district — is to build capacity.

FOCUS, BUILD, AND CHECK

Focus, build, and check: These are the leadership priorities of a central office working to establish a professional learning community culture — a culture of continuous improvement.

DuFour, DuFour, Eaker, and Many (2010) state that the central office has three key tasks in leading professional learning communities: Limit initiatives, build capacity, and monitor progress. In other words, focus, build, and check.

That’s what is happening in the Hastings (Nebraska) Public Schools, where two of the eight schools have been identified as national models of educational effectiveness. In seven of eight buildings, in just four years, student test

scores have increased from around 60% proficiency to around 80% proficiency or better.

FOCUS

Limiting initiatives, rather than pursuing the most recent innovation, is an important task for the central office. Central office leaders must show restraint and insist on focused efforts.

At Hastings, central office leaders emphasize three key principles and four critical questions, based on DuFour et al. (2010). Those principles are: a focus on learning, staff working collaboratively, and using results to improve both student learning and instructional practice.

The critical questions are:

1. What do we want students to know and do?
2. How will we assess what students know and do?
3. What will we do for students who don’t yet know what we want them to know and do?
4. What will we do for students who do know and can do and need to move on to more advanced learning?

Any innovation must fall within those three principles or help district leaders answer one or more of the four critical questions.

Hastings leaders reduced their efforts on a number of initiatives. A few years ago, the district gave a norm-referenced test three times a year in almost every grade level. Now, the district requires the test in select grade levels just once a year, choosing instead to focus on formative assessment practices and professional learning community processes.

Another initiative that has been reduced is the practice of double-scoring. In the past, every student paper in district writing — done in fall and spring in grades 3-11— was double-scored for reliability. Now, all papers are scored once, then a random sample of papers are double-scored to ensure reliability.

Further, more emphasis is placed on anchor papers. The result is that student writing is scored in half the time, the scores are more reliable because staff aren’t exhausted from

Sample agenda for learning team meeting, pp. 32-34.

reading hundreds of papers, and the focus can be directed toward using data from the assessments to improve instruction.

There are more examples of limited initiatives — new intervention programs, the latest computer programs, professional development speakers, and other programs. These initiatives don't get beyond central office leaders' desks because they choose to focus.

BUILD AND CHECK

Building and checking involve joint responsibility for learning and mutual accountability for action.

Building capacity and monitoring progress go hand-in-hand. Monitoring progress of implementation without building capacity is like expecting performance without providing the needed learning for implementation.

In Hastings Public Schools, the common language is what the district calls the learning cycle: Assess, instruct, assess, and reflect. Through the learning cycle, all work focuses on either assessment literacy or instructional practices, conducted in the context of professional learning communities.

The district uses four main activities aligned with the district's focus on building capacity for assessment literacy and professional learning community implementation: monthly administrative learning team meetings, classroom walk-throughs with central office staff and each other, leadership trainings, and school improvement leadership days.

ADMINISTRATIVE LEARNING TEAM

Twice a month, all district administrators convene. One meeting is devoted to purely management items. The second is the learning team meeting. The separation allows district leaders to focus on their professional learning as leaders in the district.

Learning team meetings last about three hours. (See sample agenda and notes on pp. 32-34.) Meetings employ a mix of structures adapted from Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) and best instructional practice. For example, the whole group may hear a short talk about insights into the learning for the day. Every meeting dedicates significant time to small-group learning. There are also sections devoted to coaching.

During small-group learning, principals are grouped, together with central office staff, to engage in tasks such as debriefing from prereading, engaging in a specific activity, and reviewing evidence of implementation of the learning cycle from staff in their buildings.

The expectation in the Hastings Public Schools is that every teacher formally documents his or her engagement in the learning cycle, providing evidence of preassessing, instruction, post-assessing, and reflecting on what did or didn't work based on evidence of student learning.

Building principals guide staff through the learning cycle. Every month at the administrative learning team meeting, they

HASTINGS PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Student results on Nebraska's state reading and math tests 2010-14

The results of improvement efforts in Hastings Public Schools, as measured by state test scores, show strong and steady gains in student reading and math scores.

Grade	Reading			Math		
	2010	2014	Change	2011	2014	Change
Grades 3-8 average	60	78	+18	65	74	+9
3	59	81	+22	64	78	+14
4	60	84	+24	71	84	+13
5	55	79	+24	78	79	+1
6	62	77	+15	72	71	-1
7	62	80	+18	60	73	+13
8	62	80	+18	66	77	+11
11	61	58	-3	44	48	+4

In 2010, the average percent of students proficient in Hastings Public Schools was eight percentage points below the state average. In 2014, the average percent of students proficient was above the state average. This has been accomplished with almost 60% of students in poverty, compared to the state average of 44%.

Source: Hastings Public Schools.

bring evidence of staff's implementation of the learning cycle. This serves two purposes: Principals see what teaching staffs are doing in their own and others' buildings, and they hold each other mutually accountable for doing the work.

The learning team meeting includes time for coaching so that principals can learn to give effective feedback to their staff. Role-playing is key to this process as principals and central office staff engage in mock conversations about the evidence of professional learning provided by learning teams in their building. The principal is then able to practice using coaching skills that are useful when working directly with staff.

CLASSROOM WALK-THROUGHS

Workshops, trainings, and events will make no difference in student learning if there isn't a change of practice in the classroom. Hence, classroom walk-throughs are critical to building staff capacity and monitoring implementation of effective practice.

