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How to shape learning leaders p. 26

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— Chanda Telleen, educational consultant

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THURSDAY-FRIDAY, JULY 20-21

SESSION TITLE	SPEAKER(S)	FLEX SESSION*
Assessing the Impact & Coherence of Your Professional Learning	Thomas Guskey Michelle Bowman King Nick Morgan	No
The Feedback Process: Transforming Feedback for Professional Learning	Joellen Killion	No
Technology-Enhanced Professional Learning: Blended Learning & Micro Credentials	Nanci Meza Amber Paynter	No
Developing & Supporting Instructional Coaches	Heather Clifton Chris Bryan	No

* Flex sessions may register for either one or two days. All other sessions are two days.

SATURDAY-SUNDAY, JULY 22-23

SESSION TITLE	SPEAKER(S)	FLEX SESSION*
Elevating Teacher Leadership	Ann Delehant Cindy Harrison	Yes
Building Your Educational Leadership Skill Set	Jennifer Abrams	Yes
Becoming a Learning Team	Stephanie Hirsh Tracy Crow	No
Becoming a Learning Principal	Kay Psencik Eric Brooks	No

* Flex sessions may register for either one or two days. All other sessions are two days.

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Create a pitch for professional learning so concise it could fit in an elevator trip.
Call to action, p. 11

Cover photo by **Bill Morgan**/ BILL MORGAN MEDIA

Kenneasha Sloley is principal of Dr. Michael D. Fox School in Hartford, Connecticut.

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I SAY
Ulrich Boser

FINNISH EDUCATOR, AUTHOR, SCHOLAR, AND SCHOOL IMPROVEMENT ACTIVIST

On how professional learning should incorporate lessons from memory research:

"When we think about what makes for good teaching and learning, memory is really key for information, not just because you want to know the facts but so you are able to apply it in some way. … The issue in working memory is that it's so narrow. It's short-term. It's very easy to overload working memory. This explains why PowerPoints with all sorts of writing are so hard to decipher. Or why, when you're trying to read something and someone's talking to you, you're like, wait, I can't pay attention to these things."

Find the full Q&A with Ulrich Boser at **www.learningforward.org/learningprofessional.**

Eric Celeste

Learning leadership requires a supportive culture — and a focus on students

Allison Garland knows why Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, an intensive professional learning cohort for certain Phoenix-area principals and district office personnel, works so well.

Actually, that's a little misleading. There are, in fact, *many* reasons the three-year program, supported by the Arizona Department of Education and Learning Forward (with a grant from American Express and the National Association of Secondary School Principals), is showing great results after its first year. Those reasons range from a commitment to collaboration to buy-in from everyone involved in Learning Leaders. But what has Garland, executive director of school leadership at Littleton Elementary School District #65 in Arizona, and her team of principals so excited about tackling their problem of practice is the opportunity to create a supportive professional learning culture.

"The great thing about this team — there are seven principals, a director, and myself — is that we have a really strong culture," Garland says. "Early on, we spent a lot of time working together and creating a clear vision of where we're going along with action steps, so before we even started with Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, we were a pretty collaborative team. Team members aren't afraid to ask questions, challenge systems, and work collaboratively to find solutions."

What they're in is a multidimensional learning group, one designed to help

them solve a particular problem of practice. In the case of Littleton, that is establishing a common vocabulary or definition of what effective Tier 1 instruction looks like. Through learning communities, whole-group sessions, and coaching, they're able to tackle their problem, learn from colleagues and coaches, develop new competencies, and eventually share results in such a way that they encourage collective inquiry and find practices that scale.

Even though the program is only one year in, Garland believes the lessons she and her team are learning can be applied to principals' teams everywhere.

"In our district, we believe that all of our staff members are leaders in learning, caring, and growing," she says. "That's what our district's vision is, and we firmly believe in collaboration. Therefore it is imperative that there's a person from the district office working with a principal team. It is frustrating for schools when they don't get the support and guidance they need. I think it's a really, really important piece."

The need for a supportive professional learning culture for principals is a thread

> **"It is imperative that there's a person from the district office working with a principal team."**
>
> — *Allison Garland*

you will find in many of the pieces in this issue of *The Learning Professional*. In the following pages, you'll find great analysis, anecdotes, and advice on every aspect of leadership learning: from on-the-job principal learning (p. 41), to six key behaviors of learning leaders (p. 26), to how we can tie student achievement to principal learning (p. 36). Perhaps you're thinking of setting up a micro-credentials program for your principals and other learning leaders — our tool that helps explain the concept of micro-credentials (p. 61) is a great place to start.

