Learning plan clarifies principals' vision of effective teaching p. 12
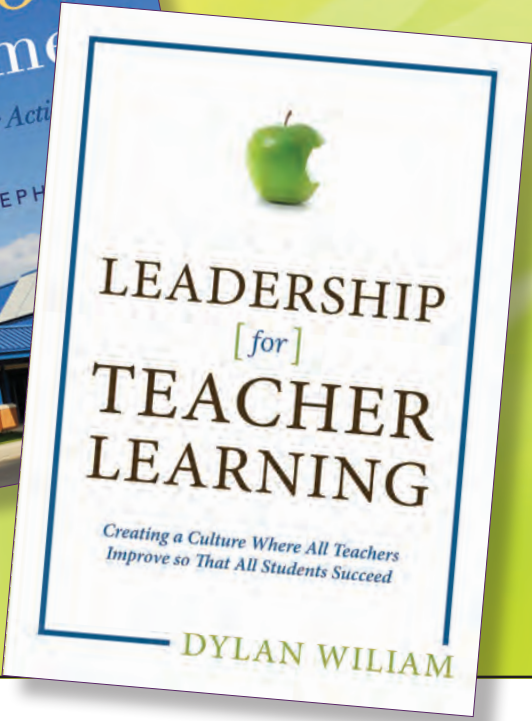
PERSPECTIVES
ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

The 5 habits of effective PLCs p. 24

Announcing the 2015 Shirley Hord Learning Team Award winners p. 60
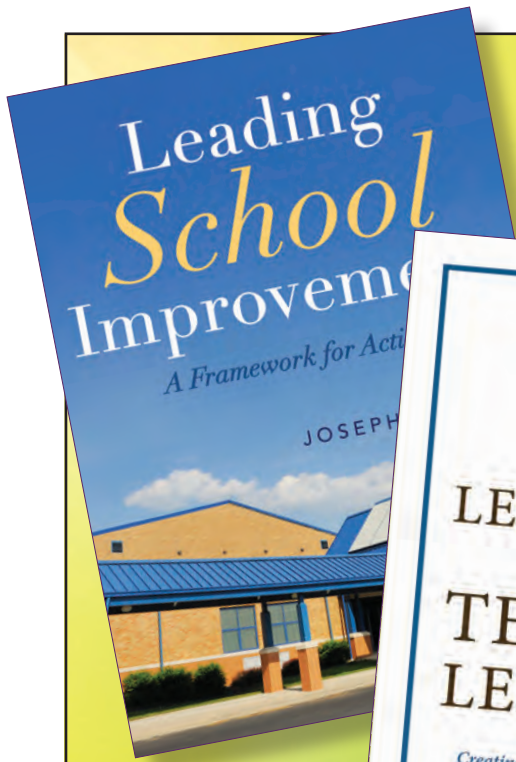
learningforward
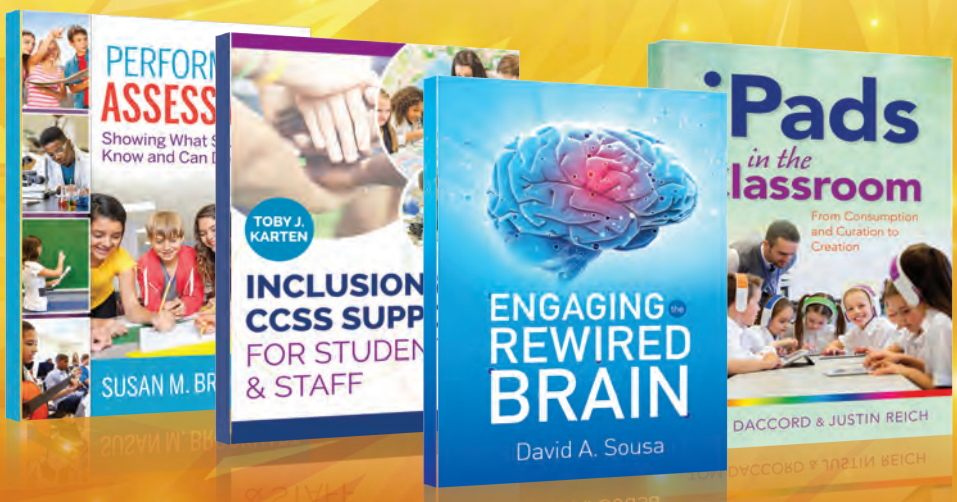THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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JSD

The
Learning Forward
Journal

DECEMBER 2015,
VOLUME 36, NO. 6

Put yourself in someone else's shoes

Being comfortable is nice, but it can also be dangerous.

While education professionals are always dealing with change, sometimes we can get stuck in our perspective. We know how critical it is to develop a vision and a point of view, we know what matters to us, and we know where we're headed. Operating with a steady perspective keeps us focused.

And yet, it can be limiting. We may not see potential solutions or new possibilities for coming at challenges from a different direction. We may not see that the problems in front of us aren't the problems we should be concerned about. Often when Frederick Brown, Learning Forward's deputy executive director, hears educators talk about a problem such as curriculum implementation, they assume the solution lies in the curriculum, when, in fact, effective professional learning might be the answer. He has a different perspective — one that can help those educators achieve better results.

There's value in opening ourselves up to new perspectives — and that is, in itself, a growth strategy. Here are three starting points for creating new windows into the world.

•

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

Read literature from other fields. Many of the challenges educators face are not unique. When we talk about adult learning, there are models to consider in law, medicine, and sports. When we talk about organizational culture, there are valuable perspectives from a wide range of business arenas. We should also go further afield — reading about music and art, or science and technology, exposes us to vastly different ways of thinking about the world that can create valuable eureka moments.

Seek out those with whom you disagree. In the midst of an argument or at a time when you are advocating for a particular point of view, it can be difficult to sympathize with the person you consider your opponent. However, when you step back from your opinion, you create an opportunity for dialogue with that person. Approach with an inquiry stance, one where you don't want just to understand or empathize, but where you are open to upending your view entirely. This can force you into cognitive dissonance, and, in that state, there are many possibilities for new thinking.

Become someone else, if just for a moment. Sometimes a person you admire might act or react in a way that you'd like to be able to emulate. Consider what it would mean to just become him or her in that moment and behave accordingly. I've used this strategy recently more than once. I might be in a spot where I know that Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward's executive director, would say the right thing, and so I tell myself to say what she might say. Putting that hat on gives me a different attitude to act in that moment.

What strategies do you use to learn through another's eyes? How has it helped? We hope *JSD* can contribute to broadening your view.

Note:

The October *JSD* article "It's not just *what* you say" by Kendall Zoller, Antonia Issa Lahera, and Anthony H. Normore should have included a reference to *Cognitive Coaching: A Foundation for Renaissance Schools* by Arthur L. Costa and Robert J. Garmston. We apologize for the omission. The online version of the article includes the full citation. ■

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Gayle Gregory – Teacher as activator of learning

Ainsley Rose – Visible learning

Linda Kaser and Judy Halbert – Spirals of Inquiry framework

Tom Hierck – Response to Intervention

Roland Case and Garfield Gini-Newman – Critical thinking

Jim Knight – Coaching

Christine Suurtamm – Using PLCs in math

Val Olekshy – Improvement science and implementation

Jenni Donohoo – Facilitating collaborative teacher inquiry

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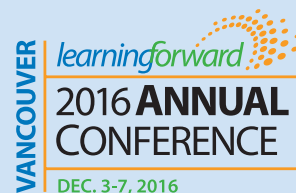
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EDUCATION UPDATES
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REDESIGN SCHOOLS
Dissatisfied Yet Optimistic: Moving Faster Toward New School Models
New Schools Venture Fund, 2015

In this report, the four authors state that they have come together from overlapping but different roles in an effort to redesign schools. To that end, they share a framework for their theory of change, open a discussion about how to make it better, collaborate so that their efforts are deliberately aligned to the framework, and invite peers, colleagues, and partners to do the same. Their vision of the future includes "embracing continuous learning through rapid iteration,

refining and redesigning as we learn more and more." To support this vision, they call on educators to ask, "What can I be doing differently in my classroom or school or district to create learning models that fully engage, challenge, and support all students?"
www.newschools.org/ publications/dissatisfied-yet-optimistic-moving-faster-toward-new-school-models

TEACHER LEADERSHIP
Policy Snapshot
Center on Great Teachers & Leaders, July 2015

This report focuses on how to increase teacher leadership, outlining the obstacles present and specifying policy levers for increasing and improving teacher leadership opportunities. Strategies include adopting teacher leader standards, providing guidance and technical assistance to schools and districts, offering incentives for leadership programs and positions, and providing state-level opportunities for teacher leaders. District efforts in Baltimore, Maryland, as well as state efforts in Iowa, Tennessee, and Kentucky are featured. The report also includes multiple resource lists.
www.gtlcenter.org/sites/ default/files/Snapshot_Teacher_ Leadership.PDF

OBSERVER TRAINING
Seeing It Clearly: Improving Observer Training for Better Feedback and Better Teaching
Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, August 2015

The Measures of Effective Teaching project is a research partnership investigating better ways to identify and develop effective

teaching. This guide explains how to build and improve the elements of a training system that equips all observers to identify and develop effective teaching, based on the collective knowledge of key project partners and practitioners in the field. The report outlines how training can build the necessary skills and how to build the capacity to provide that training. The guide includes a planning worksheet and an appendix of tools referenced throughout.
http://collegeready. gatesfoundation.org/learning/ seeing-it-clearly-improving-observer-training-for-better-feedback-and-better-teaching

LEARNING INNOVATIONS
Remake Learning Playbook
Remake Learning Network

The Remake Learning Network is a collaborative network of educators and innovators in the greater Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, region. To expand its work, the network has created the *Remake Learning Playbook,* a field guide of ideas and resources for supporting learning innovation networks. The playbook includes an interactive website that allows users to create their own game plan to remake learning in their communities, an advocacy kit that organizations can use as a guide to create presentations, and audio interviews with network members.
http://remakelearning.org/ playbook

RETAINING TEACHERS
Incorporating Retention of Effective and Highly Effective Teachers in Principal Evaluations
Reform Support Network, 2015

The quality of a teacher's instruction is widely understood to be the most important school-based factor in student learning. By taking positive steps to retain their strongest teachers, principals can maximize the impact of teacher retention on instructional quality, a process referred to as "selective retention." This brief from the Reform Support Network explores promising state and district approaches for incorporating teacher retention standards into principal evaluation frameworks. The brief also examines five key decision points for future implementers to take into account if they are considering this measure in their principal evaluation systems.
https://rtt.grads360. org/?p=rtt#communities/pdc/ documents/8758

SCHOOL REFORM SURVEY
The 2015 EdNext Poll on School Reform
Education Next

Education Next's 2015 poll examines public thinking on issues such as testing and accountability, Common Core, and support for school reform. Among the major findings:

- *Support for standardized testing remains strong.* Both teachers and the public at large oppose the idea of letting parents decide whether their children should participate in standards-based testing.
- *Support for the Common Core State Standards declined a bit further.* Among the public at large, support for the Common Core fell to 49% in 2015.

The survey was administered in May and June 2015 to a nationally representative sample of more than 4,000 respondents, including almost 700 teachers.
http://educationnext.org/2015- ednext-poll-school-reform-opt-out- common-core-unions

CLASSROOM ASSIGNMENTS
Checking In:
Do Classroom Assignments Reflect Today's Higher Standards?
The Education Trust, September 2015

The Education Trust examined more than 1,500 English language arts, humanities, science, and social studies assignments given to middle school students and found that only 5% of assignments fell into the high range on its assignment analysis framework centered on Common Core alignment, text centrality, cognitive challenge, and student motivation and engagement. And while the results did show some positive movement toward the instructional shifts demanded by the Common Core, significant work remains. The report urges school district and education leaders to ask themselves tough questions about what students are being asked to do in the classroom and whether these assignments are preparing them for success.
https://edtrust.org/resource/ classroomassignments

PERSPECTIVES THAT RESONATE

THE PASSAGES on these pages are drawn from articles that have been perennially popular on Learning Forward's website. Read the passages, explore the full articles online, and consider the following questions:

- Why do these concepts continue to intrigue learning leaders?
- What implications do these ideas have for my practice?
- How will we know we're seeing progress in our school or system related to these ideas?

POSITIVE OR NEGATIVE

"School culture enhances or hinders professional learning. Culture enhances professional learning when teachers believe professional development is important, valued, and 'the way we do things around here.' Professional development is nurtured when the school's history and stories include examples of meaningful professional learning and a group commitment to improvement.

"Staff learning is reinforced when sharing ideas, working collaboratively to learn, and using newly learned skills are recognized symbolically and orally in faculty meetings and other school ceremonies. For example, in one school, staff meetings begin with the story of a positive action a teacher took to help a student — a ceremonial school coffee cup is presented to the teacher and a round of applause follows.

"The most positive cultures value staff members who help lead their own development, create well-defined improvement plans, organize study groups, and learn in a variety of ways. Cultures that celebrate, recognize, and support staff learning bolster professional community."

— *Kent D. Peterson*

SOURCE: **Peterson, K.D. (2002, Summer).** Positive or negative. *JSD, 23*(3), 10-15. Available at www.learningforward.org/docs/jsd-summer-2002/peterson233.pdf.

LEARNING FORWARD OFFERS A CHALLENGE TO SCHOOL SYSTEMS

"Many central office administrators refer to their school systems 'providing' or 'delivering' professional development, but do they learn from it? School systems devote enormous resources to learning about their students' education, and its results, but they fail to examine and learn from the professional development of adults responsible for the students' education. To do so, administrators will want to regularly monitor and assess whether and to what extent professional development is accomplishing its intended purpose — raising the performance levels of educators and their students. Only by systematically and consistently collecting such data can school systems obtain the information necessary to learn how well professional development is working and how to increase its impact."

— *Hayes Mizell*

SOURCE: Mizell, H. (2010, Fall). Learning Forward offers a challenge to school systems. *The Learning System, 6*(1), 2. Available at www.learningforward.org/docs/learning-system/sys9-10mizell.pdf.

WORK ON THE FINAL 2%

"Schools and schools systems do many things in the name of professional development that may be important and even essential but, in and of themselves, do not affect learning and relationships in schools. Among these activities are establishing policies, forming planning committees, hiring instructional coaches, and providing released days. I think of these activities as the 'initial 98%' because they consume most of the time and energy devoted to professional development, although they have little demonstrable effect on teaching, learning, and relationships.

"The 'final 2%,' on the other hand, is that cluster of experiences that physically change teachers' and administrators' brains and alter their professional relationships in ways that improve teaching and learning in schools. Activities that comprise the 'final 2%' can take many forms, some familiar (for instance, direct teaching of a skill) and others less familiar to many teachers (for instance, lesson study or the examination of student work).

"It is critically important that professional learning employ methods that align with the school or system's sense of 'good teaching.' Like students, teachers' brains are changed when they are fully engaged in cognitively demanding processes such as reading, writing, observing, using various cognitive strategies, listening carefully, speaking thoughtfully, and practicing new habits of mind and behavior."

— *Dennis Sparks*

SOURCE: Sparks, D. (2008, May). Work on the final 2%. *The Learning Principal, 1*(8), 2. Available at www.learningforward.org/publications/learning-principal/learning-principal-blog/learning-principal/2006/05/01/the-learning-principal-may-2006-vol.-1-no.-8.

ARE YOU COACHING HEAVY OR LIGHT?

"What I am asking of coaches demands that they shift from being liked and appreciated to making a difference. Coaches may need to examine their beliefs about who they are as a coach, the role of coaching in the school, and about change. These beliefs drive who they are as coaches. Coaching heavy requires that coaches move to the edge of or beyond their comfort zone and even their competence to encourage teachers to move beyond theirs as well. For some coaches, the thought of this produces tremendous anxiety. When coaches opt to stay in their own or in teachers' comfort zone too long, they limit the impact of their work and even waste their precious time and the resource of coaching."
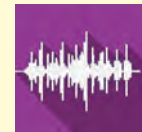
— *Joellen Killion*

SOURCE: Killion, J. (2008, May). Are you coaching heavy or light? *Teachers Teaching Teachers, 3*(8), 1-4. Available at www.learningforward.org/docs/leading-teacher/may08_killion.pdf.

PERSPECTIVES
ON PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Tracy Crow

Learning Forward is fortunate to work with stakeholders in a range of roles and from all kinds of contexts, including schools and systems, higher education, teacher associations, foundations, government, and corporations. While the people we work with cover a lot of ground in and beyond education, we have the luxury of focusing deeply on this singular challenge: What can we know about — and do about — what it takes to build the capacity of educators to be their very best?

Focusing on professional learning doesn't mean, however, that there isn't a lot to explore: the science of learning, cultures in schools, contexts and conditions, holding professional learning to high standards, measuring impact, identifying the elements of effective learning, the role of technology, dedicating appropriate resources, the roles of educators in professional learning, creating effective sys-

tems, to name a big handful.

A wonderful aspect of serving as the professional learning association for educators is the opportunity Learning Forward has to hear about the great work people are doing in this field. While we typically use *JSD* to explore a topic in some depth, sometimes we just want to share valuable stories and words of wisdom from a variety of perspectives. As we head into 2016, we ask you to consider these broad questions.

What big goals do we have for our school or system this year, and what role do we expect professional learning to play in achieving that goal?

Sadly, in too many systems, professional development is a box to be ticked. The days are set aside by policy, law, or tradition, and educators do their best to endure their inservice days. Meanwhile, those same educators are tasked with achieving some extremely ambitious goals.

What will it take for all systems to connect the dots so that the learning on the calendar and the goals in the

strategic plan align? Schools have progressed considerably on this front. Read "Beyond professional development" on p. 42 for a glimpse into how professional learning has evolved. Consider what next steps you'll take in your evolution on this question.

How will we know if professional learning makes a difference?

Setting ambitious goals for learning is one essential step in planning. Another is considering what learning strategies will meet the needs of the particular learners in the room. Yet another is integrating support for follow-up and coaching to ensure full implementation. Finally, however, educators must build in mechanisms for knowing if the learning made a difference, both for educators and students.

"Make a path for evaluation" on p. 30 offers several considerations on this topic. Fully understanding the impact of professional learning is a complex task. Still, educators at every level can take steps to monitor their progress and assess the outcomes they achieve against the goals they set for learning. Schools and systems must foreground this question so they'll know whether they are making wise investments along the way.

