



# LASTING LEGACY *for* ACHIEVEMENT

COLORADO COACHES BOOST TEACHER EFFECTIVENESS  
WITH A RUBRIC FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

By Jean Cross

In 2006, the Weld County School District Re-8 in Fort Lupton, Colo., was eager to find a way to increase teacher effectiveness and, as a result, improve student achievement. This small, semirural district about 35 miles northeast of Denver grappled with high teacher turnover (34% in 2005) and low scores on state assessments (three out of four schools didn't make Adequate Yearly Progress). More than 52% of 2,400 students were eligible for free and reduced-price lunch. The district's demographics and needs matched the purposes of a federal Teacher Incentive Fund program to "develop and implement performance-based compensation systems for teachers and principals in order to increase educator effectiveness and student achievement in high-need schools" (Lee, 2010).

One of the core elements of the five-year grant is for professional development to improve practice. Using the grant, Weld County Re-8 placed one achievement coach in each building to work with teachers in their classrooms and forge new possibilities for professional learning. In addition, a half-time coach of coaches worked with principals, coaches, teachers, and students and served as liaison with district administrators and programs.

Coaches met biweekly in professional learning communities to study, discuss, analyze, reflect, seek, share, risk, and grow professionally in their coaching roles. Because of their efforts, the district gained coaches with expertise in teaching skills and adult learning, and teachers gained flexible formats for professional learning. And, in what may be the most significant product of their work, coaches developed a rubric for planning, facilitating, and evaluating professional learning in many formats. The overall result is a foundation that will continue to support and sustain high-quality professional learning in the district after the grant dollars disappear.

#### HOW THE RUBRIC WAS CREATED

Weld County's coaches knew that if they were to promote effective teaching behaviors, they would need to increase and deepen their own instructional skills. First, they examined best instructional practices described in *The Skillful Teacher: Building Your Teaching Skills* (Saphier, Haley-Speca, & Gower, 2008), research-based instruction ascribed by national organizations in content areas, and teacher performance standards in the district evaluation system. They increased their leadership skills with studies, training, and webinars about change theory, adult learning, Levels of Use, and facilitation strategies. They also engaged in consistent practice with coaching conversations, meta-coaching, reflection and goal setting, simulations, case study protocol, and analysis of videotaped coaching activities.

In their professional learning communities, coaches created the environment for learning that they sought to replicate in professional learning settings with teachers. They realized they needed to define the essential elements of their growth in their professional learning communities in order to transfer them to teachers' professional learning. Coaches decided to create a document that defined excellence for these elements — a rubric — and applied a qualitative process to build it.

The rubric was initially intended for use with professional development classes, but its use expanded to include principals, who used the rubric to plan building activities, and new coaches, who used the rubric as a training guide for their role as facilitators. While the rubric would be useful as a guide for high-quality professional learning, the

- Facilitator's rubric for professional learning, pp. 38-39
- Essential elements of quality professional learning: Quick guide, p. 43
- Essential elements of quality professional learning: Planning worksheet, p. 44

**FACILITATOR’S RUBRIC FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING** Weld County School District Re-8, Fort Lupton, Colo.

In summer 2009, achievement coaches reviewed current literature and best practices for facilitating professional learning for teachers. This led to a commitment to increase coaching skills of professional learning facilitators by creating a rubric to plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning. Coaches and facilitators also used the rubric to guide their own professional learning.