But if I have one takeaway from all these items — from the work Garland and her team are doing to the many aspects of learning leadership discussed in the issue — it would be to remember another quote from Garland: "It's always about putting students in the middle of your learning, in the middle of solving our problems." That's something the best learning leaders never forget.

•

Eric Celeste (eric.celeste@ learningforward.org) is associate director of publications at Learning Forward. ■

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL
THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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HOW TO GET IN TOUCH

The Learning Professional is published six times a year to promote improvement in the quality of professional learning as a means to improve student learning in K-12 schools. Contributions from members and nonmembers of Learning Forward are welcome.

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VOICES

1
Local latitude to try different strategies as districts shift their emphases.

2
Engagement of top district leaders.

3
Opportunities for local program directors to learn and share.

3 FACTORS KEEP PRINCIPAL PIPELINES FLOWING

Key features above strengthen principal pipelines, according to a Wallace Foundation October 2016 report, *The Principal Pipeline in Action*.

- FULL REPORT: **www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/Building-a-Stronger-Principalship-Vol-5-The-Principal-Pipeline-Initiative-in-Action.aspx.**

Michael Garren

Position: Deputy director of schools, Loudon County Public Schools, Tennessee

In education: 18 years

Learning Forward member since: 2015

Learning Forward origin story: I became a Learning Forward member because I wanted access to professional expertise that would stretch my thought processes. I'm in a small- to medium-sized rural district that is very innovative, and I was seeking to connect with leaders in a similar position. Although I felt like we were a leader in professional development, I wanted to strengthen our professional development even more and look at how the process could be refined to a point that we are able to offer teachers a highly individualized professional development experience.

How Learning Forward helped him: We have been part of Learning Forward's Redesign PD Community of Practice, and our problem of practice has focused on improving the coherence and relevance of our professional development. The collaboration with Learning Forward and its members has given me a better insight on refining our professional development within the district, as well as my own professional development.

Michael Garren has a joke at the ready when he's asked why he left a career as a civil and environmental engineer to become an educator: "Summers off!" In truth, the reason Garren switched careers is more heartfelt. "I made this switch because I've always loved working with kids, and there is something really special about giving a child a better opportunity to be successful in life." Now, after years in the classroom and working as an instructional supervisor — as well as earning a master's degree in education and an education specialist degree in supervision and administration — Garren leads a small but innovative professional learning team in Loudon County Public Schools (student population about 5,000).

"I think you give teachers what they need, make it engaging, and help them see the relevance of their training to their everyday work."

— Michael Garren

What is your greatest professional learning challenge day to day?

Making sure that the professional development we deliver to teachers is beneficial to them and worth the investment of resources we are making. Examining our professional development practices regarding quality, relevance, and coherence has provided the opportunity to look at where our district has been and where we hope to move. I have also investigated how best to communicate this to all stakeholders in the process for them to feel informed and invested.

What's your primary long-term challenge?

Differentiating professional development opportunities for teachers to make their professional learning more individualized and meaningful while making it coherent and relevant to the district's vision.

You've said you believe Loudon County is on the leading edge of professional learning innovation. How so?

Essentially, we're not afraid to take risks, and we try to stay on the cutting edge of new strategies or new initiatives if the state wants to pilot something. With our size — we've got about 400 teachers — we can make sure we're communicating with everyone. Right now, we're doing an initiative dealing with early literacy, and then we're doing one systemwide dealing with effective planning strategies for teachers. I've been able to pull

every teacher in the district out. Today I'll pull all the kindergarten teachers. Well, that's about 25 teachers. Then tomorrow, I'll pull all the 1st grade, then I'll pull all the 2nd, all the 3rd. I pulled all the teachers K through 12 out already this year to go through our effective planning. When we do an initiative, we're able to do that with everybody. Everybody's getting the same message. Everybody's on the same page.

The sense of cohesion runs up and down the org chart, true?

Yes. All of our district supervisors plan and collaborate together as a team when developing and facilitating professional learning opportunities. This creates a more coherent experience for administrators and teachers and allows the district to maximize its various funds toward the vision of the district. Our district is just the right size to be able to train all teachers in what we feel are important initiatives and not rely on a train-the-trainer model in schools. This makes the training more coherent and relevant, and it increases the fidelity exponentially. There is a culture of not only excellence but one of collegiality and family that exists in our district.

What drives that culture?

At least in part it's driven by the unity and vision of the district office. Our district needs to improve on differentiating professional learning for teachers to maximize their strengths and enhance their areas of challenge. However, with the positive culture already in place, we feel we are poised to take on this challenge with great success.

How do you overcome skepticism or stereotypes of sit-and-get style professional learning?