How are we ensuring that learning is grounded in the real work of teaching and learning in schools?

Teachers are implementing rigorous content standards, and their needs are likely quite specific, just as their students' needs are quite specific. Consider how learning connects teachers with the content they teach and the strategies they'll use to reach students whose needs cross a very wide spectrum.

In this issue, read about the rich discussions teachers have as they clarify exactly how they'll approach specific lessons in "Words matter" on p. 20. At the same time, keep in mind what school and system leaders need to know to achieve their highest priorities. How will principals, for example, gain the knowledge and skills to help teachers improve? You'll find one pathway in "Do you see what I see?" on p. 12 as principals collaborate to calibrate how they evaluate teachers.

How we are creating not only structures for learning but also the culture and capacity to leverage those structures?

Educators don't have enough time to learn — there are no advocates for professional learning who would disagree with this. Time, however, is not the only critical missing element in schools. Educators at every level need skills to use their time in valuable ways. As you'll read in "The 5 habits of effective PLCs" on p. 24, effective learning community members know how to collaborate. Just as important, they do it within a culture that values learning for all and that ties learning to a clear purpose.

How are we engaging educators at every level to create and sustain a culture of continuous learning?

As the school and district articles in this and other issues of *JSD* demonstrate, when teams of professionals join together around shared purposes and challenge themselves to improve, they deliver results for students. Consider what is happening in your learning context to elevate educator voices and educator needs. How do those needs inform learning designs, cultures, and structures?

What else do we need to know to create effective professional learning systems?

As Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh writes at the end of this issue, not everyone who has the responsibility to lead professional learning has the opportunity to become an expert in it before they take the reins. The field deserves serious study, and not just by researchers in universities — though we'll ask for more of that, too. Reflect on what it would mean for you to develop more expertise in the field, whether for yourself or others. What areas of learning would best support your efforts to influence how professional learning happens in your context?

While the articles in this issue don't answer all of these questions, we hope they provide fodder to spark your continuing journey to develop a rich body of knowledge about professional learning that results in positive changes for all the learners in schools.

•

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

DO YOU SEE WHAT I SEE?

**DISTRICT DESIGNS LEARNING PLAN TO DEVELOP
A CLEAR VISION OF EFFECTIVE INSTRUCTION**

As Larry Gerardot, a principal in Fort Wayne (Indiana) Community Schools, sat in front of a computer, he had no idea how the new project in which he had been asked to participate would affect his work and the work of other principals. Yet he knew that Fort Wayne Community Schools had decided that the district would approach inter-rater reliability as professional learning, starting with the principals. Though he was uncertain of the outcome of this work, he was intrigued with the power of principals working and learning together on the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric — the district's instrument for evaluating instructional practice — and improving his practice in supporting teacher learning.

By Kay Psencik, C. Todd Cummings, and Larry Gerardot

T he district leadership team of Fort Wayne Community Schools, Indiana's largest school district, has focused on becoming a learning organization for many years, due primarily to the leadership of Superintendent Wendy Robinson (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014). Valuing professional learning, she partnered with organizations such as The Wallace Foundation and Learning Forward and consulted Michael Fullan's work to build leadership capacity. She wanted to ensure the district focused on developing a skilled and committed district and principal leadership core to achieve the district's moral purpose.

In 2010, as one of its major initiatives, the district implemented the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric — a principal and teacher evaluation system to clarify for teachers and administrators what highly effective, rigorous instruction really looks like. The district uses the rubric, which was developed by Indiana Department of Education and guided by Charlotte Danielson's Framework for Teaching, to evaluate classroom teachers' instructional practice.

The rubric's 24 measures cover four major domains: purposeful planning, effective instruction, teacher leadership, and core professionalism.

At the same time, the district received a Teacher Incentive Fund grant to provide stipends for teachers based on student performance data and their evaluation. The evaluation carried 60% of the weight in determining stipends. As a result, the district paid nearly $8 million in teacher effectiveness stipends in 2012-14.

District leaders began to analyze the teacher evaluations to determine whether principals were rating teachers across the district with the same lenses. They wanted to be sure that principals were observing instruction in the same way and in agreement on ratings teachers received. Data from five years of implementation of the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric showed principals were all over the map in scoring instruction.

Through data analysis, they found that not all principals had a clear or common understanding of the rubric's elements. They also realized that the district had little professional learning in place for principals that focused on teacher evaluation.

STEPS IN THE PROCESS

Establish a theory of change and logic model.

▼

Establish a leadership team.

▼

Develop clear definition of terms from the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric.

▼

Establish exemplars.

▼

Hire external partners to provide video and manage teacher ratings.

▼

Hire external partner to make 12 videos for the district of exemplar teachers.

▼

Engage the entire principal corps and district leaders in defining terms.

▼

Establish inter-rater agreements among the leadership team members.

▼

Establish norms for videos.

▼

Begin conversations.

▼

Estabilish protocols to guide conversations and bring principals to rater agreement.

▼

Test to identify areas of agreement and discrepancies.

▼

Support.

DEVELOPING CLARITY

District leaders determined that principals needed professional learning with an emphasis on inter-rater reliability — especially in purposeful planning and effective instruction, the first two of the rubric's domains.

Modeling their work after the Measures of Effective Teaching project (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2012), district leaders sought a process that would meet the unique needs of the district and work toward ensuring principal rater agreement. They realized that the most effective way to do this work is to increase principals' conversations about high-quality instruction.

This focus deepens the district's efforts at becoming a learning system. The district leadership team has established a clear vision and definition of standards-driven professional learning to ensure that all in the organization are learning in powerful ways. Team members know that if they are to achieve their moral purpose — educating all students to high standards — they need to engage teachers and principals in a cycle of continuous improvement.

The district superintendent and district leadership team believe professional learning is the central process for continuous improvement. Leaders focused their work on inter-rater reliability to establish effective approaches to engaging principals in deep conversations around instruction and key elements of the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric.

District leaders knew they must start with a clear vision of inter-rater reliability and build an effective change process that made sense to everyone in the organization in order to develop this process with fidelity, so they did their homework and lined up strategic partners to buttress the work.

THE RESEARCH

As a starting point, district leaders relied heavily on the work of the Measures of Effective Teaching project and one of its principal authors, Tom Kane. Kimball & Milanowski (2009) and Graham, Milanowski, & Miller (2012) found that quality observation verified by a well-trained observer added validity to the evaluation process and that adding even a second observer creates even stronger ratings. Consequently, inter-rater reliability is an essential learning design to support principal and teacher learning that results in highly effective instruction every day for every child.

In addition to the research, district leaders drew on support from the Harvard University Strategic Data Project in the Center for Educational Policy Review. Having access to Measures of Effective Teaching project's principal authors Tom Kane and Andrew Ho helped guide early theoretical underpinnings.

PARTNERSHIPS

Realizing that the process would need key partners to ensure success, the district selected Empirical Education's Calibration

GUIDING ASSUMPTIONS

- Establishing clear guidelines and thorough, intense practice through experience with peers strengthens inter-rater reliability and observer agreement. If observers and raters have clear and concise instructions about how to rate behavior and can come to agreement about this rating, this agreement increases consistent ratings across the district.

- When using qualitative data using two or more observers, developing inter-rater reliability and observer agreement ensures that results generated will be useful in understanding the effectiveness of all teachers based on common vocabulary and can be used to design professional learning.

- If even one of the observers is erratic on his or her scoring system, the entire system may be jeopardized as perceptions of others may interfere with its effectiveness.

- Developing inter-rater reliability and observer agreement is more about having clear distinguishing descriptors, exemplars, and conversations than about simple agreement.

and Certification Engine as the vehicle to host videos and the calibration tests. The district also chose Edivate — from School Improvement Network — to create videos of a diverse group of teachers to highlight teachers teaching at a highly effective level.

Learning Forward senior consultant Kay Psencik provides district leadership with the tools to build an inter-rater reliability process grounded in the principles of professional learning and guided by a framework that includes KASAB (knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behavior), theory of change, and logic model.

ESTABLISHING EXPECTATIONS

The district leadership team considered several statistical approaches during the design phase. What the district really wanted was absolute agreement among all principals when they observed lessons. The team established the expectations and percentage of agreement as a standard all principals must meet.

Those expectations include:
- In order to become a trainer, principal leaders had to develop 90% agreement on all elements in planning and instruction (domains 1 and 2 of the rubric).
- To receive certification, principals and raters must agree at a minimum of 85% of all elements in planning and instruction. For example, there are five components in the purposeful planning category. The group of observers of a common teacher plan and observed video lesson must agree on an exact rating with the norm established by the leader-

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ship team on four of those five elements.

- The team will discuss any discrepancy for any element. Team members will share their thinking and, using their observation notes, the definitions, and the rubric, they will work toward coming to agreement about its rating.
- Ultimately, every principal will meet the standard through taking a test and matching the norms established by the principal leadership team.

ASSESSMENTS

Principals pretested for agreement before engaging in the learning process to determine significant areas of agreement and disagreement. Facilitators monitor progress by giving assessments regularly throughout the learning sessions so that they focus on the needs of the learners and differentiate instruction.

Principals are required to be certified to rate teachers. If a principal is unable to reach the standards of agreement required, the district provides intense coaching and support and a certified second evaluator for the school.

Principals who don't meet the standard have multiple opportunities to learn and meet the certification requirement.

THE LEARNING PROCESS

At the first meeting of the leadership team, Gerardot became excited about the work. He knew it would be a challenge to do the work well, but he believed that if they could do a great job, it would have a significant impact on teaching and learning in the district.

As he became clear about the work to be done, he and his teammates jumped right in. He realized that the first task was to analyze the terms in the rubric and consider those that might be troublesome. The team found many words that might be easily interpreted in different ways and some that had multiple definitions. Furthermore, he knows that the team's work was to develop a definition of terms that would mirror the district's purpose and definition of rigorous instruction.

First, the district established a clear purpose for the learning process and worked to ensure that everyone understood it. The purpose of this program is to establish a professional learning and certification system for all principals and assistant principals to ensure reliable use of the rubric.

The process includes six steps:
1. Ensure everyone knows the purpose and process of the work.
2. Develop precise and clear definitions of terms unclear in the district's rubric.
3. Develop a training manual for a group of trainers to ensure consistency.
4. Establish ongoing districtwide collaboration and support.
5. Clarify certification procedures.
6. Establish post-certification support and monitoring.

The superintendent, the cabinet, district leaders for this project, and the facilitator developed the district's proposed

initiatives to improve the inter-rater reliability of classroom observation rating. These included a train-the-trainer approach and developing a user's manual for the rubric. In a vision statement, district leaders laid out the program design and described the implementation of the program.

The district's goal was to ensure that every principal engaged in conversation about the rubric, the definitions, and their observations of instruction by July 2015 and was certified by June 2016. Because of the short timeline, several components of the project needed to be managed at the same time. The district needed to hire a consultant to guide the process, identify an effective certification calibration engine and use it effectively, and create videos showing highly effective teachers, as well as launch a stringent professional learning program for all district administrators.

The district established a district leadership team of principals from all school levels. The team also included district leaders responsible for teacher evaluation as well as those responsible for curriculum, assessment, and instruction. The district set criteria for this team, approved that criteria through the superintendent's cabinet, and requested the principals to join the group.

This leadership team defined the terms in the rubric and sought exemplars to be sure all were seeing with the same eyes. As the leadership team became proficient in identifying terms and recognizing those indicators in video of lessons, the group turned to ways to engage the entire administrative team.

The team sought feedback from the larger community of administrators, then used the feedback to make revisions. The goal was to develop as clearly articulated definitions as possible so that people could see the definition in the same way.

The principals became engaged in the process and could see the value of the work they were doing together. As Gerardot reported, "I shared this process with my teachers, and they are so excited about this work. They are eager to deepen their understanding of the definition because we all want to improve our practice."

At the same time that principals were working on definitions, district leaders contracted with School Improvement Network to create 12 teaching videos mirroring the terms being defined by the principal leadership team. The leadership team set criteria for the selection of these teachers, balancing the list by race, gender, and sexual orientation in order to capture the widest view of the district. Most importantly, the teachers had to be rated highly effective on the rubric.

Once the principal leadership team was satisfied with its definitions, the work of calibration began. This team began observing videos and, using the rubric and their definitions, they rated teachers in the videos on each element in the first two domains of the rubric.

The process of viewing the videos, scoring the elements, discussing the rationale for the ratings, and working toward consensus proved to be time-consuming. The leadership team

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spent one day a month viewing the videos and hosting the essential conversations around their observations. The leadership team had to meet that standard of agreeing on 90% of the elements in each domain.

As the principals in the district leadership team began to use the definitions while viewing video of classroom teachers instead of just the rubric, they had an aha moment. One principal reported, "When we just used the rubric, we were all over the place in our ratings — there was no agreement. We have used just the rubric for five years, and we were in a habit of just using the rubric. Our facilitators had to remind us to pay attention to the rubric term definitions that we had been working on for almost eight months. When we used the definitions, we realized we were in closer agreement on our ratings."

The district principal leadership team viewed video after video, stopped and discussed each element, working toward agreement, and continued the process until the team met the standards of agreement.

After celebrating their success, the team began viewing video and establishing the norms all other principals would have to meet. They realized they were still learning.

Once the videos were normed, the principal leadership team began to host afternoon sessions with all principals to give them the opportunity to work through the same processes and to have the same conversations the team had been having. They began with observing video, scoring that video in domains 1 and 2 using the definitions as well as the rubric, and hosting conversations.

They held multiple afternoon meetings at elementary, middle, and high school levels. Two principals worked together at each level. They created a protocol to engage all principals in the conversation and work toward agreement. They were all working toward their first assessment date 12 months later. Everyone began to deepen their understanding of the elements and what they looked like. They were beginning to wear the same glasses.

On July 14, 2015, almost 12 months after the start of the work, all principals and assistant principals met to take their preassessment and engage in meaningful conversations around the instruction they were observing. All principals in the district were at 65% absolute agreement on all elements. Sessions for the next school year will focus on areas where they were not in agreement. After 10 months of deep conversations, they will take their full test.

PERCEIVED INITIAL IMPACT

Participants say that having collegial conversations around definitions, constructing common meaning regarding instruction and the rubric, and engaging with vertically aligned teams have already impacted their system of support for teachers. They report:
- Increased precision and quality of feedback comments;
- More consistent ratings across all forms of feedback;

- Greater clarity and understanding in the relationship between domains 1 and 2; and
- Better understanding on the part of teachers and coaches of the terms and vocabulary in the rubric.

CHALLENGES

Participants encountered several challenges:
- **Staying focused on this process as professional learning and not certification.** The district did not choose to just certify the principals, but to ensure there was ample time for learning from each other. However, when principals know they will be tested and certified through the process, they naturally concern themselves with that process rather than what they are learning. The leadership team is key to ensuring that principals stay focused on their own learning and the learning of their peers.
- **Ensuring that all principals can distinguish between evaluation and rater agreement.** Evaluation of teacher effectiveness has many components. Principals do multiple drop-in observations and view artifacts in the classroom, such as unit designs and student work, to make a final rating. The classroom formal observation is only one component. Inter-rater agreement is a focus on the lenses the principal uses to see the rubric in the classroom.
- **Developing precision in observations and descriptive language** to distinguish differences in observations and move toward agreement.

LESSONS LEARNED

By engaging in this process, participants came to understand a few key concepts.

Definition of terms matters. The rubric gives principals and teachers clarity around quality instruction, but terms in the documents often have multiple meanings and lack clarity of vision. When principals come to agreement about what the terms mean, and then have multiple opportunities to discuss what those terms look like while viewing lessons, they begin to see together.

Collaboration time matters. Principals spend many hours evaluating teachers. They really value time together to discuss their observations and work together toward common agreement about their observations. The leadership team is adamant about ensuring that all principals have extensive time to work with each other, discuss video lessons together, and learn from each other. They requested and were granted longer time than planned to engage their peers in the same level of conversation and dialogue that the leadership team had experienced.

Principals were concerned that the process would be rushed and they would not have the same rich experience as the leadership team. They appealed to the cabinet for longer working time and multiple windows to certify. This request led to many

WORDS MATTER

**UNPACK THE LANGUAGE OF TEACHING
TO CREATE SHARED UNDERSTANDING**

By Genevieve Graff-Ermeling, Bradley A. Ermeling, and Ronald Gallimore

Words matter. They are principal vehicles of classroom instruction and lesson planning. The more clearly teachers articulate what is to be learned and the instructional practices to be used, the better they teach and the more likely students develop knowledge and skills.

Words can be enigmatic. In education, many words have accumulated so many meanings that people interpret them differently. Sincere professionals might believe they are in agreement and engaged in complementary action for students' benefit. But closer examination reveals that the specific actions they take vary so much that they rarely achieve shared goals.

For example, there is evidence that a little struggle helps students better learn scientific or mathematical concepts and transfer them to new problems. In joint planning, teachers might agree on incorporating "struggle" into their instruction, but if they observe how they implement their plans, sometimes they are surprised at how differently they interpret "struggle" (Ermeling & Graff-Ermeling, in press).

Lesson plans and curriculum resources are filled with other familiar terms that broadly describe teaching actions but leave substantial room for interpretation. Words such as *emphasize, model, explain, demonstrate,* and *discuss* are just a few examples. Subtle but pivotal nuances of teach-

ing and learning lie beneath these words. When vaguely defined, the result is often less purposeful teaching, less clarity in key ideas or instructional procedures, and slower learning progress.

Here's an example. A group of elementary school teachers was working to improve reading fluency. The group elected to carve out weekly collaboration time to discuss challenges with student mastery of decodables. Each teacher was diligently working to teach well and assumed they had a common understanding of how to practice decodables, but further discussion revealed each had a different definition of decodables' purpose.

With some gentle nudging from a literacy coach, teachers discovered that some were making a subtle but critical mistake in the sequence of instruction. The purpose of decodables is to help students practice target sounds by emphasizing high-frequency words. By showing a word and asking students to repeat sounds, rather than allowing students to first pronounce each word themselves, teachers were short-circuiting the opportunity for learning.