STAGE	INDICATOR	ADVANCED	PROFICIENT	PARTIAL PROFICIENT	UNSATISFACTORY
<b>PLAN</b>	<b>Clear outcomes and goals</b>	Goals are documented as SMART goals. Plan is created for teachers to monitor progress on goals.	Goals are documented as SMART goals. Plan is created to share goals orally and visually.	Goals are documented. No plan is created to share goals.	No clear outcomes or goals.
	<b>Preassessment plan</b>	Preassessment is based on goals. Plan for instructional options is created for differentiation.	Preassessment is based on goals to measure teacher readiness for content.	Preassessment plan is vague or irrelevant.	No preassessment plan.
	<b>Peer review of plan</b>	Professional development plan has been shared through multiple planning conversations before written plan. Written professional development plan is reviewed through multiple reflective conversations.	Professional development plan has been shared with a peer through a planning conversation before written plan. Written professional development plan is reviewed through a reflective conversation.	Professional development plan has been discussed with a peer before written plan or written plan has been informally reviewed by peers.	No discussion before written plan and no peer review of written plan.
	<b>Rationale</b>	Rationale is based on district or building-specific student data or teacher need and is backed by research data and researched best practice.	Rationale is based on student data or teacher need and is backed by research data.	Rationale is based on perceived need.	No rationale or rationale is based on personal preference.
	<b>Facilitation strategies and transitions</b>	Facilitation resources are embedded in the outline in order to assist in differentiation.	An outline shows evidence of a variety of adult learning strategies, triple tracking, and effective time management.	An outline or personal notes are prepared, but lack evidence of learning strategies, triple tracking, or time management.	No outline.
<b>IMPLEMENT</b>	<b>Learning cycle</b>	Facilitator uses an object, event, data, or question to engage participants with intended receptiveness. Facilitators activate participants' prior knowledge and guide interactive activities through modeling, questioning/probing, providing resources, and giving immediate and meaningful feedback to participants. Participants construct, apply, and extend their knowledge of concept.	Facilitators activate participants' prior knowledge and guide interactive activities through modeling, questioning/probing, providing resources, and giving immediate and meaningful feedback to participants. Participants construct, apply, and extend their knowledge of concept.	Facilitator makes minimal connections to participants' prior knowledge, guides some activities through modeling and questioning/probing, and gives minimal feedback to participants. Participants are given few opportunities to construct, apply, and extend their knowledge of concept.	Facilitator does not engage participants to begin session. Facilitator does not provide modeling, questioning, or feedback to students. Participants are given no opportunities to construct, apply, and extend their knowledge of concept.
	<b>Engagement</b>	Participants have multiple opportunities to effectively communicate, synthesize learning, and produce desired outcome within instructional setting (whole group, small group, partner, individual). Facilitator tailors communication strategies so that participants effectively express, listen, and adapt to others.	Participants have multiple opportunities to effectively communicate, synthesize learning, and produce desired outcome within instructional setting (whole group, small group, partner, individual).	Participants have few opportunities to communicate, synthesize learning, and produce desired outcome within instructional setting (whole group, small group, partner, individual).	Participants have no opportunities to communicate, synthesize learning, and produce desired outcome within instructional setting (whole group, small group, partner, individual).

STAGE	INDICATOR	ADVANCED	PROFICIENT	PARTIAL PROFICIENT	UNSATISFACTORY
IMPLEMENT	<b>Differentiation</b>	Facilitator implements effective instruction to address a range of learner needs. Instruction is more qualitative (deeper) than quantitative (more work). Instruction is rooted in assessment and is learner-centered. Instruction provides multiple approaches to content, process, and product. Extended activities are available for participants who demonstrate proficiency on preassessment. Participants and facilitator are learners together.	Facilitator implements effective instruction to address a range of learner needs. Instruction is more qualitative (deeper) than quantitative (more work). Instruction is rooted in assessment and is learner-centered.	Facilitator's instruction addresses the needs of the majority. All participants work on the same task at the same time. Instruction is mostly facilitator-directed.	Facilitator's instruction addresses the middle participant with no differentiation. All participants work on the same task at the same time with absence of any assessment. Instruction is facilitator-directed.
	<b>Formative assessments</b>	Facilitator consistently applies a variety of formative assessment strategies to monitor progress on specific goals in a timely manner, provides specific, individualized feedback to participants, and adjusts the facilitation plan as needed for individuals and the group.	Facilitator applies formative assessment strategies to monitor goals throughout the learning process, provides feedback to participants, and adjusts the facilitation plan as needed for the group.	Facilitator applies some formative assessment strategies related to goals, provides general feedback, and may make some adjustments in the facilitation plan.	Facilitator does not measure participants' progress in meeting goals during the learning process.
EVALUATE	<b>Sustainability</b>	Facilitator provides multiple resources for further research and review. Participants walk away with a written plan and timeline to implement as well as a plan to instruct/share the strategies, concepts, or practices in their classrooms/building.	Facilitator provides adequate resources for further research and review. Participants walk away with a written short- and long-term plan to implement the strategies, concepts, or practices in their classrooms.	Facilitator provides few resources for further research and review. Participants walk away with the intent to implement the strategies, concepts, or practices in their classrooms.	Facilitator provides no resources for further research and review. Participants walk away with no plan to implement the strategies, concepts, or practices in their classrooms.
	<b>Feedback</b>	Participants have an opportunity to complete a Likert scale, provide specific and descriptive written comments, and engage in dialogue as feedback to the facilitator. Facilitator provides group and individuals with specific and descriptive feedback based on goals and norms.	Participants have an opportunity to complete a Likert scale and provide specific and descriptive comments as feedback to the facilitator. Facilitator provides group and individual oral feedback to the participants based on goals and norms.	Participants have an opportunity to complete a Likert scale for quantifiable feedback for facilitator. Facilitator provides general and minimal feedback to the group.	Participants have no opportunity to provide feedback for facilitator. Facilitator provides no feedback for participants.
	<b>Reflection</b>	Facilitator reflects in writing on: 1) achievement of personal goals, and 2) generalizations from feedback, significance, and next steps needed to improve facilitation. Facilitator makes revision in plans indicating activities and presentation points that further increase effectiveness of professional development in relation to original facilitator goal.	Facilitator reflects in writing on: 1) achievement of personal goals, and 2) generalizations from feedback, significance, and next steps needed to improve facilitation.	Facilitator indicates that reflection has taken place and targets an area for improvement.	No evidence of reflection or future improvement.