I think you give teachers what they need, make it engaging, and help them see the relevance of their training to

their everyday work. Teachers inherently want to improve their practice, and if you provide them with opportunities that are relevant and engaging, then that will overcome any skepticism.

Since you got this job in 2011, you've used instructional coaching as a tool to help them improve.

My second year here, I started an instructional coaching program. There weren't any instructional coaches in the district, and I started with an English language arts instructional coach. Then the next year, I added a math instructional coach, then another English language arts coach, then a special education instructional coach. I went from zero coaches to four coaches in four years. And we provide similar training to all principals and assistant principals, so they know, "This is the training that we've provided your teachers. This is what you need to know to support that effort and what you need to look for to make sure this is taking place in the classroom." I see a lot of places you've got that disconnect where you do a lot of teacher training, but then your admin is still running kind of out on their own. Not here.

How do you tie student achievement to professional learning design and implementation?

This is a challenge in professional learning because there are a multitude of factors that impact student achievement. I believe designing professional learning that is sound and based on good practice, relevant to teachers' needs and vision of the district, while allowing teachers to produce a product that they feel will improve their instruction will lead to gains in student achievement. You overcome this challenge in the same way you overcome sit-and-get skepticism: Make your professional learning meaningful for teachers,

make it relevant, and provide them the opportunity to leave the training with actionable steps or products.

What new initiatives did you implement this past year?

We had two primary focuses: One, we implemented the use of a professional learning rubric to evaluate all professional learning opportunities before offering them to increase the coherence, relevance, and quality. This is supplemented by a newly designed survey instrument to gather teachers' perceptions of the offering as well. The data derived from these two processes will help drive our professional learning offerings and determine the level of effectiveness in the teachers' eyes of the professional learning.

Two, the district is focused on effective lesson planning strategies for all teachers that particularly highlight the thought processes behind planning. We engaged in some instructional professional development with our administrators as well to more effectively look for evidence of this planning in instruction so that teachers can be provided with any support they need.

Has your feedback been positive on these?

In the spring, one of the questions on the survey is, "How do you think the professional development is aligned to the district goals and vision? How do you think that alignment is with the professional development that you've got?" We were around 70% to 72% positive last spring. Now, we're at 92%. I think that is, No. 1, because our professional development is more aligned and more cohesive, and No. 2, we've done a better job communicating what our goals and vision for the district are. That feedback let us know we were doing something right. ■

Frederick Brown

The Wallace Foundation lights the way to better principal learning

I wonder how many of you remember your elementary, middle, or high school building principal. I really don't remember much about mine. A principal, I remember thinking, was someone you only saw when you were in trouble. The principal's job was to keep order, fix problems before they got out of hand, do paperwork, and speak at events like Spirit Day and graduation. I had no idea what else principals could be doing.

Twelve years after shaking my principal's hand at my high school graduation, I stepped into my own principalship. After sitting in a principal's seat and studying leadership further, I have a much deeper understanding of the importance of the building principal. I now understand that, although individual teachers play the primary role in supporting learning at the classroom level, it's the building principal who can create the conditions that enable every child in a school to experience great teaching and learning every day. As Manna (2015) states, principals are "multipliers" of effective teaching.

This link between leader effectiveness and outcomes for students has been well documented in the research. Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, and Wahlstrom (2004) concluded that principals are second only to classroom teachers among all school-related factors that contribute to results for students. This effect, according to Leithwood, is even more pronounced in schools that are considered high needs. Clearly, effective principals can make a huge difference in children's lives.

This fact underscores the important work being done within The Wallace Foundation's Principal Pipeline and Principal Supervisor Initiatives, which together support 14 districts seeking to ensure every school has a quality building principal.

In the Principal Pipeline Initiative, each of the six districts is reaching clarity on the kinds of leadership behaviors it considers highly effective. Each district is also developing structures to identify potential leaders. These districts are developing relationships with preservice institutions to ensure their programs are aligned to district needs.

Additionally, how principals are selected for positions, inducted into those positions, and supported the first few years on the job is being meticulously structured. Evaluation structures in these districts are tied to the agreed-upon leadership standards and linked to professional learning systems that are based on a cycle of continuous improvement.

The Principal Supervisor Initiative pushes districts even further to consider the work of those who support building principals. Often called a principal supervisor, these individuals have titles that range from area or associate superintendent to director or superintendent. The work they do to help principals grow into

Effective principals can make a huge difference in children's lives.

effective instructional leaders is critically important.

The theme of The Wallace Foundation's initiatives and this issue of *The Learning Professional* is that leadership practice, development, and support cannot be left to chance. We must work together to support leaders who demonstrate an absolute focus on creating the conditions that enable excellent teaching and learning every day for every single child in their schools. These principals will model what Learning Forward calls "learning leaders for learning schools." As you read their stories and see their examples, I encourage you to reflect on what it takes to find, develop, and support these types of principals.