Here's another example. A team of algebra teachers collaboratively planned a pivotal lesson on systems of equations to engage students in a rich conceptual problem. For the last segment of the lesson plan, the team added, "Share, discuss, and analyze with the whole class. Choose several groups as time permits. (About 15 minutes.)"

The teachers were prepared to finish and move on to other agenda items when the facilitator asked, "What does that discussion look like? How will we connect back to the core concept?" This prompted a discussion and a more specific set of teaching notes for the final lesson segment.

One member shared a critical addition: Deliberately circulate during student pair work and identify student pairs to present for each of the primary solution methods (table, graph, and equation). This idea set the stage for a culminating class discussion — providing students an opportunity to learn from a full range of examples and compare and discuss the advantages of each method.

COMPLEXITY BENEATH THE SURFACE

Words that have a strong history of use within a certain context can also mask the complexity that lies beneath. Consider the word "explain." Teachers might choose from a dozen different methods for explaining a new concept or idea for a given lesson topic, but an equally important qualifier of "*Who* is the explainer?" can dramatically alter a learning opportunity.

Considering this central question can shift a lesson from a conventional teacher-sharing-knowledge explanation to one that enhances understanding by enlarging students' responsibility. Working as an external advisor for a Title II-funded project in Riverside, California, Genevieve Graff-Ermeling observed such a shift while coaching elementary teachers'

For example, there is evidence that a little struggle helps students better learn scientific or mathematical concepts and transfer them to new problems.

implementation of the Biological Sciences Curriculum Study 5E instructional model.

In her coaching notes, Graff-Ermeling recorded a third of the teachers she visited reverting to a teacher-centric use of the word "explain." This occurred despite training and take-home materials received during a summer workshop that emphasized students as the agents of this activity.

Follow-up conversations revisited the importance of creating opportunities for students to explain concepts to each other and back to the teacher before receiving answers from direct instruction. The expectation that everyone understood a common meaning for "explain" proved to be an unwarranted assumption.

Finally, the clarity of words determines whether assessment results get translated into detailed actions that impact classroom instruction. At one high school we work with, teachers periodically examine their school-based benchmark data to identify student strengths and continuing learning needs. A critical final step in the analysis protocol is to select a high-priority need and articulate, "What are we going to teach, and how are we going to teach it?"

Teachers new to this process often record vague language for teaching, such as, "Give more time and examples," "Say it with more emphasis," or "We need to spend time working on this skill." Each of these phrases begs the question, "How?" For assessment findings to impact teaching, the "how" must be clearly articulated.

> **Encourage teacher teams and individual teachers to add a deliberate step in their lesson planning process where they identify and unpack words with multiple meanings.**

A group of high school chemistry teachers experienced this in their collaborative work around stoichiometry, specifically mole conversions. One of their continuing student needs was the correct use of the mole ratio to convert between given and wanted units of measurement. The teachers raised the possibility of creating a "mole troll bridge" activity and wrote in their notes: "Stress that it's a bridge between wanted and given ... cannot cross over without going over the bridge."

After prompting from a coach, they further discussed and elaborated, "Create a sidewalk chalk stoichiometry map with wooden box as mole ratio bridge. Have teacher be mole troll. (Require ratio as password.)" In spring 2015, sidewalk chalk on the ground outside the building marked that two new teachers implemented this learning activity with fidelity, bringing the total to five teachers over the past few years.

STRATEGIES FOR UNPACKING LANGUAGE

Principals, coaches, and mentors can help teachers recognize and address the multiple meanings of words in their planning and reflection process. Here are four ways to facilitate these discussions.

> **Engage grade-level or subject-area team leaders in identifying and unpacking common and familiar terms used in lesson planning.**

Engage grade-level or subject-area team leaders in identifying and unpacking common and familiar terms used in lesson planning. Introduce a word such as "explain." Ask participants to describe their personal interpretation of that word's meaning and implication in the context of a typical lesson. Compare their descriptions, drawing attention to inconsistencies, ambiguities, and the limitations these place on effective teaching and learning.

Encourage teacher teams and individual teachers to add a deliberate step in their lesson planning process where they identify and unpack words with multiple meanings. Present sample lessons or invite participants to study their own lessons to identify examples of words where the intended teaching or learning activity is not specific enough. Assist team leaders or instructional coaches by practicing specific facilitation moves and language to initiate further elaboration during upcoming team meetings (e.g. "I'm not sure I understand what we mean by 'explain.' Can someone unpack that a little more for me?").

Foster a habit of asking probing questions when discussing instructional practices with colleagues. Whether in formal or informal settings, teachers often exchange ideas about classroom activities and teaching methods, which are typically expressed in general terms and implemented with varying degrees of fidelity to the intended design and purpose.

For example, imagine two high school English teachers discussing obstacles they experienced with improving student writing through peer revision. One teacher mentions positive results she has observed from modeling levels of revision commentary with example student papers. The conversation often ends here with, "That's an interesting idea. I'll have to try that."

Educational leaders can help foster a new pattern of professional discourse by modeling and practicing these types of exchanges with detailed follow-up questions and requests for further elaboration. In the teacher exchange about peer revision, the second teacher might ask, "How exactly do you model that?"

This could lead to an explanation about providing students with specific rating criteria for revision commentary (level 0, level 1, level 2), selecting anonymous papers, and engaging students in groups of three where they rotate specific revision roles (reader, commentator, recorder).

Become the novice and ask teachers to explain their ideas to you. Instructional coaches and administrators often approach their roles as purveyors of advice and miss the opportunity to facilitate clarity and depth of thinking by asking questions.

During planning or data analysis sessions, listen with inter-

est and curiosity to validate and encourage. Then ask teachers to describe ideas in more detail so you can picture how it would transpire in the classroom. When time permits, have teachers use you as a mock audience to teach the content or skill. This short trial run can help uncover vague language or plans that lack specifics. In many cases, it will also reveal critical sequences in the teaching process that were missing altogether.

RICHER OPPORTUNITIES FOR LEARNING

Diligently and consistently modeled and implemented, practical unpacking strategies can help an educator community develop shared understanding of underlying ideas, uncover gaps in grasp of instructional practices, and prepare lessons with improved clarity and richer opportunities for student learning.

A central goal of communication is to cohere — "to coalesce fragments of information back together into a single understanding" (Atkinson, 2003). This definition describes well one of the most difficult tasks of teaching. And it's actually the origin of the word communication: to "make common" or "bring together."

Vague words produce underdeveloped conceptions, limit-

ing teacher growth and understanding of practice and leaving students with ambiguous ideas. Well-defined and specified language paves the way for purposeful classroom interaction, minimizes unproductive struggle, and creates opportunities to learn.

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Do you see what I see?

Continued from p. 18
afternoons of rich conversations with their peers.

Leadership matters. The final, most important lesson from the project was how principals took over the leadership and facilitation. From writing the protocol and implementation to planning for the districtwide assessment, leadership team members were vocal advocates for the power of a thoughtful, reflective, conversational process.

NEXT STEPS

As the district moves closer toward rater agreement among all principals, it plans to take other approaches.

First, the district will work with teachers to understand the definitions and use them with precision in their collaboration to design curriculum maps, units of study, assessments, and lessons to match the descriptors in the first two domains.

The district will also work to develop inter-rater agreement among those who evaluate principals and program directors.

Finally, the district will work to ensure that the conversations principals are having around quality instruction continue through ongoing professional learning and district leadership meetings.

One principal sums up the impact of the professional learning on his work: "I learned today that I need to pay more attention to the rubric and the definitions when I do my observations," said Chad Hasong, principal of North Side High School. "I had begun to make assumptions about what this

rubric says, and this work is going to reshape the way I observe teachers and give them feedback."

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THE 5 HABITS OF EFFECTIVE PLCs

By Lois Brown Easton

Habits are, according to Stephen R. Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People,* "the intersection of knowledge, skills, and desire" (2004, p. 47). They emerge from a deep understanding of what to do (knowledge), how to do it (skills), and why it must be done (desire).

Beginning with the why — or desire — as Simon Sinek (2009) suggests is the way school-based professional learning communities (PLCs) begin curating a set of habits. The most compelling desires for which a professional learning community develops a habit are student learning and well-being. This article describes the knowledge and skills that professional learning community members need to create a habit out of their desire.

Habits serve educators as signposts of progress toward achieving their desires. They are interim indicators of a professional learning community's success. Ultimately, of course, professional learning communities demonstrate effectiveness by sharing both qualitative and quantitative data that document improved student achievement and well-being.

In the meantime, demonstration of habits serves notice that professional learning communities are success-oriented. Professional learning communities that manifest the habits described in this article are likely to be effective and to achieve what their members desire.

Here, in no particular order, are five habits that professional learning communities can cultivate to be effective.

1 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE.

The most successful professional learning communities hold themselves accountable both formally and informally. Informally, professional learning community members hold themselves accountable for their own learning and for the learning of everyone in their professional learning communities.

They also hold themselves accountable for doing something about their learning — implementing changes in their classrooms or in the school as a whole that make a difference for students. They also hold themselves similarly accountable to others outside their own professional learning community — those in other professional learning communities, those in the school as a whole, and in the district.

Professional learning communities with informal accountability:
- Establish and adhere to working agreements or norms that advance learning and doing;
- Report to professional learning community colleagues what they are doing (as well as challenges they encounter) as a regular part of professional learning community meetings;
- Communicate outside their professional learning communities by voice mail, email, blogging, or other means about what they are learning and doing;
- Keep track of and reflect on what they are learning and doing through a portfolio system; and
- Make short presentations at other meetings (faculty, grade-level, and subject-area meetings as applicable) about progress and periodically (perhaps twice a year) display their portfolios and make presentations of learning to others.

Formal professional learning community accountability is distinguished from informal because it centers on goals or purposes that the professional learning community has identified.

Professional learning communities give notice that they are being accountable formally by broadcasting goals or purposes within the school and, perhaps, the district; sharing progress toward meeting those goals or purposes; and sharing challenges and addressing them through peer coaching (perhaps with members of other professional learning communities), protocols, or other inquiry processes.

They demonstrate that they have met goals with data, student work, test scores, interview or survey results, teaching plans and materials, or other concrete indicators. They invite others into their classrooms to see the results of their work. They write reports, which they publish locally or broadly, and make presentations about their results.

2 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS MAKE EFFECTIVE USE OF IMPORTANT SKILL SETS.

Professional learning communities that have acquired and use these four skill sets are more likely to be successful:
- Understand the change process;
- Facilitate learning and implement changes based on learning;
- Share leadership; and
- Use dialogue.

Understand the change process. Successful professional learning communities make part of their learning the study of a variety of change processes, and they regularly refer to at least one model as they learn and implement their learning.

Popular change models include: Hall and Hord's (2001) Concerns-Based Adoption Model; Rogers' (1962) diffusion of innovations; Bridges' (2009) three-phases model; Tuckman's (1965) model of how groups change (forming, storming, norming, performing); and Ambrose's (1996) model describing the essential elements of change and how the absence of any one of them can thwart change.

Professional learning communities can study any of these and other change models and adopt the one that makes the most sense to them in terms of explaining what professional learning community members are going through and — if changes will affect others in a school — what they will go through.

The important thing for professional learning community members to understand is that change is not a smooth, straight road across a blank countryside. It is more likely to be curvy, with several U-turns, numerous potholes, and scores of environmental threats.

Facilitate learning and implement changes based on learning. Professional learning community members need the ability to facilitate their own learning and implement processes. One or more members — or the whole professional learning community — can learn and practice these skills. Among the subskills that facilitators need are: Organize the professional learning community for learning and doing; create a learning and doing agenda; use activities to open and close gatherings and process learning; give and get feedback; and reach consensus.

Professional learning community members can gain these skills in a variety of ways. Sometimes district staff members can

RESOURCES ON FACILITATION SKILLS

Danielson, C. (2009). *Talk about teaching! Leading professional conversations.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.

Delehant, A. (2007). *Making meetings work: How to get started, get going, and get it done.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press & NSDC.

Garmston, R. & Wellman, B. (1999). *The adaptive school: A sourcebook for developing collaborative groups.* Norwood, MA: Christopher-Gordon Publishers.

Murphy, M. (2009). *Tools & talk: Data, conversation, and action for classroom and school improvement.* Oxford, OH: NSDC.

provide training; otherwise, professional learning community members can study the art of facilitation online or read books (see resources list above).

Share leadership. Professional learning community members need to develop their understanding of shared or distributed leadership, especially if there are role differences among members. Members need to understand that each of them has at least one leadership asset (see Douglas Reeves' list of leadership assets, 2006) and can play any number of needed roles.

Charlotte Danielson makes a strong case for teachers as leaders in her 2006 book, *Teacher Leadership That Strengthens Professional Practice.* As Richard Elmore (2000) stated, "The roles and activities of leadership flow from the expertise for learning and improvement, not from the formal dictates of the institution" (p. 21).

It may be enough for a professional learning community to make shared or distributed leadership a topic for a meeting and use Reeves' list or other resources (see Easton, 2011, pp. 220-228). Principals who find it difficult to share leadership may need training or book study using a book such as Reeves' *The Learning Leader: How to Focus School Improvement for Better Results* (2006).

Use dialogue. The fourth skill set may very well be the most important. Without the skill of dialogue, professional learning communities may become dysfunctional. Absent this skill, people can interrupt each other, become fractious and competitive, break into factions, use sarcasm (disguised as humor) to level each other, engage in side conversations or birdwalks, disengage entirely, and monopolize the discussion. No professional learning community needs these distractions from learning and implementing important changes to benefit students.

Dialogue differs from conversation, discussion, and debate.

It is as friendly as conversation usually is; it does not result in decisions, as discussions often do; and it has a fine balance between advocacy and inquiry, something that debate — with its automatically adversarial stances — does not have.

Dialogue sounds different. It moves at a slower pace as people try out ideas, may include silences during which people think about what they have heard before speaking, and is usually quieter than discussion, during which raised voices are common, as people try to interject their ideas, sometimes speaking over each other.

Dialogue does not come naturally. It must be learned, consciously practiced, and purposefully employed when it's important to surface everyone's ideas.

A variety of protocols (both online and face-to-face) ease people into the use of dialogue. What really helps, however, is watching dialogue in action. One way to do that is by viewing the DVD *Dialogue: An Introduction* from the Center for Adaptive Schools (2009).

3 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOCUS ON DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING GOOD RELATIONSHIPS.

Professional learning communities that ignore relationships simply delay the need to attend to relationships. It's better for professional learning community members to begin building relationships at the beginning of their work together than to wait for a crisis — an inevitability if the work is to be substantive and long-lasting.

Good relationships enable professional learning community members to develop trust, and trust is essential when the work is on what Robert Garmston and Bruce Wellman call "wicked problems" — such as curriculum alignment or accountability — that aren't solvable with linear cause-effect thinking (1999, p. 225). Trust is vital when professional learning communities encounter a problem or crisis.

Professional learning communities can foster relationships that promote trust when they acknowledge and appreciate differences from the beginning, using activities such as Four Compass Points (Easton, 2011, p. 109), True Colors (https://truecolorsintl.com/resources), or the Meyers-Briggs Type Inventory (www.myersbriggs.org/my-mbti-personality-type/mbti-basics) to identify and value preferences members have for how they meet and work together.

Development and conscientious use of working agreements and norms help professional learning community members focus on individual and group needs. Protocols and dialogue that help members balance inquiry and advocacy preserve positive relationships.

Finally, professional learning community members need to surface and discuss behaviors that compromise trust, such as sarcasm or the inability to admit lack of knowledge. Articles by Goldsmith (n.d.) and Feltman (2001) identify these destructive behaviors, as does the article "Plan your response to difficult participants" in the newsletter *Tools for Schools* (NSDC, 1998, p. 7).

Regularly focusing on relationships helps professional learning community members be trustworthy themselves and choose to trust others. Finally, this focus helps members develop trust in the group and its ability to achieve remarkable changes in classrooms and schools as a whole.

4 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOCUS ON AND CONNECT LEARNING AND DOING.

An effective professional learning community focuses on both learning and doing, and the two are related. This may seem obvious, but it can easily be derailed.

Teachers and administrators may see professional learning communities as a mechanism to implement a district-sponsored initiative. For example, a district determines that all teachers need to use Fisher and Frey's (2008) strategy called gradual release of responsibility. The district requires schools to implement this strategy, and the schools, in turn, use professional learning communities to implement the reform.

Yet teachers in some professional learning communities are accustomed to being told what to implement. These teachers will sometimes wait to be told exactly what they should implement rather than determining on the basis of passion and purpose what they want to do to improve student learning and well-being.

Another deterrent to effective professional learning communities is the attitude that professional learning communities are just business as usual. Sometimes teachers see professional learning communities as just another meeting to attend rather than an opportunity for learning and making a difference for students.

Teachers who do not see themselves as learners may be content with the status quo. Principals add to this problem by usurping professional learning community time to make announcements or attend to school business. Business as usual means that a hierarchy prevails (usually with the principal as leader) that is counter to the egalitarian culture of professional learning communities.

Finally, professional *development* has long been the norm for adult learning in schools, with educators passively being developed by other adults rather than taking on their own learning and using outside resources as needed. A culture of professional development hampers a culture of professional learning.

The learning-doing gap plagues professional learning communities as much as it does corporations (Pfeffer & Sutton, 2000). Jeffrey Pfeffer and Robert Sutton wonder "why knowledge of what needs to be done frequently fails to result in action or behavior consistent with that knowledge" (Sparks, 2004).

Planning is sometimes the enemy, with professional learning communities deterred from action as they create visions, missions, and strategic plans. In fact, other than identifying passion and purpose and creating first-step-next-step, short-range plans to accomplish their purposes, professional learning communities

tool WHAT IS OUR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY PASSIONATE ABOUT?

DIRECTIONS:
- Individually rate the degree to which you believe each statement to be true:
  1 = absolutely true, 2 = mostly true, 3 = rarely/partially true, 4 = untrue.
- Collect and tally individual scores.
- Have a dialogue about the highest scores (untrue and rarely/partially true).
- Identify concrete evidence that supports your ratings.
- Ask yourselves: Is this what we care most about? Is this what keeps us up at night? Is this what gives us pain?
- If your answer is yes, you may have discovered your professional learning community's passion.
- Then, consider what you need to do in your professional learning community about your passion. Your first actions may be as simple as get more concrete examples, interview students, or research this problem.
- Later, you will develop additional actions to take.