The district's director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment began conducting walk-throughs throughout the roughly 300 classrooms in 2010-11. The goals of the walk-throughs are to build a common language of instruction, understand the

implementation of instructional strategies in classrooms, and build the capacity of principals to have productive coaching conversations with teachers.

The following year, building principals joined the walk-throughs. And in 2012-13, principals doing exceptional work with specific strategies were paired with principals facing challenges with those strategies. In 2013-14, some building principals brought teachers along on the walk-throughs.

The district, in collaboration with building principals, developed a feedback form based on Design Questions 1 and 5 from Marzano's *The Art and Science of Teaching* (2007). Teachers received a copy, but neither the central office nor the building principal kept copies.

LEADERSHIP WORKSHOPS

Workshops are one very limited action that the district takes to build the capacity of principals and other designated leaders. These workshops are focused on district leaders (principals and school improvement leaders in the building) only and are not open to the entire staff.

For example, when first implementing Design Questions 1 and 5, the district brought in author Jim Knight for two days to assist in providing feedback to staff. In 2013-14, the district brought in education consultant Lee Jenkins to help leaders understand how to use his LtoJ tool for setting expectations, monitoring progress, and celebrating success.

These limited workshops focus on building leaders' understanding to move forward with implementation after the workshop.

SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT LEADERSHIP DAYS

One of the longest-standing and more consistent philosophies of school reform is Larry Lezotte's (2005) *Correlates of Effective Schools*. Lezotte's first correlate is instructional leadership. A key aspect of this is the need for a core leadership group whose responsibility is "to initiate and sustain an ongoing conversation of school change based on the Effective Schools research" (Lezotte, 2005, p. 183).

Hastings Public Schools cultivates core leadership groups in every building by hosting school improvement leadership days. These are three separate days during the school year — typically in September, December, and February — where school improvement leaders from each building come together for the day.

Led by the district's director of curriculum, instruction, and assessment, building principals and their school improvement chairs gather in a central location. The district provides substitute teachers for classroom teachers who chair the school improvement committees in their building.

The morning of each session focuses on new content that school improvement leaders need to consider in implementing their action plans. In 2010-11, content for the school improvement leadership days focused on data literacy, data analysis, and

the content of a building profile.

In 2011-12, the morning session of school improvement leadership days focused on the study and implementation of the breakthrough model of school improvement. This included researching best practices, clarifying interventions, and developing district and building action plans.

The next two years, the district focused on an in-depth study of Learning Forward's Innovation Configuration maps (Learning Forward, 2012) for the Standards for Professional Learning — specifically, those concerning the roles of principals and leadership teams.

During the afternoon portion of school improvement leadership days, participants work in their teams. The focus is on implementing the learning from the morning, revising building action plans, and planning specific next steps.

FOCUS, BUILD, AND CHECK

District leaders realize that while they can lead change, they can't manage it (Fullan, 2001).

Instead of trying to control change, Hastings' central office staff creates the conditions for change to occur: They focus their efforts. They build the capacity of the people in the district to make change happen. And they monitor the implementation of learning throughout the district.

REFERENCES

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ADMINISTRATIVE LEARNING TEAM *AGENDA*

Tuesday, Dec. 17, 2013 District office conference room 8:45 a.m. to 11:30 a.m.

BEFORE THE MEETING, PLEASE:

1. Read pp. 132-153 of *Learning by Doing* (2nd ed.) — note Knowledge Map Key Concepts as you read.

2. Bring the interview questions that you use when interviewing teachers for position(s) in your building.

3. Bring evidence of the implementation of the learning cycle and SMART goal(s).

FOCUS ON COMPETENCY 3: The leader understands the necessity of clear academic achievement standards, aligned classroom-level achievement targets, and their relationship to the development of accurate assessments.

Estimated time	Topic	Facilitator(s)	Desired outcome
5 minutes	Gathering	All	Initiation of meeting
5 minutes	Last time's quiz data	Chad	Review/preview
5 minutes	Divide into groups: Craig, Tamisha, David (F), Cathy, Montessa, Jay, Donna (F), Beth, Jason, Chad, Lawrence, Amy (F)	Chad	Preparation
30 minutes	<i>Learning by Doing</i> , pp. 132-153 What key concepts are in this section? Where are they found? What ahas did you have?	Facilitators	Shared understanding
30 minutes	Assessment FOR Learning Activity 13	Facilitators	Shared understanding
30 minutes	Assessment FOR Learning Activity 13 debrief	Chad	Future action steps
30 minutes	Learning cycle show-and-tell Modeling conversations with staff	Facilitators	Mutual accountability
20 minutes	Gallup hope	Chad	Shared understanding

NORMS: Be prepared, be on topic, be respectful, honor consensus.

Source: Hastings Public Schools.

ADMINISTRATIVE LEARNING TEAM NOTES

Dec. 17, 2013

Assessment FOR Learning Activity 13 (p. 170)

Great questions already:

Great questions to add:

Learning cycle show-and-tell observations

Pause

Prompt

Paraphrase

Rapport

Hope article (tinyurl.com/hpshope):

Four things that "squared" with me:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.



Three things that I will "try-angle":

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.



Question(s) that is/are still "circling" around in my head:



Source: Hastings Public Schools.