



## Choose learning that benefits one and all

Over the past year, I started a new coaching relationship with an administrator. Walking through the leader's school, I was transported back to eight years ago, when I was the new principal at a high-performing high school. It didn't take long to see I had a journey ahead of me.

Within weeks, I knew that I was leading a school that had great results — for most students. We had many skilled faculty members, but they didn't always see why we'd need to change. While I could set up a schedule that put every teacher into a team, could we really advance our school to excellence?

Looking back on that journey, I'd like to share a few lessons I learned along the way.

### **DIG DEEP INTO YOUR DATA.**

When the faculty in my school were complacent about change, it was time to learn about the students we were leaving behind.

By looking not just at the state or systemwide data but also what we could learn from homework and teacher-developed tests, we learned that students in a range of subgroups weren't proficient. Because those subgroups were small, our scores overall looked fine. But attaching names to the data helped the faculty realize that settling for fine was not an option.

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### **on board** DEBORAH JACKSON

Every student had the right to strong teaching, and now we could figure out how to make that happen.

### **BUILD CAPACITY OF YOUR LEADERSHIP TEAM.**

I quickly realized that if we were going to ask teams of teachers to, for example, become masterful at using data, I would need the help of a schoolwide leadership team. The 20-plus members of my instructional leadership team included assistant principals, department chairs, school librarians and technologists, an instructional coach, and directors of student services and activities.

In our work as a learning community, we strengthened our abilities to lead collaboration, facilitate teams, focus on cultural proficiency, and so much more. Without the commitment of this team, there is no way we could transform culture or skills schoolwide.

### **USE RESOURCES CREATIVELY.**

Every school or system leader has a unique set of resource constraints and opportunities. While I didn't have Title I funds to draw on, I did have an instructional fund that most principals would assume would be best spent on textbooks.

What if I didn't need textbooks?



Instead, we bought what we needed — for example, we found that using those funds to hire an assistant principal dedicated to instructional improvement would propel us forward. I also relied on parents and community members to support our learning. Some parents supported learning teams through refreshments and snacks, while community partners gave us offsite learning locations to help the leadership team look at our solutions in new ways.

### **INVEST IN YOURSELF.**

I wouldn't have helped my school succeed if I hadn't made my own learning a priority. By my second year in the job, I knew I needed more knowledge and skills, support, and a network of smart peers. That's just what I found with the Learning Forward Academy. I'm a proud graduate of the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2011. If I hadn't invested in my learning, I also wouldn't be the president of Learning Forward.

I can't wait to help my coaching colleague along the learning journey. We all have many more lessons to learn. ■