	1 Absolutely true	2 Mostly true	3 Rarely/ partially true	4 Untrue
Students in my school are achieving their potential.				
Teachers in my school are satisfied with student achievement in the school.				
School and district administrators are satisfied with student achievement in the school.				
Parents are satisfied with student achievement in my school.				
Students in my school are excited about going to school and learning.				
The culture of my school is conducive to learning.				
In my school, the conditions for learning (e.g. use of time and resources) are conducive to learning.				
We have little or nothing to improve in my school.				
What we do have to improve can be done by individual teachers working alone in their classrooms.				
Teachers feel efficacious and express job satisfaction.				
Teachers are resilient and resourceful in my school.				

should leave visions, missions, and strategic plans to schools and districts, referencing them but not spending any time in creating them for the professional learning communities.

Learning without doing something about learning — implementing strategies to improve classrooms and schools — satisfies only half of the equation. Doing something — such as implementing an outside reform — without learning is equally unsatisfactory. In the best professional learning communities, learning and doing are enmeshed.

To begin to make changes, professional learning community members will find that they need to engage in their own learning. They will discover what to do as they learn, and they will engage in additional learning as they discover the effects of their actions.

5 PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY MEMBERS OPERATE ACCORDING TO A STRONG SENSE OF PURPOSE, DRIVEN BY THE PASSION THEY HAVE ABOUT ACHIEVING THAT PURPOSE.

Professional learning communities need to be driven from inside and informed from the outside. This means that professional learning communities work according to passion (related to the desire that forces habits) about making substantive change (based on data, both qualitative and quantitative) that leads to development of purposes or goals, which align with their school's and district's mission, vision, goals, and strategic plan.

Working according to passion and purpose — rather than on an imposed goal or purpose, which may not relate to a strongly felt need within the professional learning community

— is what makes professional learning communities effective. For example, professional learning communities are more likely to achieve success on differentiated instruction if they work from their passion about reaching all students and a purpose related to that passion than from a district-imposed requirement that all teachers implement differentiation.

It is far better that professional learning communities address a commonly held goal that all students should achieve their potential than focus on implementing someone else's solution to the problem of nonachievement. This means that district boards and administrators, as well as school administrators, must allow professional learning communities to find their own work within a general mission, vision, set of goals, or strategic plan.

It also means that district and school administrators should not try to control what professional learning communities decide to make the focus of both their learning and doing.

The figure at right shows where the other interim indicators intersect.

Professional learning communities can work according to their own passion and purposes (within school and district priorities) if they are accountable. Skills sets and trust relationships help professional learning community members determine and orient themselves toward their purposes. All four of these indicators make it possible for professional learning communities to learn and implement their learning for the benefit of students.

Professional learning communities should have control over not only their focus but also how they work. If, according to data of various kinds, they decide that there are too many dropouts between 9th and 10th grade — and if it is important to the school and district to keep all students in school and have them graduate — a professional learning community can operate according to this passion and establish a related purpose.

Passion is the driving force behind effective professional learning communities. One way that professional learning community members can identify what they really care about is by sharing their worst fears and best hopes (Chadwick, 2002) about a situation, such as the dropout rate.

Passion comes from what keeps educators up at night as they think about school or what gives them pain. Responses to the survey statements in the tool on p. 28 can also help professional learning community members identify their passions.

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

Professional learning communities that are accountable, employ various skill sets to operate, foster good relationships among members and with the larger community, operate according to passion and purpose, and engage in both learning and doing are more likely to be successful than professional learning communities that have not developed these actions into habits. And professional learning communities that demonstrate these interim indicators are likely to be successful in

RELATIONSHIP AMONG THE HABITS
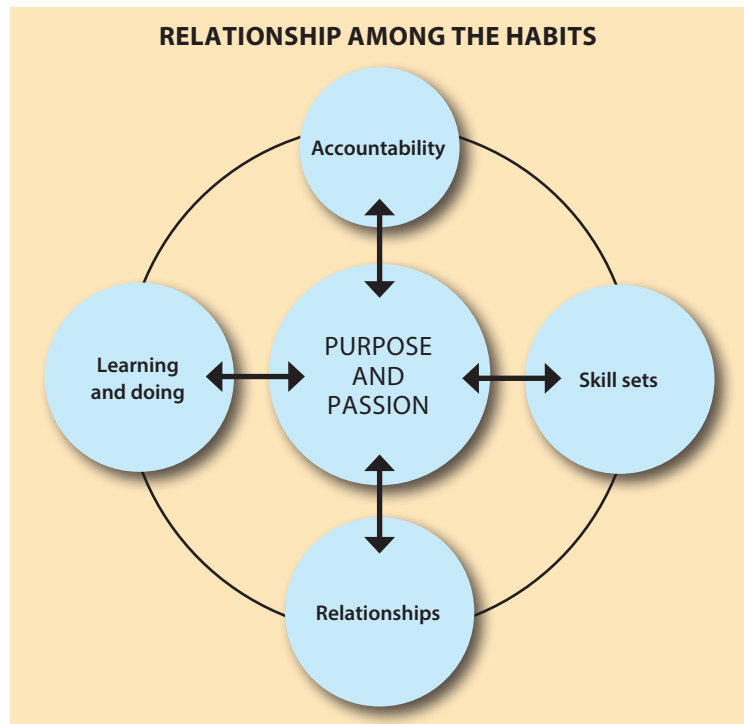
terms of achieving the ultimate indicator of success: improved student learning and well-being.

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MAKE A PATH *for* EVALUATION

10 STEPPING STONES HELP LEADERS BUILD SOLID PRACTICES

By Robby Champion

You may have noticed a near absence of conversation about thorough evaluation of professional learning. Perhaps this topic has momentarily slipped off everyone's agendas — too many other high-priority challenges.

Maybe the silence correlates with the decline in federal grants requiring systematic monitoring and some degree of program evaluation to document evidence of results. Or, most likely, a confluence of factors pushed program evaluation aside.

One thing is for sure. If professional learning leaders are looking for a clear path lined with models of best program evaluation practices, they will become tangled in the weeds.

I encourage leaders to get started making their own path. As it happens, there are lots of reasonable places from which to start.

Since the knowledge base about evaluation of professional learning expanded noticeably in the 1990s, the pressure for doing better program evaluation will not likely disappear. Why? As in other education endeavors, leaders are now re-

sponsible for getting the best possible results.

The benchmark has been reset. Professional learning leaders will be expected to ensure that the connections between their work and enhanced student learning are not just happenstance. Just as they are breaking through new paths to expand the available learning models and options for adult learners, these leaders will be expected to have the knowledge, will, and expertise to undertake better evaluation practices than were accepted in bygone eras.

After working for several decades to help professional learning leaders and their teams improve programs and evaluations, I have observed several habits of mind and work that can make a significant difference in the quality of evaluations. I offer these 10 stepping stones for leaders growing curious or anxious about undertaking solid evaluation practices.

1   CARVE OUT 10% OF YOUR WORK TIME.

Your challenge is to make program evaluation in your organization better than last year — not perfect, but better. How do you accomplish this? Don't wait until a program is well underway or winding down to figure out what needs to be done regarding evaluation. Incorporate evaluation into your work calendar on a regular basis.

Devoting 10% of your time to professional learning evaluation tasks can achieve more than you think, especially if you drop the habit of multitasking and focus on this one task. You may pride yourself on multitasking, but this work calls for monotasking.

When a task is not routine yet and you are learning as you go, you need to focus on it. You will get a lot done if you focus. You may fumble around. You will rethink more efficient ways of doing it. You will make corrections as you go and as you gain input from others. All of that is essential to gaining traction on your new path.

Before planning any organized professional learning, before initiation and implementation get rolling, start a new habit of mind: Make evaluation part of the program's life story from conception.

I call this level 0 evaluation. It accomplishes two things: It works out any bugs and builds support among stakeholders (Champion, 2004). With this newly acquired habit of mind, you have a better chance of ensuring that a program is appropriate, has the best design you can afford, and has the best possible chances of enhancing student learning in this context.

2   START AN INFORMAL COLLABORATIVE LEARNING GROUP.

Many educators in charge of programs, initiatives, or grants have never taken a course in program evaluation. Take the lead: Start a learning group to expand your knowledge, and invite your collaborators to learn along with you.

Maybe your situation calls for a monthly 30-minute brown bag lunch group or 15 minutes carved out of a regular weekly staff meeting or 90 minutes out of a semiannual retreat. Or maybe you need to launch an online study group on this topic so your colleagues can participate at their convenience.

For reading materials, expect to dig around. Not many program evaluation reports get published in journals. Many published reports are snoozers — weak evaluation designs, heavy with jargon and rambling narratives, guilty of overreach with too much weight placed on sketchy self-report data. Select a few articles, brief abstracts, blurbs in journals, or even a book.

You can read and dissect the readings together or have participating members each read something different on their own and report back their discoveries to the group. Learn from both the good and the mediocre examples — much like facilitators learn from the good and the poor facilitators they encounter.

If you look outside the field of education, you will find worthwhile reading materials. Search for evaluations of professional development or training conducted by corporations or in medical fields, such as nursing education journals or government-funded studies.

Locate a variety of types of studies, including self-report surveys, in-depth case studies, longitudinal studies, experimental control group studies, ethnographic investigations, and studies examining return on investment. Look for goal-based versus non-goal-based program evaluations.

Note especially any reports of evaluation efforts that combine methodologies in order to gain deeper insights from various kinds of data. Pay attention to particular aspects that puzzle you: major question(s), program description, design type, participant sample and the technique used to select the sample, data sources, procedures used to collect data, data analysis and treatment, how data are triangulated, the findings, and next steps.

3 GET OUT OF THE "BROAD GOALS" TRAP.

Evaluation becomes convoluted when programs are aimed loosely at broad goals. Take this typical dilemma: Reading scores in a school or district improve significantly. What really pushed the reading scores up?

Think of all of the possible influences or drivers. Was it the new language arts and literacy curricula, the addition of trained reading mentors who worked side-by-side with new teachers drilling down on specific reading habits every day, the increase in instructional time devoted to reading, the influx of new principals who were trained and charged with pushing reading, whole-school free reading time, or was it the interim testing in classrooms begun last year to keep much closer track of student progress?

Ask five different leaders in a district, school, or state, and they will likely give you five very different explanations for the results, depending on their particular area of expertise and work responsibility.

Before launching any professional learning initiative, clarify the targets you are taking responsibility for that are related to the broad goals you are supporting. Work collaboratively with others to specify measurable results of the professional learning efforts you lead.

This may seem obvious since specific learning outcomes and results have been an established practice for decades. That is the reality in programs for students, but professional learning initiatives are often launched with no more direction than to support broad organizational priorities or goals.

Your challenge as a leader in this next era of professional learning is to work collaboratively with your stakeholders (faculty, departments, teams, district leadership) to align strategically with the enhancements to student learning that are the broad goals and the intended timeline. Break this down into the specific knowledge, skills, attitudes, and practices that participating educators will be employing in their practice at a specific target date.

4 USE THE MOST POWERFUL DESIGNS YOU CAN AFFORD, AND START WITH A COST-BENEFIT HABIT OF MIND.

Advisory groups often like to get their work done pronto — without stepping back to pause and methodically consider costs and benefits. Sometimes these groups also become infatuated with particular professional learning models, favorite consultants, and established traditions.

When you undertake to plan any initiative, pause to take a second look with a cost-benefit analysis frame of mind. Your responsibility is to select the most powerful learning models and practices to get the results intended within the resources available.

Envision this typical scenario: Groupthink takes over when the suggestion comes into focus to launch into using mentors for induction of new teachers — like they do in the district down the road. Before the loud affirmations and applause close the work session, lead your group to pause and work through a cost-benefit analysis.

Question the kinds of resources needed to support mentoring, including ongoing training and support for the mentors throughout implementation of the strategy. Question how effective mentoring as an induction approach might be if, due to limited resources, mentors get only 10 hours of training or have to be stretched to limit contact with each new teacher to 90 minutes per week.

Two important axioms to remember: The more powerful the design, the more likely you will get strong results, and every model of learning has its costs and benefits.

5 FOCUS ON THE BIG PICTURE WITH A BACKWARD MAP.

If you are working within a multiyear timeline, you need a backward map. This planning strategy requires that you list the target accomplishments you need to see happening for each span of time (such as quarters or semesters), starting with the farthest out date. Be warned: Some of your collaborators may cling to the old habit of "Let's just see how it goes" rather than thinking of measurable milestones to guide the next few years'

work. Backward mapping is a big picture, results-driven habit of mind.

Backward mapping helps with formative assessment of what is working and what needs to be adjusted right away. It helps remind you and your adult learners and your collaborators of the next milestones. If you use a backward map to guide what data you collect on evaluation questions, you will be ready at a moment's notice to report with confidence to your leadership on the results thus far.

6 CHRONICLE EVERY INITIATIVE'S LIFE STORY.

You might have already faced the challenge of taking over a job without the benefit of the history or results data for a program or initiative. Beyond stacks of customer satisfaction surveys (often not tallied, analyzed, summarized, scored, or reported), you might have to make major decisions without sufficient background — no narrative on the program's vision or original mission, no videos or electronic portfolios or photos of student work, no backward map, no interim progress reports, no interviews or focus groups with students or teachers, no graphs of the metrics.

Start the work habit of creating and maintaining an ongoing chronicle for every initiative. Whether you create an electronic portfolio online or use a loose-leaf notebook, the program's story will serve you well. Update it so that the record shows an ongoing story of the initiative, including the rationale or approach to change, contact information for all leaders, samples of the evaluation tools, formative evaluation results, narrative notes on shifts and improvements made to accommodate changes in leadership or funding, budgets, newsletter articles, pictures of students at work in classrooms, evidence of student learning, and a timeline or backward map.

7 ESTABLISH EVALUATION PRIORITIES.

A big part of doing a good job with program evaluation is deciding which burning questions to investigate — and which not to investigate. Whittle down the scope of the evaluation work so that it is manageable with the resources you have. Remember: All programs deserve to be evaluated, but not all programs need to be evaluated with the same degree of effort.

You can establish evaluation priorities in several ways. For example: Focus on the program or programs for which the stakes or organizational expectations are highest. Or focus on making one manageable but vital improvement to all of your initiatives at the same time.

Once you have set your evaluation priorities, you can be much more definitive when seeking help and expertise to get the job done. Evaluation of any scope requires resources. There are a variety of jobs to be done, so you can use various kinds of help. Seek out university graduate students, volunteer interns, local university professors, measurement and technology experts within your district, and research institutes in your region.

8 CREATE TEACHABLE MOMENTS AND SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW.

One reason that expectations regarding professional learning practices stay decades behind is that some top decision-makers are stuck in a time warp.

They do not have up-to-date information about advances in the field of professional learning. They still envision professional learning as edutainment aimed to inspire and transform — required attendance events for employees who passively face the front of the room, listen attentively, applaud politely, become inspired, complete the exit survey, leave the room, go back and make changes in how they do their jobs, and produce wildly better learning results for students.

Many top leaders are oblivious to the innovative ways in which employees are learning at work today — open source knowledge sharing strategies, 10-minute alerts, online learning aids, informal job-embedded conversations, team huddle techniques, video simulations, collaborative analysis of student work, and more.

Get ready to share what you are learning — in small digestible morsels. Create teachable moments. This is vital if you are to cut a new path and get others to join you on this path.

Be aware that some top-level leaders know even less about program evaluation than they do about the array of emerging models of professional development. Think through what you are learning and what you would say if you get the spotlight for a couple of minutes in a committee meeting.

Be ready to draw a quick sketch of the different levels of program evaluation or the typical performance dip that occurs during change. Be ready to explain how you regularly do various formative assessments to keep track of how, for example, the initiative to develop team leaders or mentors or department chairs is advancing (Champion, 2001).

Be ready to answer questions about your work when the ball is tossed to you. Here is how not to do it: I encountered a top leader in a steering committee meeting who challenged me by asking, "I think principals should be given a test at the end of each summer institute. What proof do you have that they are learning anything?"

I fumbled the ball because I was so stunned with the question. I assumed the leader knew the critical importance of follow-up supports to ensure that whatever was learned in a summer institute was put into practice.

Leaders often find program evaluation perplexing. They wonder what makes evaluation of organized professional learning efforts so challenging. The simple answer: There's a lot going on. Even if your professional learning efforts are considered top-notch, they are not the only influences on student learning.

Another important reality to acknowledge: Educators learn from many sources outside of the workplace — graduate programs, professional organizations, online sources, or even informally chatting with other teachers, and they learn at home.

This mix of learning sources can easily get mingled with and overtake whatever impact the professional learning in your organization achieves. That is not a condemnation of the program but an opportunity to learn.

Program evaluation queries should focus on collecting various data to triangulate when asking questions that matter, such as: "Looking at our interim target, how are we doing thus far, and what is the evidence?" "What do we need to improve right now to increase progress toward our stated long-range targets?" "What did the investment in this effort cost?" "What, if anything, did this program contribute that was not anticipated? What patterns are we seeing repeatedly and what might they tell us?"

9 GET OTHER FINGERPRINTS ON THE EVALUATION.

To do solid, credible program evaluation, you need the cooperation and collaborative thinking of other stakeholders. Avoid making all program evaluation decisions on your own, even if it seems more efficient. Just as it is important to involve your adult learners (or their representatives) in helping create a professional learning plan that affects them, reach out to get input about evaluation design decisions. Then be generous with kudos to all those who helped strengthen the evaluation.

Your colleagues all around the organization have expertise, information, documentation, student work samples, videos, and valuable stories to share. You need all of this to make your evaluation efforts credible and valued.

Keep your stakeholders in the loop from start to finish and with regular updates. Resistance to participating in data collection often stems from people sensing they have not been kept informed, listened to, or adequately recognized for their investment of time or ideas.

In addition, disdain for the results that come out of an evaluation effort often include remarks like these, and they can sink your evaluation report: "This is all news to me." "No one interviewed any of us." "No one ever visited classrooms here that I know of." "I don't buy the notion that teacher team projects can show real evidence that they actually learned anything new from working together to analyze student work."