Source: Weld County School District Re-8.

process of creating it became a source of deep professional learning for coaches.

Coaches' professional learning communities encouraged research, data, consensus, trust, honest communication, self-reflection, disclosure, goal setting and monitoring, and collective meaning making. These elements were crucial in completing the rubric. All of the coaches' knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs about professional learning became embedded in the process and product the coaches pursued collectively and relentlessly.

The following steps outline the process used to create the rubric.

### STEPS TO CREATE A RUBRIC FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

#### 1. Expand background knowledge for professional learning.

Coaches reviewed more than two dozen articles on professional development, professional learning communities, and adult learning. Using protocols such as gallery walks, an idea catcher, and jigsaw reading, coaches analyzed the articles and began to group ideas. The coaches' guiding question was: What can we do with this information to ensure that we get better over time in planning and facilitating professional learning?

Coaches envisioned a rubric with four levels of proficiency for indicators in three categories: Plan, implement, and evaluate.

#### 2. Build the rubric with indicators and descriptions.

Coaches identified 12 indicators based on the literature review and a set of professional development standards that were the forerunners to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). Each of three groups worked to describe proficiency for each indicator in its category. The whole group provided critical feedback on the proficiency descriptor before the next iteration, when coaching subgroups described advanced, partial proficiency, and unsatisfactory. Coaches continued their work at biweekly coaching academy sessions until they were ready to share the rubric with district and building

**Coaches admit their professional learning extended far beyond creating a rubric. They learned that teacher effectiveness improves in many settings when a benchmark for excellence is applied.**

administrators. These professional colleagues deemed the rubric an informative synthesis of best practice, a consistent quality check for district professional development, and application of professional learning standards. They also saw a tool for planning building work groups (content, grade, vertical, departments). The final rubric was published in 2010 (see pp. 38-39).

#### 3. Use the rubric to promote professional learning for coaches.

Coaches engaged in professional learning through the following actions:

- **Coaches self-assessed their skills and efficacy for each indicator.** They highlighted descriptors that represented their level of proficiency. This became a personal profile of strengths that would be shared with coaching peers and areas for growth that would become outcomes for individual or team learning.
- **Coaches shared strategies they used to support advanced proficiency on rubric indicators, thereby affirming the expertise within the coaching team.** For example, a coach explained his advanced proficiency in rationale by explaining how he used state and district student achievement data to create outcomes on guided reading.
- **Coaches identified rubric indicators and levels of proficiency that would be outcomes for their learning.** Where there was consensus, coaches created team goals: preassessment, differentiation, and sustainability. Each coach identified two additional indicators for in-

### STANDARDS CROSSWALK: HOW THE RUBRIC ALIGNS WITH STANDARDS

Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (2011) are embedded in each of the indicators of Weld County School District Re-8's rubric. Here is how the rubric aligns with the standards.

#### PLAN

- Clear outcomes and goals: **Outcomes**
- Preassessment plan: **Learning Designs**
- Peer review of plan: **Learning Communities**
- Rationale: **Data**
- Facilitation strategies and transitions: **Learning Designs**

#### IMPLEMENT

- Learning cycle: **Learning Designs**
- Engagement: **Learning Designs**
- Differentiation: **Learning Designs**
- Formative assessments: **Data**

#### EVALUATE

- Sustainability: **Implementation**
- Feedback: **Data**
- Reflection: **Data**

dividual growth. For example, a coach set a SMART goal (specific, measurable, attainable, results-based, and time-bound) for the next year: “By (end of year), I will document reflections of three facilitated professional learning sessions including achievement of goals, feedback from peers/teachers, and goals for the next session. Currently, I will arrange for planning and reflecting conversations with a peer coach before and after a videotaped professional learning session.”