10 CREATE DEADLINES ON YOUR EVALUATION WORK CALENDAR.

Steady progress on your evaluation path will be a challenge. You have myriad other tasks that are more pressing. They are also more predictably rewarding. What to do?

Most professional development leaders have a strong habit of mind about working backward from big deadlines and public events. Work with that established habit of mind by creating a firm deadline. Put it on your public calendar. You might even promise to give a report at a particular time and place. Prepare whatever you think will help your stakeholders sit up and take notice of your evaluation efforts — video, snapshots of students in classrooms where the new techniques are being employed, charts displaying the trends in data, and some notable quotes.

Best wishes on your journey.

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HOW LEADERS CAN MAKE A BIG DIFFERENCE

By Stephanie Hirsh

According to the 2015 National Survey on College and Career-Ready Literacy Standards and Collaborative Professional Learning, 91% of teachers surveyed report working on standards implementation during collaborative time with colleagues, with 77% rating it valuable or extremely valuable in supporting their transition to new literacy standards.

73% of teachers who report having regular time to collaborate feel better prepared to implement the standards. And yet more than 80% of teachers report having fewer than two hours a week to collaborate.

If we agree with the simple supposition that time and collaborative learning experiences are key to successful implementation, then how do we ensure that more teachers have what they need?

Research has confirmed many times that leadership is second only to teaching in influencing student achievement. In my view, when our goals include equity and excellence,

leadership may be even more important.

What do system and school leaders do that teachers value most and identify as most helpful in their efforts to ensure high-quality literacy and standards-based instruction for all students? According to the survey results and confirmed by research, system and school leaders:

1 **ESTABLISH A VISION FOR HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION.** Leaders engage staff and colleagues in refining that vision so that it translates all the way to what happens between teachers and students.

2 **SHARE LEADERSHIP ON KEY ISSUES IMPACTING INSTRUCTION.** Leaders engage teachers in examination of data, determine priorities as they relate to ensuring all students master literacy standards, and identify the professional learning they need most to achieve the outcomes they want for students.

3 **TAP THE EXPERTISE OF THEIR BEST TEACHERS.** Leaders recognize that solutions to their most challenging problems may reside within their staff, so they look there first. If further expertise is necessary, they involve the staff in deciding where to look.

4 **MAKE COLLABORATIVE TIME A PRIORITY AND REMOVE THE BARRIERS TO IT.** Leaders eliminate excuses and find ways to create schedules that prioritize collaborative learning time. They provide support so teachers can use learning time wisely to solve problems tied to their highest student learning priorities.

5 **BEHAVE AS THE CHIEF LEARNER AND MODEL ALL THE PRACTICES THEY ASK OF COLLEAGUES AND STAFF.** Leaders learn alongside teachers and, in particular, engage in professional learning with teachers so they learn how to

ABOUT THE SURVEY

NCLE's report, *Building Literacy Capacity: The Conditions for Effective Standards Implementation,* details the findings from a large-scale national survey completed in spring 2015 in cooperation with NCLE's 25 stakeholder groups from across the education spectrum. Read the full report at **www.literacyinlearningexchange.org/building-literacy-capacity.**
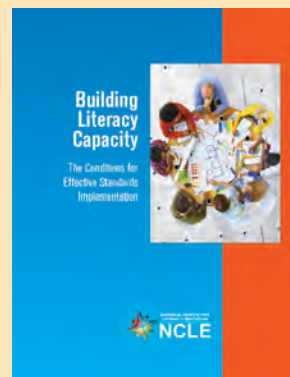
observe and provide feedback that will be most helpful. They also seek opportunities to learn with other leaders in other buildings and districts.

According to the National Center for Literacy Education survey results, teachers thrive in schools that prioritize these literacy capacity-building strategies and, in turn, students have greater opportunities for success.

These actions are small but very important things that system and school leaders do and teachers value most. When leaders are successful at these five things, they ensure that teachers have the opportunities they need to develop competence in teaching literacy and new standards. They also ensure that best practices spread from classroom to classroom and school to school.

That is why leadership is essential to achieving the goals of equity and excellence for all.

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DON'T JUST SURVIVE — THRIVE!

DEVELOP PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL TO HELP TEACHERS THRIVE IN TIMES OF GREAT CHANGE

By Roberta Reed and John Eyolfson

Teachers matter. Do our actions show that we believe this to be true? When treated as professionals and given the opportunity to participate in building and extending the profession, teachers rise to the occasion.

School leaders in Colorado's Cherry Creek School District put words into actions by developing teachers' professional capital through the use of high-impact instructional rounds grounded in an appreciative inquiry approach. By blending research from Hargreaves and Fullan (2012), Marzano (2007), Cooperrider and Whitney (2005), Dweck (2007), and Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning, these schools created and implemented a model that has had transformational impact.

HOW IT BEGAN

Beyond Our Own Walls, a series of cross-school instructional rounds, was born out of a conversation that

focused on what would happen if district leaders acted on the belief that teachers matter and that building and developing the profession is everyone's responsibility. What outcomes could we expect?

In the face of legislation that would impact teacher evaluations, we determined four hopeful outcomes and presented the idea to a district director and the assistant superintendent. These outcomes are:

- Increase depth of understanding, ownership, and usage of inquiry-based instruction in both science and literacy;
- Develop a collaborative understanding and ownership of the explicit connections among district initiatives through the lens of excellence and equity;
- Increase competency in professional communications and support the professionalism of teachers as decision-making collaborators; and
- Create and implement an effective and efficient model for meeting the adaptive challenges of education with measurable positive outcomes.

The directors and principals of three elementary schools chose to fund this process, allowing two grade levels at each school to participate. The only cost was for substitute teachers.

These schools achieved the proposed outcomes and more in the first year. The schools also developed sustainable teacher leadership and increased student engagement at a cognitive and affective level. As a result, in the six years since the instructional rounds began, the process has grown to include 10 schools and two districts.

WHAT HAPPENS DURING A ROUND

Participating schools take turns hosting instructional rounds. The morning of a round, a grade-level team of teachers from three schools gathers at the host school. All teachers from that grade level in the host school participate, though only one hosts a lesson. The other two schools send one grade-level teacher and one instructional coach or teacher leader.

Before the groups meet, coaches and teacher leaders have already designed professional learning centered around what the schools have selected as an area of focus. Content has included topics such as science notebooks, standards of mathematical practice, appreciative inquiry, mindset, and developing professional capital. The job-embedded professional learning time offers an authentic forum for applying and blending current research in a lower-risk setting.

The stage is set for the observation through a conversation about objec-

WHAT MAKES BEYOND OUR OWN WALLS UNIQUE

These rounds are framed as an opportunity for the observing teachers to be selfish, to focus on their own practice, and to look for what they can take away to continue to refine their practice. This invitation to be critical consumers creates a level playing field where everyone's professionalism is valued.

The philosophy of appreciative inquiry and focus on developing social capital create a learning environment where teachers feel safe to be innovative and take risks in their pursuit of excellence.

Beyond Our Own Walls is constructed around a belief that if we are all professionals, if we have exposure to experts and professional text, then we can gain knowledge and expertise from watching and dialoging about any colleague's lesson, not just a master lesson unique to the master teacher teaching it.

As teachers became critical consumers of the possibilities of instructional rounds, their investment increased, and we became a learning community committed to improvement with the self-efficacy to know we have what it takes to bring about positive change that impacts student achievement.

tive language (rather than evaluative), a commitment to using language that supports this objectivity (i.e. I notice, I observed, I wonder, etc.), and maintaining a perspective of appreciative inquiry, where the observers focus on the best of what is in order to create the best that might be.

Before the lesson. The host teacher gives a prebrief of the lesson about to be observed, including the following information:

- What are your plans for the observation?
- What are you working on (targets for lesson)?

- What are some of your routines and structures that we might see?
- Is there anything you would like feedback on from your team?

The host teacher leaves a few moments before the rest of the group to make final preparations for the observation. An interesting result we have experienced is that as teachers become acclimated and invested in this positive process, they lose their concern over the number of people who come to observe. Teachers once reticent to hosting four or five observers willingly embrace an active audience of 20.

During the lesson. The active observers notice and record the teacher and student moves through the pedagogical lens of Marzano's observational protocol. This tool gives the observers not only a framework for their thinking about sound instructional practice, but also builds the language necessary to have professional conversations about instruction.

> If all we did was talk about the process of one round, that would be powerful. With multiple rounds (usually four a year), we use the feedback loop to continue to refine practice.

Following the lesson. The teachers adjourn with the host for a debrief session. During the debrief, participants engage in a structured protocol to share the observed teacher and student moves with the host teacher and discuss what each person will take from this session to further refine his or her own practice.

The host teacher ends the debrief session by reflecting on what the group learned from the process and talking through next steps based on student responses and feedback. These dynamic conversations build the foundation for continued communication and professional growth as teachers build strong collegial relationships not only within their own building, but also across the multiple schools participating.

This half-day session is repeated in the afternoon with a different grade level.

Each session concludes with 15 minutes devoted to written answers to open-ended questions about the experience (what worked, what could be improved, what are next steps, etc.). This critically important piece establishes shared ownership and accountability by all participants. It also allows all participants the heady opportunity to be co-creators of a transformative process.

Coaches and teacher leaders use this feedback to make adjustments. During the next round, they address suggestions that are not yet possible to implement or not desirable at the time. Explicitly naming these changes and nonchanges greatly increases the level of trust in the shared ownership of the process.

If all we did was talk about the process of one round, that would be powerful. With multiple rounds (usually four a year), we use the feedback loop to continue to refine practice.

WHAT HAPPENS BETWEEN ROUNDS

What happens between rounds is as important as the round itself and either propels the learning forward or allows it to stagnate and linger as an isolated event. When participants return to their own schools, the paired grade levels meet, with the teachers who participated in the round leading the meeting.

These teachers share the content of the professional learning, the classroom observation, and what they will apply to their own practice. Their colleagues also make choices about what they will apply based on what they heard. In our experience, this cycle of synthesizing and presenting information to colleagues was stressful at first, but worked to develop the leadership abilities and social capital of all participants.

All teachers have also selected specific areas from the observational protocol that they will refine and develop in their classrooms in order to share their personal growth and its impact on students with colleagues at their next round. Teachers choose these goal areas to support the goals they have selected on Colorado's educator effectiveness rubric (**www.cde.state. co.us/educatoreffectiveness/statemodelevaluationsystem**). This process helps streamline teachers' professional growth and embed it into their practice.

Instructional coaches play an active part in supporting and coaching teachers as they develop and deepen the skill sets they selected. Instructional coaches also act in a coaching capacity with each other as they continue to refine their own practice.

CONNECTIONS TO STANDARDS
AND PROFESSIONAL CAPITAL

Throughout this process, we used Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning to guide our work. We set out to develop a learning community. By employing the cycle of continuous improvement, we determined how best to use our limited time together.

Because of time constraints, the best learning design would be a hybrid of instructional rounds and protocols that would allow for our conceptual understanding of the guiding principles.

We also considered the ultimate outcome — increasing student learning — by examining student work as well as gathering anecdotal success stories. We recorded videos of students describing how their learning changed during the school year.

Beyond Our Own Walls has developed into a process that captures the essence of Hargreaves and Fullan's words in *Professional Capital:* "What is needed is a profession that constantly and collectively builds its knowledge base and corresponding expertise, where practices and their impact are transparently tested, developed, circulated, and adapted. There needs to be a continuous amalgamation of precision and innovation, as well as inquiry, improvisation, and experimentation" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). The teachers, coaches, and administrators who participate in Beyond Our Own Walls are the active creators of adaptive and dynamic changes to our profession.

EVIDENCE OF IMPACT AND WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

In the first year of implementation, the chosen focus was science notebooks. Using Guskey's five levels for planning and evaluating professional development (Guskey, 2000), we looked at the impact Beyond Our Own Walls had on participants' reactions and learning, the organizational support and change, participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and student learning outcomes.

One of the most notable impacts on teacher reaction and learning was a shift from wanting to continue to work in isolation behind closed doors to welcoming opportunities to be observed and receive feedback. Many participants extended the structure beyond the scheduled rounds and created their own collaborative networks using planning times and lunch periods to observe each other with the same tools.

We saw a dramatic shift in culture in some of the schools, and Beyond Our Own Walls even began to be used as a verb. With the adoption of new curriculum, teachers would ask, "Are we going to be able to Beyond Our Own Walls that?" Collaboration, trust, and a desire for professional learning became the norm of how schools did business.

An instructional coach noted the change in culture: "Teachers became more willing to try new strategies, more efficacious in their craft, and more collaborative. Our culture went from isolated islands to collaborative communities of teachers who were willing to share, learn together, and attempt new methods and strategies. We also saw people rise to levels of teacher leadership that had not existed in our building."

Teachers became proficient at using the pedagogical language from Marzano's protocol to describe and refine their practice. Their increased sense of professionalism and self-efficacy also created a desire to have more of a direct impact on developing the teaching profession.

One teacher said, "It's so refreshing to see other people teach. I get fantastic ideas, feel validated, and come away with more passion for our profession."

Students engaged in applying the components of the science notebooking to their understanding of science. Teachers began to embrace the idea of writing in science and teaching it explicitly to students. Writing, and specifically using the components of science notebooking, allowed students to construct meaning through their experiences with scientific investigations.

Each year, Beyond Our Own Walls has taken on a different focus based on the participating schools' Unified Improvement Plan and has been a catalyst leading to increased understanding of the multiple ways in which the school goal can be addressed in classroom instruction.

One teacher described the benefit for students: "I believe my students will benefit as I work to raise my expectations of them. I have been encouraged today to have crystal-clear goals for my students, with the expectation that they will get there. I also want to raise my expectations by probing with more ques-

tions and allowing that to guide lessons. I will also implement that important 'think time.' "

Participating teachers actively sought out other leadership opportunities, including professional learning team facilitators, leaders in equity work, and leading professional development both in their schools and in the district. One experienced teacher was so energized by participating in the process that she became a team facilitator and professional learning team facilitator, piloted a student data usage program, and presented her work at a university class.

A conversation about changes in student achievement allowed our team to look deeply into the process of student writing in science. It was our belief that students as early as primary grades could construct a scientific explanation through the process of the components of the science notebook, specifically the portion where students would have to use evidence collected during an investigation to substantiate a claim.

We designed a scoring rubric and spent time with grade-level teams scoring student work. This process not only provided formative feedback to students, it also was a powerful professional learning experience for all involved. Sitting around a table together, wrestling with the evidence of where our students were, and collaboratively brainstorming ideas and strategies for next steps in supporting them reaching the standards generated a high level of professional collegiality and sense of "we're all in this together."

Part of the success of this process is due to the willingness of school-level administrators to adapt schedules, provide support, and designate funds for substitutes. Another key factor was having a committed coach or teacher leader within each school to develop the schedule and follow up with coaching conversations between rounds.

Teachers want to continuously improve. Given a structure to support this and a safe environment in which to experiment, they will continue to do so. Teachers invested themselves at a high level and owned the process.

> **Teachers want to continuously improve. Given a structure to support this and a safe environment in which to experiment, they will continue to do so. Teachers invested themselves at a high level and owned the process.**

LOOKING AHEAD

Now in its sixth year, Beyond Our Own Walls continues to adapt to meet the changing needs of all constituents. One highly successful adaptation has been to blend it with a Within Our Own Walls process.

This gives a school not only the opportunity to see the best of other schools and to build cross-building collaborative professional relationships, but to also build vertical alignment, efficacy, common talking points, and collaborative connections

BEYOND
PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT

**BREAKING BOUNDARIES
AND LIBERATING
A LEARNING PROFESSION**

By Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun

Almost every day, we wonder how to make career-long inquiry a centerpiece of the work life of educators.

The challenges of implementing the Common Core State Standards and Science Technology, Engineering, and Math (STEM) provide momentum for facilitating teacher learning far beyond the capacity of current formal and informal professional development in most school districts.

Joining the demands of Common Core and STEM are the needs to eliminate inequities not only in inner cities but also the struggling neighborhoods in small towns and rural areas and socioeconomic, ethnic, and racial differences everywhere.

In addition, gender differences are growing. In United States colleges and universities, three-fifths of undergraduate students are women. Hispanic, black, and white students have large gender differences, again favoring women, in high school graduation rates and entrance into higher education, although some differences are narrowing. Among high school graduates, as many Hispanics as whites enroll in higher education (Fry & Taylor, 2013).

Gender joins socioeconomic status, ethnicity, and race as areas where differences in learning are substantial and serious, begin early, widen, and are not compensated for in

later years. Education is creating differences among people that are resulting in changes in society.

Implementing better curriculum and instruction is now an imperative. Schools simply have to generate higher and more equitable learning and strive to be healthier social systems. Students, society, and the economic system will benefit simultaneously.

Common Core and STEM provide direction and, judging from research on similar models of curriculum and teaching (Joyce, Weil, & Calhoun, 2015), will increase learning for all, but variance will lessen and reduce the gender and demographic differences that plague us now.

Which brings us to the focus of this essay. The implementation of the curriculums that substantially increase the learning capacity and achievement of all our children — or the more powerful curriculums that will succeed them — require a solid continuing education for educators. Some teachers can manage on their own, but most of us need help from colleagues who are knowledgeable in the content and processes that are new to us.

The really good news is that there is a storehouse of good models of professional learning that, taken together, can generate a fine range of professional learning opportunities (for a summary, see Joyce & Calhoun, 2010). In some settings, one or more of those models are doing well. But in general, professional development lives under constraints of time that do not enable it to thrive. We are fortunate to have emerging powerful curriculums and the tools for supporting educators coinciding with urgency to address some very serious problems.

Therefore we can envision some marvelous possibilities if we can free these to flourish by removing some constraints. *In particular, the traditions that govern educator workdays and year have not included the time needed for solid continuing education.* Professional development of all types is currently squeezed into little windows of time that are simply inadequate to address the needs we refer to above on an ad hoc basis. The recognition that teaching is a learning profession where the study of educators is a prominent feature of the work is long overdue.

The keys to releasing the energy to build strong, sustained support are remarkably simple, although they will make some people nervous. Removing or at least bending some barriers is the secret door that lies hidden in plain sight.

The largest currently implemented components of professional learning in districts are the residual menus of workshops, the organization of professional learning communities within school faculties, and the creation of instructional coaching positions.

All these can work well, but all have serious limitations in their present forms because they have to live within impossibly difficult time constraints — boundaries that were created very long ago. Actually, they began to appear in the 1830s, when the common school was being created in America.

Let's look at those boundaries — then how professional learning evolved, how decentralization made its contribution, and, last, how to break those boundaries and allow strong continuing education to emerge.

THE COMING OF THE COMMON SCHOOL: REASONABLE PARAMETERS THAT TURNED INTO CONSTRAINTS

Although the early leaders envisioned an educated citizenry, and Franklin and Jefferson and others imagined the development of universities that would extend the sciences and the learning professions, the Constitution did not mention education. The 10th Amendment says that

powers not explicitly provided to the federal government are the domain of the states or the people.

Many communities in the Colonies had developed schools and, as the population migrated westward, communities continued to do so. Boards of trustees were formed to tend them and, gradually, states organized departments of education to develop and tend schools. The Morrill Act of 1862 gave states land to establish and support colleges, leading to the development of land grant colleges throughout the nation.

Gradually, the "school year" developed and naturally followed farming cycles, for when the common school was being developed, about 90% of the population was engaged in some kind of agriculture (most of the rest had gardens). The school year developed around the fallow months (think September to May) with students and teachers freed during the summers to participate in the enterprise. The custom became to have school years of 180 days.

Also, gradually, teachers were employed on formal contracts that provided for the 180 days of instruction, plus a couple of days to open and close the school and a day or two of meetings spread through the year. And, importantly as it turns out, the contract for teachers provided that they arrive at school before the students and stay for a period of time at the end of the students' day.

Although there was and is variance, the day normed around beginning about 8 a.m. and ending at about 4 p.m., about 40 hours a week. There are districts where the workday is longer and some where the times are in guidelines rather than the clock. Over time, the work year, week, and day became matters of negotiation between districts and teachers' organizations. The boundaries now had serious legal status.

These are the boundaries that have shaped professional learning and school improvement initiatives. Districts create workshops to fit within contracted days. Schools must find time for professional learning communities to meet within the workweek.

Scheduling staff meetings to conduct action research or study the new curriculums is tricky. Coaches can visit teachers in their classrooms, but if they need additional time for discussion, where can that be found?

The ancient constraints are now binds — barriers to enrichment.

Let's look at the evolution of professional learning to see if we can find some clues to overcoming those barriers.

WHERE DID THE CONCEPT OF PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COME FROM?
HOW DID BOUNDARIES MIGRATE WITH IT?

Through the 19th and into the 20th centuries, teacher preparation was created. Normal schools were organized and licenses to teach were codified. And, reasonably enough, extending the certificate obliged additional study.

Most states required completing university courses, often two semester courses every five years. Courses were offered on evenings, Saturday mornings, and in summer schools. At that time, most higher education institutions worked on a semester schedule, and the typical offering required attendance for 12 to 15 two- to three-hour meetings and the acceptable completion of work assigned by the instructor(s).

As a practical matter, just about everyone was recertificated. Although most courses required an action project in the classroom, many teachers had a low opinion of the courses and believed that the instructors were impractical and probably had no experience in schools.

School districts complained that the courses did not address their needs, particularly for support of school improvement initiatives that addressed pressing problems. Literacy in urban schools was a commonly mentioned need, as was help for struggling readers. Some courses addressed field needs, but many did not.

School districts complained that the courses did not address their needs, particularly for support of school improvement initiatives that addressed pressing problems. Literacy in inner-city schools was then (think 1950s to 1970s), as now, a commonly mentioned need, as was help for struggling readers in all schools. Some courses addressed field needs, but many did not.

THE BIRTH OF STAFF DEVELOPMENT

In the 1970s, changes in the locus of recertification gave rise to professional development as a component of professional life.

Swayed by the criticisms of university courses, state departments of education and state legislators authorized school districts to offer professional development workshops where participation would result in the award of professional development "recertification units" that could be accumulated into the equivalent of the university courses.

Most districts decided to offer workshops — something similar to courses, but generally much shorter. Generally, certificates of attendance sufficed for credit.

That change resulted in the scheduling by districts of contracted staff development days, often two during the year — somewhat more in some districts — and menus of workshops were developed from several sources. State and district officials suggested topics. Teachers were surveyed to suggest topics they would like (a process usually called "needs assessment"), and the menus of those days were built from the combination.

As the federal government became more involved in making initiatives, the conference days contained sessions about regulations, beginning with Title I and Public Law 94-142 and later extending to No Child Left Behind. The professional development days also contained offerings suggested by consultants who used the sessions to advertise their wares.

Note that the professional development was scheduled

within the boundaries. Teachers were not asked to participate in summer or after-school events. There were no fees. They could implement the content or choose not to.

The staff development days received relatively good press. Teachers were relieved to escape the university course requirements to apply the content to their classrooms and to be graded on the courses. (In fact, they graded the providers!)

Districts could use the ability to deliver recertification units to organize events where the units could be used as incentives. Some school districts employed professional development to fuel school improvement efforts.

Through their continuing education units, some colleges developed ways that organizations could award credits. For example, some national organizations would offer credits through those colleges for attendance at their conferences and, often, the submission of a brief paper about content relevant to the conferences. There is no instructor in that equation.

LONG-TERM OPINION
ABOUT THE MENUS OF WORKSHOPS

Skip ahead a few years, and we find that the opinion of teachers and administrators has soured. The complaints paralleled those that had been lodged against the courses. Particularly, "expert" opinion turned against the workshops. The prominent voices in the field of staff development — including Linda Darling-Hammond, Ann Lieberman, Michael Fullan, and others — were particularly negative. National organizations followed suit.

Certainly the menus of workshops included some of good quality, but the condemnations were en bloc (Feistritzer, 2013). Oddly, the teachers who attended workshops on those professional development days gave the ones they chose high ratings on the questionnaires asking their opinions of the experiences (see National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). And organizers of those days took those opinions seriously when inviting providers.

SITE-BASED MANAGEMENT, THE DEVELOPMENT
OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES,
AND THE CREATION OF THE POSITION OF COACHING

Beginning in the late 1980s, many districts moved toward site-based management that gave schools most of the responsibility for regulating and improving themselves. Site-based management shifted many day-to-day and professional development responsibilities to the principal and school staffs (see Hill, Bonan, & Warner, 1992).

Simultaneously, site-based management districts reduced central office support personnel, diminishing both districtwide initiatives and support for schools. In the 1990s, the movement to organize school staffs into study groups, soon called professional learning communities, fit nicely with the site-based management concept. The small number of scheduled profes-

sional development days continued, but parts of them were used for school staff and PLC meetings as workshops became fewer.

(Site-based management is sometimes confused with decentralization — where large districts were divided into subdistricts with local boards and offices. Hopefully, the smaller entity would be more manageable and increase community involvement. Sometimes the new units adopted site-based management.)

SOME SMALL STEPS TO ESTABLISH CONTINUING EDUCATION

We believe that the most likely avenue to establish continuing education is by capitalizing on current needs and building the conditions they need for success. If present needs can be addressed, future ones can be spoken to as they appear.

Currently:
- To make site-based management work, schools need to operate from an action research perspective.
- To implement Common Core and STEM requires educators to learn both new content and processes, including managing the change as instruction becomes a hybrid of campus teaching linked to Internet resources.
- PLCs need time to meet, and their leaders need professional development on the new curriculum and instruction.
- Coaches also need time to bring their colleagues together for discussions and problem solving. Many of the coaches themselves need help to master the new curriculums.

Creating paid time is critical for all of these by softening some barriers.

CHANGING THE NATURE OF THE BOUNDARIES

There won't be strong continuing education — including formal professional development, PLCs, coaching, and preparation for building schools operating on action research protocols — unless substantial amounts of time are found. Where should they be found? We suggest that:
- Teachers' work includes 10 paid days each summer for formal study, part on school initiatives and part on districtwide initiatives.
- During the school year, biweekly sessions of about two hours be scheduled to follow the student day, divided among whole-school action research, PLC action research, and work and discussions with the instructional coaches. The school principal, those coaches, and a member from each PLC would organize and conduct the sessions. Large schools should probably be organized into "families" for the purpose. In secondary schools, department heads would be members of the leadership team. An additional five days of paid contracted time would be needed.

HOW TO MAKE THESE ARRANGEMENTS

In the immediate future, hire teachers for 15 days more

than the current contracts, 10 days in the summer and the remainder to compensate them for the weekday sessions.

The cost of these would be manageable, even in today's climate, but involve some serious changes in thinking. Consider the following:

WHERE CAN WE FIND THE MONEY FOR THIS?

The price tag is surprisingly small compared to the overall budget, and many districts have funded larger amounts for various initiatives in recent years.

We have looked at a few district budgets to get some perspective on the task. Here's the example of an urban, largely inner-city district. It employs 100 coaches at an average salary per year of $90,000, including pension, medical coverage, and other, smaller, fringes: $9 million altogether.

The district employs 3,000 teachers at an average inclusive salary of $55,000, or about $300 per day. To employ all of them for an additional 10 days over their contract would cost about $9 million — two-thirds of the additional cost of providing 15 days of consistent time for study.

This example should not to be taken to mean that we are suggesting an end to the coaching initiative and using the money to add study time for the rest of the staff. Far from it. We are trying to improve the chances that coaches, PLCs, and schoolwide action research will be effective. And coaching is a small part of what districts have found the funds for.

Together, teachers, teaching assistants, counselors, and principals make up only about half of the salaried staff in our example district. The workforce includes 3,000 other employees, all for what are considered good and necessary purposes!

Were the continuing education of teachers to become popular, we suspect that the funds for those 15 days could be found. Surely they would be.

And, note, please, that we are not proposing exotic, unfamiliar modes of study, but simply amplifying the current components of professional development to the point where continuous learning by teachers is prominently and generously supported.

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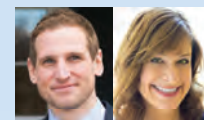
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SAY GOODBYE
TO DRILL-AND-KILL
TEACHING

AUTHENTIC READING AND WRITING EXPERIENCES ARE ENOUGH TO REACH STRUGGLING STUDENTS

By Eric Simpson

When leaders in Lewisville Independent School District in Texas saw the district's writing scores on STAAR — the Texas standardized tests introduced in 2011 — they panicked. They weren't alone. The response from many neighboring districts, and from some of Lewisville's own campuses, was a renewed commitment to summer and after-school drill-and-kill tutorials.

The term "drill-and-kill" is a fitting moniker. Some campuses extend the oppositional language further, naming their programs STAAR Boot Camp and STAAR Wars. It's each individual student against the test. And students, too often, are the losers.

After two years, Lewisville's scores stagnated. Frustration was high; teachers and students burned out. As the district's secondary literacy and language arts administrator, I knew we were at a turning point: Do we double-down on this testing practice, or do we try something completely different?

I worked with principals, department heads, and teachers to put together a comprehensive literacy improvement plan to address concerns while adhering to the district's core belief about student learning: *High-quality, research-based instruction is enough to turn the tide, and practice tests and drills should be abandoned.*

ASSESSING THE PROBLEM

Lewisville ISD is a large, suburban district in the Dallas-Forth Worth area, with nearly 53,000 students on 66 campuses. 30% of students qualify as economically disadvantaged, and 14% are English language learners (ELLs). With so many campuses working on the same problem, we were able to look closely at the effects of these practices.

> **Across the district, every campus tutorial, sometimes each tutor, had a different approach and lesson plan.**

While examining campus data, we noticed something startling. When three campuses in particular used a released version of the STAAR test to benchmark students 2½ months before the spring state assessments, the average difference between the number of items answered correctly between the first week of February and the actual April test was only 2% — a difference of one question. It appeared that instruction stagnates in the two months leading up to the state assessment.

Upon closer examination, we learned that, in the middle schools where scores did not improve after benchmarking, students simply practiced the test format, with test fragments as their primary instructional resource. Across the district, every campus tutorial, sometimes each tutor, had a different approach and lesson plan.

The tutorial was an additional class prep for teachers and another class period at the end of a long day for students. Steady attendance was impossible to predict, and the entire process had a punitive feel. Many students had participated in required six- to nine-week tutorial sessions since the early days of middle school, and they found themselves failing state assessments again and again. Teachers reported that tutorials felt hopeless for pupil and instructor. These tutorials were not better than nothing. In many cases, we were afraid they were doing more harm than good.

Successful remediation must teach students how to connect their identities to the "secondary discourse" of the English classroom and not further alienate them from academia (Meeks & Austin, 2003). If we put students in a remediation for eight weeks, that's eight weeks where they are told, "You are not a part of the regular classroom. You're different from your peers — you're not good at this

reading and writing thing."

The consensus across the district was that, despite the significant time and energy invested in these tutorials, students were not achieving more success on the tests. They were not more likely to read in their free time, nor were they building confidence about their English language arts abilities.

CHANGING COURSE

After an honest look at what we were doing and an extensive search for alternate paths, we decided to ground our new approach in these core assumptions:

- Intervention has to be responsive to student learning needs. It can't simply be a reaction to the format of state standardized assessments.
- Responsive intervention calls for teachers who have the tools and the flexibility to adapt to individual students' strengths and needs.
- Identity plays an important part in the lives of readers and writers; therefore, intervention must help struggling students build confidence as readers and writers.
- Intervention must increase time spent on quality writing and literacy instruction both in tutorials and in the regular classroom — not simply increasing time spent on test practice.
- Teachers must be supported with research-based resources and professional learning to strengthen best practice for struggling readers and writers.

We invited colleagues from the North Star of Texas Writing Project, the local National Writing Project site housed at the University of North Texas, to partner with us in developing the tools and the professional learning structures to build a more responsive intervention. They brought their deep knowledge of writing development and writing instruction, which we combined with research surrounding explicit instruction (Archer & Hughes, 2011), authentic literacy instruction (Fountas & Pinnell, 2000), primary and secondary domains (Meeks & Austin, 2003), and engagement theory (Schlechty, 2011).

Our goal was to invite student engagement focused on clear instructional goals. We wanted to establish replicable routines to build student confidence and encourage student conversation about integrated reading and writing experiences (Archer & Hughes, 2011). To achieve these learning conditions, we needed stable groups of students to work together for a predetermined length of time — three weeks — to remediate specific learning objectives.

The three-week period for these lessons is intentional: This brisk pace increases engagement, but also allows students to build positive momentum toward their goal (Archer & Hughes,

FINDING TRUE NORTH LESSON ELEMENTS

- Sustained silent reading
- Building reading and writing muscle
- Mentor texts
- Close reading
- Craft lessons
- Guided writing
- Writing workshop
- Feedback
- Conferring
- Peer response
- Reflection
- Self-assessment
- Goal setting
- Publishing for authentic audiences

2011). We didn't want to target reading or writing in isolation. Instead, we provided a foundational literacy curriculum to engage the students in authentic reading and writing tasks that help them meet the demands of state accountability (Fountas & Pinnell, 2000). This is directly where our work with the North Star of Texas Writing Project came into play.

Project consultants partnered with Lewisville ISD to develop a writing and literacy lesson framework for any school willing to commit to the revised remediation approach. This framework, called Finding True North: A Lesson Framework for Powerful Writing Instruction, integrates the widely recognized components of rich literacy instruction with a focus on helping students build confidence as they learn to write powerful narrative, expository, and persuasive essays. The framework (above) provides teachers with concrete demonstrations of powerful writing instruction — a framework that they were encouraged to adopt as a basis for classroom instruction.

In short, this intervention is two-tiered: support for students who are becoming powerful readers and writers and support for teachers who are developing more responsive and more focused instructional strategies.

Professional support for teachers was key. Any teacher conducting an outside tutorial participated in a two-day workshop led by project consultants who modeled the tutorial instruction for participants. Teachers wrote side by side with the facilitators to understand the work their students would be doing.

We also built in reflection time. After the tutorials, and after the initial scores came back from the state, we met with representatives from each campus to have a half-day debrief to discuss what went well and plan what revisions the North Star of Texas Writing Project would make for the spring.

One campus in particular — a 9th-grade center with no retesters to tutor — agreed to go a step further: Teachers would forgo after-school or in-class pullouts and use the Finding True North lessons in classroom instruction. They spent Monday through Thursday on the lessons and used Fridays for a differentiated combination of sustained silent reading and individual conferences.

They carried out this work the three weeks before the state test — a time other campuses traditionally spent focusing on practice tests. Not only did the 9th-grade center avoid benchmark or practice tests, they did absolutely no multiple-choice work. Their students didn't even see a released copy of the test before the actual testing date.

Although we were not suggesting such a radical departure for all campuses, it was our long-term goal that other campuses would alter their instruction based on the two-day professional development workshop. Our main selling point to principals and teachers alike was that this intervention was going to be so strong that the learning process would make the participant a better teacher. The lessons and the work students do in the tutorials would be so gratifying that teachers would want their classrooms to look more like the tutorials: writing workshops.

THE ROLE OF CHOICE

Two years into the process, the workshop model is growing throughout the middle and high school levels. Four of the district's high schools use the North Star of Texas Writing Project experience as classroom instruction, and all seven high schools use the workshop as primary intervention with struggling readers and writers.

All 15 middle schools use North Star of Texas Writing Project mini-units for a combination of classroom and accelerated instruction. More than 90% of 7th-, 9th-, and 10th-grade teachers have participated in the project partnership and attended the two-day professional learning experience.

The two-day workshops and the reflection sessions to revise the work have continued through two full years, and our workshop instruction has become a point of pride in the district. Three secondary campuses, one middle school, and two high schools have formed deeper, job-embedded, professional learning partnerships with North Star of Texas Writing Project. They've committed to frequent professional learning community (PLC) meetings with the intent of changing classroom instruction to follow the ideals put forth in the writing tutorial lessons. These teacher teams have grown beyond the original district professional learning opportunities and are actively making their own learning plan.

Campuses that have delved into this work yielded above-average growth for the students struggling most in reading and writing, as well as students transitioning between on-level and advanced performances. Over the past two years, results of students in the district tutorial program show sustained improvement over fellow retesters, and all without practice tests or drill-and-kill approaches.

This tutorial and classroom instruction work grew from our experience with North Star of Texas Writing Project as a quality summer remediation program. In summer 2013, 25 students volunteered to work on their writing process for two weeks. Early results were positive, but the number of students was so small it was difficult to get reliable data to say conclusively one way or another.