Coaches invited education consultants to share resources and strategies for team goals. All resources were scanned and made accessible to coaches on an electronic file.

#### 4. Use the rubric to plan, implement, and evaluate professional learning.

Coaches followed the rubric to develop learning designs and implement professional learning:

- **Coaches used Cognitive Coaching skills** to practice and reflect on these new facilitation skills and protocols. Conversations grew in depth and insight as coaches focused on rubric indicators and Cognitive Coaching skills.
- **Coaches created a document** asking for evidence of each indicator (see p. 43). The complete rubric continued to be the foundation of professional learning work, but coaches needed a quick reference guide to monitor progress, internalize the rubric, and expand questions for peer feedback.
- **Coaches also created a collaborative planning worksheet** to use and share with building leadership teams for planning their professional learning (see p. 44).

#### 5. Recommend sustainability measures for high-quality professional learning and rubric.

Coaches admit their professional learning extended far beyond creating a rubric. They learned that teacher effectiveness improves in many settings when a benchmark for excellence is applied. They also learned that professional learning is an unfolding process for themselves, teachers, and administrators. Coaches recommend the following to sustain high-quality professional development:

- **Schedule professional learning** with intermittent checkpoints to ensure practice, feedback, and higher levels of application.
- **Encourage teachers to initiate** their learning and select from a variety of formats to suit their needs and learning styles.
- **Enhance relevance and meaning** for teachers by inviting them to bring to the sessions their units and instructional sequences for direct application of strategies and concepts introduced in a session.
- **Invite principals and administrators** to participate

in professional learning and provide ongoing support of best practices through classroom observations and feedback to teachers.

- **Ask coaches to co-plan** and co-facilitate professional learning to ensure reflection on rubric indicators and to support differentiation for teachers’ needs and readiness.
- **Revise the evaluation form** to reflect the rubric indicators so that teacher feedback guides facilitator reflections and future planning.
- **Increase the alignment** of topics and outcomes with teacher performance standards, which are the basis for increasing student achievement.

#### AN INVIGORATING EXPERIENCE

Recent research indicates that student achievement is directly related to teacher effectiveness. (Heck, 2009; Sanders & Rivers, 1996; Springer et al., 2010; Stronge, 2010). By extension, growth in student achievement occurs because of growth in teacher effectiveness. The Weld County School District Re-8’s efforts to increase teacher effectiveness in the district have invigorated coaches and teachers.

According to the report *Partnering for Compensation Reform* (Sommerfield, 2011), in the three years since the district implemented the program, teacher turnover has dropped from 34% in 2005 to 13% in 2010. While this decline is not entirely attributable to the new program, Carol Ruckel, district grant coordinator, believes it is one of a number of important factors. In addition, the district is providing better support for new teachers and paying more attention to teacher mentoring, both supported by the grant.

With each coaching interaction, teachers and coaches hone their skills and increase their appreciation of the power of and need for high-quality professional learning that makes a difference for students. Teachers who increased their students’ achievement received incentive pay from the grant, but, more importantly, felt the satisfaction of increasing student achievement with new energy, worthy risks, strategies for thinking skills, and increased efficacy.

Roberta Chacon-Caciari, leader of the local teachers union, initially viewed the grant with some skepticism, but said, “There have been some phenomenal things that have come from this grant. ... The biggest, most positive and wonderful thing that

#### Weld County School District Re-8

Fort Lupton, Colo.

Number of schools: **4**

Enrollment: **2,470**

Staff: **180**

Racial/ethnic mix:

White:	<b>27.7%</b>
Black:	<b>0.4%</b>
Hispanic:	<b>70%</b>
Asian/Pacific Islander:	<b>0.4%</b>
Native American:	<b>0.4%</b>
Other:	<b>0%</b>

Limited English proficient: **37.9%**

Languages spoken: **English,**

**Spanish**

Free/reduced lunch: **67.5%**

Special education: **6.1%**

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has come out of the entire program has been the amount of training. It is just amazing, research-based training. There have been mentors and coaching that have been paid for to oversee professional development, but also going one-on-one to help people who are struggling. They are helping teachers get the resources they need to be successful and to implement best practices” (Sommerfield, 2011).