That changed with the district's 2014 writing camp. Five of the seven high school campuses met with students at the end of the spring, called parents, and were able to encourage 140 students to register for the camp. After two weeks, the number of students hovered at the 100 range. This was all voluntary — none of the students were required to attend.

All programs, tutorials, writing camps, and teacher professional development revolved around choice. We appealed to individual teacher teams and principals to join this work. Because we allowed campuses to join at their own pace, buy-in not only increased, but also sustained.

Campuses brought the tutorial program and the summer camps to students and parents to illustrate how the experiences differed from previous remediation offerings. During the tutorials, camps, and classroom instruction, teachers celebrated student work.

The final day of most programs was a celebration where students could invite teachers and family members to attend a gathering and read some of the writing they produced. Because we built so much choice and identity connections into the programs, tutorial attendance — both after-school and in summer — has never been higher.

EVIDENCE OF SUCCESS

As of July 2015, six testing cycles of data show that campuses working with North Star of Texas Writing Project have higher student growth than nonparticipating campuses. The campus that has worked the longest in PLCs with the project — and is also one of the most economically disadvantaged in the district — continues to outpace all other campuses in student growth for first-time test takers.

We began the work with December 2013 retesters, but we only had buy-in from a little over half of the high school campuses. Still, the results were inspiring.
- English I retesters scored 6% above the district retesting average in reading and same as district on writing.
- English II retesters scored 7% above the district average in reading and 6% above the district average in writing.

- The most promising results came from the two campuses using the tutorial workshop as classroom instruction.
- Hebron 9th-Grade Center, which conducted no tutorials or pullouts and gave no practice tests, had the highest freshman reading scores in the district.
- Lewisville High School Killough, which has the second-most economically disadvantaged population (56.8%) and was first to use North Star of Texas Writing Project in monthly PLCs, had the highest sophomore reading scores in the district.

Word spread, and by spring 2014, more teacher teams asked to be part of the writing project, including seven of 15 middle schools. Again, initial results were promising:

- Two campuses chose to use the writing project as their classroom instruction and abandoned tutorials. Both campuses showed modest gains (3% to 5%) over spring 2014.
- Five campuses scored 4.08% above district average in reading growth as compared to the same students' 2013 reading test.
- The tutorial scored 5% above district average in writing achievement as compared to the previous year.

The summer writing camp was also successful. The July 2014 retest showed:

- English II retesters met passing standard at 4% higher than district average.
- English II retesters' essay scores rose by 4%.
- English I retesters scored 37 (out of 7,153) points higher on the scale score.
- English I retesters scored 3% above average on the essay.

ELL students benefitted the most. In English II, ELL students scored 12% higher than the district average for all retesters and 2% above all retesters in English I.

In the December 2014 retest, more students across the district participated in the tutorial, and the program continued to use the Finding True North lessons. Retesters continued to show improvement:

- 76% of English I students met standard, beating the district nontutorial average by 21.7%.
- 62% of English II students met standard, beating the district's nontutorial average by 2.5%.

For the 2014-15 school year, all 15 middle schools used the North Star of Texas Writing Project tutorial program and expanded the instruction into the classroom. The district maintained the growth from 2014 in students meeting state standard and grew by 6% in advanced writing performance.

As workshop instruction and sustained silent reading spread across the middle schools, students' reading levels are also on the rise. The average 6th grader gained 0.91 on his or her reading level in 2012, but gained 1.26 in 2015. The average reading level for 7th-grade students rose from 0.81 in 2012 to 1.06 in 2015.

By spring 2015, the district's retesting situation had improved drastically. In April 2014, 750 students needed to retest in English I, but in April 2015, only 273 students needed re-
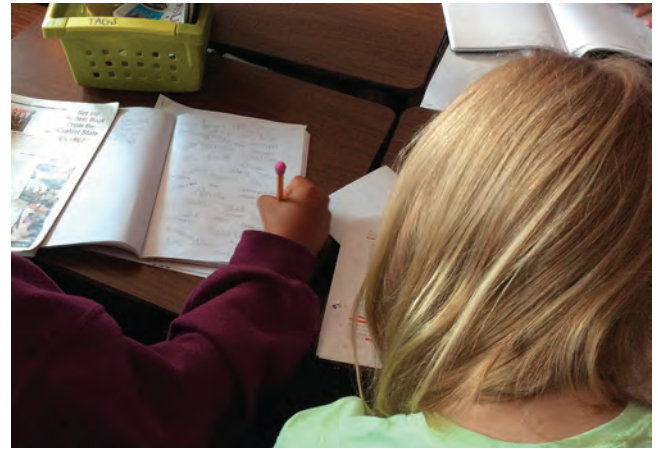
One core assumption is that intervention must help struggling students build confidence as readers and writers.

testing. English II also dropped from 473 retesters in 2014 to just 240 in 2015. First-time English I testers maintained the previous year's growth and gained 6% in students achieving advanced status. English II gained 2% in met standard and another 4% in advanced scores.

MOVING FORWARD

We believe this work will continue to empower teachers to dedicate full class time to high-quality literacy instruction as well as serve as a model for future instructional improvement.

We've seen the power of collaborative, workshop-based experiences on student achievement and realize that districts can choose to abandon the standardized, test-prep drill-and-kill model. Authentic reading and writing experiences are enough to reach struggling students.

Perhaps most important, we've learned that quality accelerated instruction programs enrich both student and teacher. Teachers learn more about the students in their classrooms, and students learn more about themselves as readers and writers.

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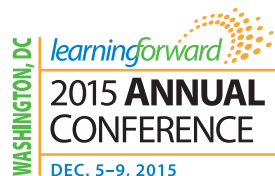
Learning Forward expresses appreciation to the sponsors of the 2015 Annual Conference in Washington, DC.

KICK-START MEANINGFUL CONVERSATIONS

**THESE TWO TOOLS CAN HELP SCHOOLS ASSESS AND BUILD
ONE-ON-ONE AND TEAM RELATIONSHIPS OVER TIME**

APPRECIATIVE INTERVIEWS

Adapted by Joellen Killion

Appreciative interviews will help you avoid trying to close the trust gap and instead focus on building on the positives. Use this tool to help you and your partners discover what has worked well in the past, affirm those successes, create positive self-images, and imagine future successes.

1. Conduct appreciative interviews as detailed here.
- Form pairs.
- One partner interviews the other and vice versa, using the following questions.
  - o Describe a time when you felt you were at your prime as a _____ *(add role you want to focus on)*. Share as many details as possible. When did it occur? Who was involved?

PARTNER INTERVIEWS

Conducting an interview with potential teacher partners, in addition to gathering information and educating teachers on the coaching philosophy, helps coaches build "one-to-one individual relationships with teachers" (Knight, 2007). According to Knight, 15-minute one-on-one interviews are more effective than two-hour group meetings, so always try to schedule individual meetings, preferably during teacher planning time.

Four starter questions that generate meaningful conversations
1. What are the rewards you experience as a teacher?
2. What are your professional goals and what obstacles interfere with your ability to achieve your professional goals?
3. What are your students' strengths and weaknesses?

APPRECIATIVE INTERVIEWS

What were you doing? What were others doing?
- o What did you value most about that situation, the work involved, the community, and yourself? What were the contributing factors that made it successful for you?
- o Project yourself into the future. It is five years from now, the start of 20__-20___ school year. Describe what is happening for you related to _____ *(add area of concern)*. What do you want to be like as a _____ *(add role title)* then? What do you see yourself doing? What do you

envision you will accomplish? Who will be your colleagues/confidantes?

2. **After the interviews, meet with another team and introduce your partner to that team.**

3. **Discuss patterns that occur across all four interview responses (your partner's and yours and the other pair's responses). Be ready to share the patterns with the larger group.**

4. **Share patterns that exist across the larger group.**

ADAPTED FROM:
Lord, J.G. (2005). *Appreciative inquiry and the quest: A new theory and methodology of human development.* Available at www.appreciative-inquiry.org.
Cooperrider, D.L., Whitney, D., & Stavros, J.M. (2008). *Appreciative inquiry handbook: For leaders of change.* San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.

PARTNER INTERVIEWS

4. What kinds of professional learning are most/least effective for you?

Questions about teachers' current realities
- Describe a typical day on the job.
- What do you really like about your job?
- What kinds of pressures are you facing?
- What challenges are you facing?
- What kinds of changes are you experiencing?

Questions about students' current realities
- Tell me about your students.
- What are the major needs of your students?
- What would most help your students?
- What outcomes are you striving for with your students?
- How many students are you teaching each day?
- How many students with various disabilities do you teach?
- What could have a significant influence on the happiness and success of your students?

Questions about the school's current reality
- Describe the relationship between special education teachers and general education teachers in your school.
- Describe the relationship between senior high school

teachers and junior high school teachers in this district.

Questions about changes being experienced
- How has your job changed over the past five years?
- How has your philosophy changed over the past five years?

Questions about instructional practices
- Are you teaching (name of intervention) at this point?
- If yes, which (intervention) are you teaching?
- What modifications, if any, have you made in your teaching of (intervention)?

Questions about a desired future
- What changes in your school would have the greatest influence on your students' success?
- Describe the ideal school.
- What would you like to change about your job?

Questions about professional development
- Talk about the kinds of professional development you've experienced in the past few years.
- What have you liked about your professional development?
- What have you not liked about your professional development?

REFERENCE: Knight, J. (2007, March). Conversations can kick off the coaching. *Teachers Teaching Teachers, 2*(6), 1-4.

Strengthening principal leadership is only one piece of the puzzle

WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

The study, conducted between 2009 and 2011 in rural schools in northern Michigan, finds positive, statistically significant impacts on variables related to principal self-efficacy beliefs, principal leadership practices, and instructional climate, yet finds no statistically significant changes in student achievement or in teachers' perception of leadership practices.

Study description

Researchers designed and implemented a randomized control study of McREL's Balanced Leadership program implemented in rural schools in northern Michigan. Funding came from the Institute of Education Sciences through the U.S. Department of Education. The study measured the impact on principal and teacher perceptions, beliefs, practices, and student achievement using data collected from both principals and teachers in their schools.

Control group principals received only the routine professional development offered through their

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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

Principal leadership development in rural schools leads to a variety of positive changes related to principal and teacher turnover, principal efficacy, leadership, and principal perception of collaboration among staff, and stronger norms for differentiating instruction, although not student achievement.

THE STUDY

Jacob, R., Goddard, R., Kim, M., Miller, R., & Goddard, Y. (2015, September). Exploring the causal impact of the McREL Balanced Leadership program on leadership, principal efficacy, instructional climate, educator turnover, and student achievement. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis, 37*(3), 314-332.

districts, other regional offerings, or state programs. Treatment group principals participated in McREL's Balanced Leadership professional development program. The program, taught by trainers approved and prepared by McREL, took place over two years and included 10 two-day, cohort-based sessions between January 2009 and November 2010.

The program's content addressed the development of 21 leadership skills associated with increased student achievement. The skills are aligned with Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium standards and other research findings on leadership practices.

Questions

The study focused on four research questions assessing the impact of the Balanced Leadership program on:
1. Principals' leadership practices and

the school's instructional climate (i.e. school climate, norms for teacher collaboration, norms for differentiated instruction);
2. Principals' efficacy beliefs;
3. Teacher and principal turnover; and
4. Student achievement.

Methodology

Researchers recruited principals from rural school districts in northern Michigan with superintendent approval. Once identified, 126 principals of public schools serving grades 3-5 inclusively were randomly assigned to a treatment or control group based on a stratified sampling framework that balanced geographical type, size, and socioeconomic status.

Preliminary analyses suggest no differences between treatment and control schools before treatment. The schools were mostly small, serving

WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

This study highlights the complexity of change in schools. Strengthening leadership practices of principals alone is unlikely to produce sweeping changes in teacher practice or student achievement. It also raises questions about the program design, the time restrictions of funded studies, and data use.

Several features of the program align with the Standards for Professional Learning, yet attention to all the standards is unknown. For example, the Balanced Leadership program content aligned with core practices of principals, standards of performance used in many school systems and states, and confirmed in the research (**Outcomes** standard), yet it is unclear how well the content aligned with the specific performance expectations for principals of the schools selected and the needs of the school systems, teachers, students, and communities.

The program engages participants in cohorts (**Learning Designs**), yet it is unknown how often participants actively engaged in the learning and whether the learning designs emphasized behavioral rehearsals to accelerate application.

While the program was free to participants (**Resources** standard), it is unknown if participants perceived a need for change in their leadership practice (**Data** standard), received implementation support and feedback throughout the program (**Implementation** standard), or if their supervisors advocated changes in their practice and provided the appropriate conditions and culture for success (**Leadership** standard).

It is also unclear if the participants and their supervisors were committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and alignment of expectations and accountability for success with program participation (**Learning Communities** standard).

The timeline for change in this research study raises questions about time for implementation and impact to occur before collecting completion data. Unreasonable timelines such as the one in this study are often the result of strict time restrictions for funded studies.

This study is a good example of the long journey of change and the intensity of reform required to generate results for students. It describes a program designed to develop principal capacity. It is one aspect of what must become a multilayered change program, one that includes efforts to improve the efficacy beliefs and practices of principals as well as teachers and school system staff.

It also requires reprioritizing commitments, expectations, and resources to generate high-leverage changes in instruction, curriculum, assessment, and professional learning. Had this program been folded into a comprehensive reform effort with opportunities to develop all staff, provide adequate resources and support for implementation of new learning, and accountability for results, the results might have been different.

Overall, while the study measures the impact of the Balanced Leadership program and provides a solid investigation design for assessing the impact of professional development, its design isolates a small number of factors from the complex constellation of factors that contribute to change in schools and student achievement.

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about 300 students who were poor (47% eligible for free or reduced-price lunch) and mostly white (more than 90%). The study examines professional development for rural school principals, a little-served population.

The study's proposed causal model, supported by a review of the literature, suggests that the Balanced Leadership program leads to increased principal self-efficacy and improved principal leadership and instructional climate. Principal self-efficacy leads to reduced principal and teacher turnover. Reduction in staff turnover and improved principal leadership and instructional climate lead to increased student achievement.

The study examined attrition carefully through a series of statistical analyses. From the 126 schools initially selected and assigned to treatment and control groups, 91 completed the study. Principal unwillingness to continue as a control school or lack of student, teacher, or principal survey data were primary reasons for attrition. The attrition rate was 28% with a differential attrition rate of 12%. Statistical analyses between attritors and nonattritors yielded no statistically significant differences.

Analysis

Researchers collected survey data from both principals and teachers in control and treatment schools. Researchers administered surveys to both principals and teachers as a baseline before and three months after completing the professional development program. Surveys included parallel questions for principals and teachers, allowing for comparison of responses. Response rates on both the baseline and outcome surveys for principals and teachers exceeded 90%.

Researchers initially identified 18 separate factors, yet aggregated factors as they loaded onto three measures: principal leadership, schoolwide collaboration for instruction, and school climate. Factor analysis did not support the inclusion of two additional factors that were retained separately: principal efficacy and school norms for differentiated instruction.

Data regarding staff turnover and student achievement were drawn from

Michigan Department of Education. Researchers used fall scaled scores in math and reading on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) between 2008 and 2011 to measure student achievement.

Results

At the end of the program, statistically significant differences between the control and treatment group principals occurred in the factors of principal efficacy, principal leadership, collaboration among staff, school climate, and norms for differentiated instruction. There were no statistically significant differences between treatment and control schools regarding how teachers assessed principal leadership, teacher collaboration, school climate, or norms for differentiated instruction.

There were statistically significant differences between control and treatment schools in principal and teacher turnover, with a reduction of 16 percentage points for principals and 5 percentage points for teachers in turnover. For example, 28 principals in the control schools compared to 14 in the treatment schools turned over during the time of the study.

Researchers applied statistical analyses to examine the unbiased estimates of the "intent to treat" and the impact of program participation to determine the impact on participating principals. These analyses provide estimates on the effect of the "treatment on the treated." Overall participation in the program was about 74% for treatment principals, and more that half attended 90% of the program. Researchers noted the challenges attendance created for principals and their superintendents because of principal absence from their schools.

There were no statistically significant differences in student achievement between the control and treatment schools.

Researchers offer several potential explanations for the results, including that the program did not teach the skills associated with increases in teacher perception of leadership or student achievement; treatment principals made small changes in their practices resulting in minimal impact; principal changes alone are insufficient to produce perceived change in instructional climate and student achievement; the unit of study is the school, with the modal district having only one school involved in the program; and 12% of control group principals participated in a program with similar content to Balanced Leadership and 79% had read the book by the authors of the original Balanced Leadership study describing the 21 behaviors, suggesting that control group principals had some exposure to the treatment content, although not with the same intensity.

Limitations

Researchers acknowledge several limitations to the study, including the handling of data in schools where there were changes in principals and staff. Because the school is the unit of analysis, those schools continued to be included in the study, and data from new teachers and principals were included in the data set if they returned surveys. This led to some instances of comparing baseline and outcome scores for two different principals.

The tension between competing commitments about continued participation in the program and expectations for principals to be present in school was exacerbated by the fact that most participating treatment schools were singletons from their districts. As a result, some principals may not have received district support for application of and participation in their ongoing learning.

Another limitation is the placement of the outcomes data. The final session of the training was in November 2010, and the student achievement data for the final year was collected the same fall. Final outcome survey data were collected in January and February 2011, also after the final student achievement data were collected.

Neither the research design nor researchers illuminate how the social, policy, and economic landscape in which this initiative was implemented affected the participants. The years during which the study occurred are marked with significant economic and education policy changes. ■
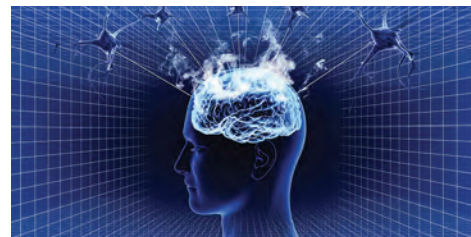
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www.learningforward.org/ learning-opportunities/ webinars/webinar-archive/data- driven-differentiation

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Learning team cycle of continuous improvement

A team learning cycle is the means for embedding learning in the day-to-day work of teachers, putting their teaching challenges at the forefront and providing support when they need it the most. The five learning stages described in the fall 2015 issue of *Tools for Learning Schools* guide the work of a team whose members share collective responsibility for the success of a group of students as well as each other. Accompanying tools in the newsletter include: Applying the Team Learning Cycle, Plan for Team Growth, and Team Progress Self-Assessment.
www.learningforward.org/publications/ tools-for-learning-schools/tools-for-learning- schools/2015/11/20/tools-for-learning- schools-fall-2015-vol.-19-no.-1

Emerging lessons from the science of learning

Laurie Calvert is the education policy advisor for Learning Forward and the National Commission on Teaching and America's Future. In this blog post, she writes about some of the latest theories in scientific learning research from Deans for Impact, an organization committed to improving student learning outcomes by transforming the field of educator preparation.

"Though researchers admit that there is no magic formula to using the ongoing science of learning well in the classroom, the need for professional learning designs that integrate theories, research, and models of human learning is an important component of the Standards for Professional Learning.

"Melina Uncapher [assistant professor of neurology at the University of California-San Francisco] suggests that teachers should continually engage in their own research about emerging concepts. 'The research has to be continually tested and blended with experience,' she said. Teachers need to be their own scientists, using their classrooms as laboratories testing their own mental models about how their students learn."
http://blogs.edweek.org/ edweek/learning_forwards_ pd_watch/2015/10/emerging_ lessons_from_the_science_of_ learning.htm

Members of the Braulio Alonso High School instructional leadership team include: Front row, from left: Robyn Sullivan, Christine Meitzler, Shawna Berger, Christina Lyle, Michele Dailey; middle row, from left: Kelly Pierino, Sue Koester, Dylana Robertson, Kate Tancrell, Francesca Sciullo, Julia Spalding, Maria Gomez, Ken Hart; and back row, from left: Alan Turnquist, Larissa McCoy Mitti, Jay Chantlos. Not pictured: Courtney Ward, Denon Ploor, Elizabeth Morgan, Gina Rodriguez, Ravyn Hunt.

Tampa team wins 2015 Shirley Hord Award

The instructional leadership team from Braulio Alonso School in Tampa, Florida, is the winner of the 2015 Shirley Hord Learning Team Award. This award is given annually to a team of teachers that demonstrates Learning Forward's definition of professional learning in action.

Teams from schools across the United States submitted nominations that included videos of the teams engaging in professional learning and documentation of their work and its impact on student learning. A team of reviewers evaluated the submissions using Learning Forward's Learning School Innovation Configuration map.

"Hillsborough County Schools has made a commitment to being an innovative professional learning system, and this commitment is reflected in the work of the instructional

To view the video submission of the winning team and learn more about the award, visit **www.learningforward.org/get-involved/awards/2015-hord-award-winner.**

leadership team at Braulio Alonso High School," said Stephanie Hirsh, Learning Forward's executive director. "The team's collaborative leadership is contributing to a culture of continuous improvement that is improving teaching practices and student achievement."

Alonso High School is the largest school in Hillsborough County Schools, the eighth-largest school system in the nation. The school's instructional leadership team is a cross-curricular team focused on implementing a system of professional learning and support to improve results for all learners.

The award, which is sponsored by Corwin Press, includes funds to support representatives of the winning team to participate in Learning Forward's 2015 Annual Conference, $2,500 to support collaborative professional learning, and a gift of Corwin books for the school's professional library.

For principals, leadership begins and ends with learning

on board
DEBORAH JACKSON

Although school leaders are responsible for leading everything in a school, many educators I know tell me they frequently feel unprepared to lead a school's mission and vision. They believe they can manage the day-to-day operations, but serving as the education leader is another matter.

I've seen how the role of the school leader in ensuring equity and equality for all students has become increasingly necessary and complex. How can these leaders move their schools or districts beyond providing equity of access to achieve equity of outcomes?

From where I sit, neither policies nor practices are creating the paradigms that align professional learning with the demands school leaders need to meet to help today's students. Here's what I'm seeing that school leaders need to respond to:

- Education reform efforts will continue to place pressure on schools, with ever-changing local, state, and federal regulations.
- Scarce resources (human and financial) within districts make it increasingly challenging to achieve our goals, and leaders have to be more effective and efficient in their work.
- Advances in technology and information systems continue to provide new challenges.

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Deborah Jackson is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees.

- Demographic shifts in our communities mean that every educator will need to acquire new instructional practices.
- Changing curricula and new resources for the classroom remain a steady concern.
- Finally, all of the above require continuous learning for every educator in a building. And that is, at least in part, a key responsibility of the school leader.

That's an intimidating list. When I work with principals in my district, they can feel overwhelmed by what faces them.

However, no matter how long the list, the answer begins and ends with learning. Your learning, their learning, our learning, my learning. Ask how you are making time for it, how you're supporting it, and how you're creating cultures that make learning the top priority.

Raising the bar for all educators to support increased achievement, as a colleague in my district put it, will require professional learning that is embedded in a culture of continuous school improvement. Principals need explicit learning to build their own capacity in the instructional leadership necessary to improve teaching and learning, which ultimately impacts student achievement.

STANDARDS LIGHT THE WAY

I've been proud to lead Learning Forward as its board president this year. When I look at where we still need to go as a field, I know that Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning help educators envision specific steps and actions to support building educator capacity that sustains increased achievement. Those standards serve as a beacon for leaders. When we're faced with another challenge, think about how to help all educators learn meaningfully so they are prepared for what comes next.

As I continue to advocate for continuous learning, I'd also ask state policy leaders and institutions of higher education to become partners in preparing aspiring and practicing leaders to serve as lead learners.

If education leaders are going to keep pace with the expectations of our constituencies and a networked global community, we need to serve as world-class learning leaders rather than thinking of ourselves as education administrators. Let's put learning first for every person in our buildings, systems, and communities. ■

Drive school improvement with principal learning teams
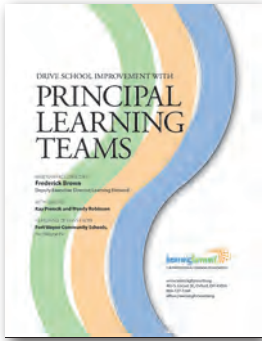
Principal learning is often overlooked as an element of change and continuous improvement. In a Learning Forward webinar hosted by Education Week, see how Fort Wayne Community Schools in Indiana established a core leadership team of principals and district leaders who are key to ensuring all schools are grounded in adult

learning designs that result in a positive impact on students.

Learn how your central office can build a principal leadership team that:
- Strengthens the entire corps of principals through a collaborative community of practice and peer support;
- Coaches and supports its peers in implementing curriculum leadership roles, responsibilities, and expectations; and
- Strengthens leadership capacity of principals, deepening their ability to be leaders of high-quality

To view the webinar, register at http://bit.ly/1IpItdV.

professional learning.

Frederick Brown, Learning Forward's deputy executive director, moderates the discussion with Learning Forward senior consultant Kay Psencik and Wendy Robinson, superintendent of Fort Wayne Community Schools.

Slides from the presentation and tools for principal learning teams are also available for download.

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT, AND CIRCULATION (Required by 39 USC 3685)

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1. Sales through dealers and carriers, street vendors, and counter sales (not mailed)	None	None
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c. Total paid and/or requested circulation	4,392	4,427
d. Free distribution by mail	563	706
e. Free distribution outside the mail	None	None
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g. Total distribution	4,954	5,133
Percent paid and/or requested circulation	89%	86%
h. Copies not distributed		
1. Office use, leftovers, spoiled	1,206	734
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Percent paid and/or requested circulation	71%	75%

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17. **Signature and title of editor, publisher, business manager, or owner.** I certify that all information furnished on this form is true and complete. I understand that anyone who furnishes false or misleading information on this form or who omits material or information requested on this form may be subject to criminal sanctions (including fines and imprisonment) and/or civil sanctions (including multiple damages and civil penalties)

Tracy Crow

book club

HAVING HARD CONVERSATIONS 2.0:
Extending the Learning
By Jennifer Abrams

This update of the author's original *Hard Conversations* book is designed to promote a deeper understanding of what needs to happen before, during, and after hard conversations. The author emphasizes the critical need for greater clarity around the goals and desired outcomes of hard conversations.

This version includes topics that weren't addressed in the first book, including filters of perception such as race and gender, the significance of organizational politics, productive responses, and effective listening strategies.

The book comes with an array of tools, templates, and checklists and a variety of vignettes and case studies based on Abrams' own practice.

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 Jan. 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email **office@learningforward.org.**

WHY DO YOU LEARN?

At this year's Annual Conference, Learning Forward launched a social media campaign to capture with words and images why educators embrace their own learning.

So every student succeeds no matter where they go to school.

#WhyWeLearn

Using the #whywelearn, we're asking members and friends to share in their own words what motivates them to improve each and every day in school. Visit Twitter and search on **#whywelearn** to see what learning leaders have shared already, then share your own.
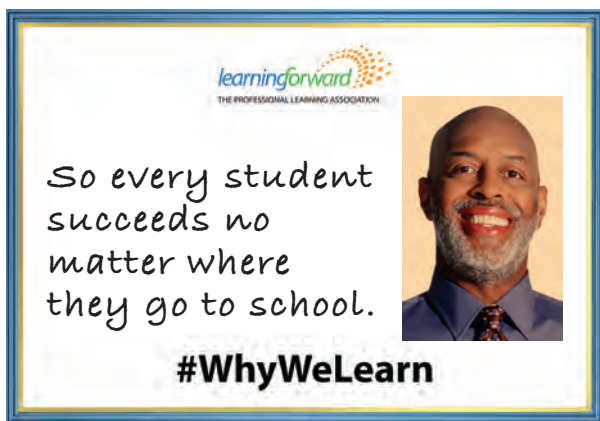
LEARNING FORWARD CALENDAR

Jan. 14, 2016: Webinar: Drivers of Equitable Achievement in K-12 STEM Programs. *Free for members.*
Jan. 15, 2016: Manuscript deadline for the June 2016 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Professional learning basics & fundamentals.
Jan. 26, 2016: Webinar: Transforming Professional Learning: Statewide District Collaboration. *Free for members.*
Feb. 1, 2016: Deadline to apply to present at Learning Forward's 2016 Annual Conference in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada.
Feb. 15, 2016: Manuscript deadline for the August 2016 issue of *JSD*. Theme: Idea lab: Innovations from the field.
March 15, 2016: Applications due for the next class of Learning Forward Academy.

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LEARNING FORWARD'S VISION:
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Perspectives on professional learning
By Tracy Crow

As the professional learning association for educators, Learning Forward works with stakeholders in a range of roles and from all kinds of contexts. This provides the opportunity to hear about the great work people are doing in this field. While JSD typically explores a topic in some depth, this issue shares valuable stories and words of wisdom from a variety of perspectives.

Do you see what I see?
District designs learning plan to develop a clear vision of effective instruction.
By Kay Psencik, C. Todd Cummings, and Larry Gerardot

Fort Wayne Community Schools implemented the RISE Indiana Teacher Effectiveness Rubric to clarify what effective instruction looks like, but an analysis of five years of evaluation data showed that not all principals had a clear or common understanding of the rubric's elements. District leaders created a professional learning plan that emphasizes inter-rater reliability to ensure that principals are observing instruction in the same way and in agreement on ratings teachers receive.

Words matter:
Unpack the language of teaching to create shared understanding.
By Genevieve Graff-Ermeling, Bradley A. Ermeling, and Ronald Gallimore

Words are the principal vehicles of classroom instruction and lesson planning. The more clearly teachers articulate what is to be learned and the instructional practices to be used, the better they teach and the more likely students develop knowledge and skills. Diligently and consistently modeled and implemented, practical unpacking strategies can help an educator community develop shared understanding of underlying ideas, uncover gaps in grasp of instructional practices, and prepare lessons with improved clarity and richer opportunities for student learning.

The 5 habits of effective PLCs.
By Lois Brown Easton

Professional learning communities that are accountable, employ various skill sets to operate, foster good relationships among members and with the larger community, operate according to passion and purpose, and engage in both learning and doing are more likely to be successful than professional learning communities that have not developed these actions into habits. And professional learning communities that demonstrate these habits are likely to achieve the ultimate indicator of success: improved student learning and well-being.

Make a path for evaluation:
10 stepping stones help leaders build solid practices.
By Robby Champion

Education leaders are responsible for getting the best possible results. Professional learning leaders will be expected to ensure that the connections between their work and enhanced student learning are not just happenstance. Just as they are breaking through new paths to expand the

columns

Lessons from research:
Strengthening principal leadership is only one piece of the puzzle.
By Joellen Killion

A study finds positive, statistically significant impacts on variables related to principal self-efficacy beliefs, principal leadership practices, and instructional climate, yet finds no statistically significant changes in student achievement or in teachers' perception of leadership practices.

From the director:
How we can stop the cycle of ineffective professional learning.
By Stephanie Hirsh

Take a look at why more educators aren't experiencing the great learning they need and what Learning Forward is doing to change that.

available learning models and options for adult learners, these leaders will be expected to have the knowledge, will, and expertise to undertake better evaluation practices than were accepted in bygone eras. An experienced professional learning leader offers habits of mind and work that can make a significant difference in the quality of evaluations.

How leaders can make a big difference.
By Stephanie Hirsh

According to the 2015 National Survey on College and Career-Ready Literacy Standards and Collaborative Professional Learning, teachers thrive in schools that prioritize these literacy capacity-building strategies and, in turn, students have greater opportunities for success.

Don't just survive — thrive!
Develop professional capital to help teachers thrive in times of great change.
By Roberta Reed and John Eyolfson

When treated as professionals and given the opportunity to participate in building and extending the profession, teachers rise to the occasion. School leaders in Colorado's Cherry Creek School District put words into actions by developing teachers' professional capital through the use of high-impact instructional rounds grounded in an appreciative inquiry approach. The process built teacher capacity, developed sustainable teacher leadership, and increased student engagement.

Beyond professional development:
Breaking boundaries and liberating a learning profession.
By Bruce Joyce and Emily Calhoun

Professional development of all types is currently squeezed into little windows of time that are simply inadequate to address student and educator needs on an ad hoc basis. The recognition that teaching is a learning profession where the study of educators is a prominent feature of the work is long overdue. The keys to releasing the energy to build strong, sustained support are remarkably simple, although they will make some people nervous. Removing or at least bending some barriers is the secret door that lies hidden in plain sight.

Say goodbye to drill-and-kill teaching:
Authentic reading and writing experiences are enough to reach struggling students.
By Eric Simpson

Lewisville Independent School District in Texas partnered with the North Star of Texas Writing Project to redesign state-mandated remediation of struggling readers and writers. Teachers, administrators, and writing coaches worked together to pinpoint instructional issues, develop foundational literacy curriculum for tutorials, and offer sustained, job-embedded professional learning for all teachers in writer workshop instruction. What started as a summer program with just 25 students has grown to voluntary writing camps and after-school tutorial sessions that serve hundreds of students. Increases in student achievement show the program's impact.

Write for JSD

- Themes are posted at **www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

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

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

Share your story

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.

To learn more about key topics and what reviewers look for in article submissions, visit **www.learningforward.com/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes.**

How we can stop the cycle of ineffective professional learning

I'm proud to say how long I've been working hand in hand with so many other educators to improve professional learning. I've been with Learning Forward (formerly NSDC) for more than 25 years. I've contributed to three versions of standards describing professional learning that leads to changes in practice and student learning. And, at the same time, it's hard not to ponder this: Given what we know, why aren't more educators experiencing the great learning they need each day?

I have four possible reasons I'd like to share with you.

Good professional learning is hard to do — and few people have the deep knowledge and expertise to plan and execute it.

There is a science regarding how adults learn, and few people appreciate its complexity. Few people study the field deeply — both research and best practice — before assuming responsibility for it in their contexts. Therefore, often those who plan professional learning don't have the understanding necessary to ensure it is designed and executed so that it achieves its intended outcomes.

Principals today are often the primary leaders of professional

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Stephanie Hirsh (stephanie.hirsh@ learningforward.org) is executive director of Learning Forward.

learning in schools, and very few of them have ever experienced effective professional learning themselves.

As a result, principals frequently plan experiences that replicate ones in which they participated. Between their lack of experience with effective learning earlier in their careers and the fact that systems often neglect meaningful principal learning, it's not a surprise that principals often aren't prepared to lead learning.

At the system level, the many people and programs that depend on professional learning for successful implementation compete, compromise, and economize on the elements essential to effective execution.

In most school systems, professional learning is part of everyone's responsibility. Without a shared vision, plan, and expectations for its outcomes, professional learning often functions as a series of disconnected and competing activities. The people responsible for it can operate in silos, protective of their initiatives. As a result, the professional learning teachers experience is fragmented and incoherent — little of it sticks and nothing changes.

Many people have lost confidence in the power of professional learning to improve practice and results for all students.

Given what they've experienced and seen, those in charge devote little

effort to making professional learning meaningful, and the cycle of ineffective professional learning just repeats itself, contributing to the perception that further investment is not justified.

At Learning Forward, we continue to address these challenges. We are focused on helping people understand what is effective professional learning and to make it the norm through these strategies and others:

- **Support the adoption and implementation** of the Standards for Professional Learning, which define the elements essential to learning if it is to change adult behaviors and improve student learning.
- **Advocate for a change to the definition of professional learning** in federal policy. This will provide direction to states and districts on how to leverage federal funding for more effective professional learning.
- **Elevate and amplify the most successful stories** of effective professional learning in practice. We are committed to helping all stakeholders see what happens with professional learning done well.
- **Partner with school systems and organizations** active in redesigning their current practice so professional learning makes a substantive difference for educators and students.

Where else should we focus our energy to create and sustain change? ■

The Annual Conference on
Standards & Assessment

APRIL 4–6, 2016   Phoenix, Arizona
Phoenix Convention Center

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Transform how they learn.

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Very high-quality and practical information. "

Melanie Ward, assistant superintendent for curriculum & instruction,
Pittsford Central School District, New York

- Recognize how to build assessment literacy utilizing a learning map to differentiate professional development.
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- Experience feedback that moves learning forward by providing students the information they need to better understand problems and concepts.
- Engineer effective classroom discussions, activities, and learning tasks that elicit evidence of learning.

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