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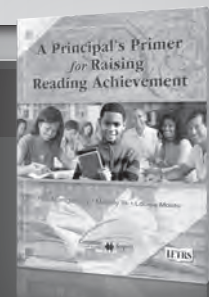
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**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING QUICK GUIDE**

STAGE	INDICATOR	QUESTIONS FOR FACILITATORS
<b>PLAN</b>	<b>Clear outcomes and goals</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are outcomes of session written as SMART goals?</li> <li>• What is the plan for communicating/keeping focus on these goals?</li> </ul>
	<b>Preassessment plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is preassessment aligned with the outcomes?</li> <li>• In what ways does preassessment measure teachers' readiness for the content?</li> </ul>
	<b>Peer review of plan</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are benefits of the Cognitive Coaching planning conversation with a coach?</li> <li>• What are benefits of a Cognitive Coaching reflective conversation about the written plan (draft)?</li> </ul>
	<b>Rationale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What student achievement data support these outcomes?</li> <li>• What is the evidence of teachers' instructional practices that support the need for these outcomes?</li> </ul>
	<b>Facilitation strategies and transitions</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the adult learning strategies being used?</li> <li>• How is time managed, including transitions?</li> </ul>
<b>IMPLEMENT</b>	<b>Learning cycle</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is prior knowledge evoked?</li> <li>• How do interactive activities include resources, deep processing, practice, rigor, and reflection?</li> </ul>
	<b>Engagement</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are multiple opportunities for teachers to communicate, synthesize learning, and use feedback?</li> <li>• What are multiple structures used for interaction and feedback — whole group, small group, partner?</li> </ul>
	<b>Differentiation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How is the range of teachers' needs addressed?</li> <li>• How will facilitators know if instruction meets teachers' needs?</li> </ul>
	<b>Formative assessments</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What formative assessment tools are used to adjust instruction toward outcomes?</li> <li>• How do formative assessments provide timely feedback?</li> </ul>
<b>EVALUATE</b>	<b>Sustainability</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What resources and supports are provided for teachers to continue pursuit of outcomes?</li> <li>• How will teachers share their short- and long-term plans to implement the outcomes?</li> </ul>
	<b>Feedback</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How and when will teachers provide specific and meaningful feedback to the facilitator?</li> <li>• How and when will the facilitator provide group and individual oral feedback to teachers based on goals and norms?</li> </ul>
	<b>Reflection</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• When will facilitators collaboratively assess the professional development with this rubric and specific facilitator goals?</li> <li>• When will facilitators collaborate to analyze teacher feedback?</li> <li>• When will facilitators develop goals for next professional development based on this evaluation?</li> </ul>

Source: Weld County School District Re-8.



**ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF QUALITY PROFESSIONAL LEARNING: PLANNING WORKSHEET**

	INDICATOR	DESCRIPTORS	COLLABORATIVE PLANNING NOTES
PLAN	<b>Clear outcomes and goals:</b> What knowledge and skills will teachers gain?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning goals.</li> <li>• Evidence of learning.</li> <li>• Communication plan.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Preassessment plan:</b> How will we find out what teachers already know and need?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Aligned with outcomes.</li> <li>• Measures readiness.</li> <li>• Measures learning styles/ interests.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Peer review of plan:</b> When will we review, rehearse, and revise the plan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Planning conversation date.</li> <li>• Reflecting conversation with draft data.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Rationale:</b> What performance information is used to indicate need for outcomes and goals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Student achievement data and growth.</li> <li>• Teaching standards.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Facilitation strategies and transitions:</b> Which 21st-century learning skills will we include in our plan?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adult learning strategies.</li> <li>• Time management and transitions.</li> </ul>	
IMPLEMENT	<b>Learning cycle:</b> How will teachers be guided to work with new skills at a higher level?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Prior knowledge.</li> <li>• Guided practice and demonstrate learning.</li> <li>• Reflection.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Engagement:</b> In what ways will teachers be engaged in their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Multiple styles.</li> <li>• Multiple structures.</li> <li>• Interactive processing.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Differentiation:</b> In what ways will we address a range of teacher needs?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Levels of Use.</li> <li>• Interests and styles.</li> <li>• Need to know.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Formative assessments:</b> How will formative assessments guide instruction toward outcome?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Adjust instruction.</li> <li>• Timely feedback.</li> <li>• Peer/self monitoring.</li> </ul>	
EVALUATE	<b>Sustainability:</b> How will teachers continue to practice and extend their learning?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Resources/support.</li> <li>• Short-term goals.</li> <li>• Long-term goals.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Feedback:</b> How will teachers and facilitators provide meaningful feedback?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers to facilitators.</li> <li>• Facilitator to teachers.</li> </ul>	
	<b>Reflection:</b> How will reflection guide planning for future professional development?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Analyze feedback.</li> <li>• Collaborate.</li> <li>• Facilitation goals for future professional development.</li> </ul>	

Source: Weld County School District Re-8.