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•

Frederick Brown (frederick.brown@learningforward.org) is deputy executive director of Learning Forward. ■

Stephanie Hirsh

Build your advocacy skills with this powerful strategy

"**H**ow can I be a better advocate for professional learning?"

This is a question I hear frequently from school and district leaders, many of whom are already doing so much to lead effective professional learning in their schools and organizations.

One of the three key concepts in the Leadership standard in the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) says that leaders advocate for professional learning. While educators may recognize that advocating for professional learning is a responsibility they can't neglect, Advocacy 101 isn't always a course they can take on their way to being a principal.

I was in a similar position myself. I knew I needed to develop my own ability to advocate, and two different experiences influenced my views on how to go about it.

My positions as a district-level leader and next at then-NSDC made me wonder about school boards. Logic told me that there was no reason school boards would oppose professional development for educators. Who could possibly be against building teacher and administrator capacity so they could serve all children? In my eagerness to understand their viewpoint — and also to serve my community — I decided to run for school board to see how they think and, ultimately, influence their thinking.

Through the election process and throughout my three terms, a group of women I referred to as my "kitchen cabinet" kept me informed of issues in the community and tried to sway my opinion on key votes. From that experience, I learned the power of influence, information, and allies when tough decisions must be made. I had many supporters along the way — and these same folks wanted my support in return. That's where I saw just how critical relationships are for changing minds and policies.

My second set of lessons came when I learned about RESULTS, an international advocacy organization that works to reduce poverty and hunger around the world. Its main strategy is to use advocacy to build political will in Congress to appropriate funds toward activities that support ending hunger. *Reclaiming Our Democracy*, a book by RESULTS founder Sam Daley-Harris (Camino Books, 2013), was extremely helpful to me at a time when I was creating my own advocacy tool kit. Takeaways I like to share include:

- There's no substitute for knowing your subject deeply. Study and be the expert before you make your case.
- Get folks engaged through the power of telling stories about real educators and real children.
- Always end with your "ask." Don't leave the room without making a real request that you know your listeners can fulfill if they have the will to do so.

The tool I use from RESULTS over and over again is the laser or elevator talk — a speech so short you can say it on a ride in the elevator. Here's a bare-bones framework for the laser talk that ensures that you state your case concisely and end by making a request.

1. Identify the problem.
2. Define your solution.
3. Make a request for action.

Consider developing a laser talk about professional learning this week and deliver it to someone who needs to hear your request. Please let me know how it goes — these are skills we all must build if we're to advocate effectively for professional learning that improves student outcomes.

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•

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

ASK

Tracy Crow

How can we develop leadership options for teachers?

Q My path to leadership was a winding one, and it eventually took me to the central office as a director of assessment and curriculum in a medium-sized urban district. I started as a mentor, led curriculum committees, and took opportunities where I found them, eventually getting my administrator's license over the course of several years of night classes.

Our district is now fully recognizing the importance of supporting teacher leaders, and we are looking ahead to intentionally crafting leadership options, both to strengthen career pathway options for educators and develop learning leaders in schools. I am so proud we are doing this, and I'm also eager to learn what this might look like and what we should consider along the way.

We've been hearing from many districts that are taking similar steps to developing leadership opportunities for teachers, and with good reason. *Beyond PD: Teacher Professional Learning in High-Performing Systems* (Jensen, Sonnemann, Roberts-Hull, & Hunter, 2016) found that the high-achieving school systems studied create learning leadership roles for teachers as a critical element for success.

USEFUL FRAMEWORKS

Learning Forward recently published *A Systemic Approach to Elevating Teacher Leadership* (Killion et al., 2016), a report that not only makes the case for intentionally creating and supporting teacher leaders but also outlines four essential components for establishing a systemic approach. "Advancing their careers while remaining in the role of teacher is what many teacher leaders want and their students and the profession deserve," the authors write (p. 5).

The components are based on several assumptions about teacher leadership, and studying those assumptions along with the full explanations of the teacher leadership components will help school and district leaders arrive at a common understanding of their goals and outline an action plan. The components are:

1. **Define teacher leadership purpose, roles, and responsibilities.** What will teacher leadership look like in action, and what are its goals (Killion et al., p. 10)?
2. **Create conditions for successful teacher leadership.** How will a district create a healthy culture, addressing such elements as trust and collective responsibility, and how will it establish supportive structures such as defined roles and relevant policies (Killion et al., p. 12)?
3. **Cultivate dispositions for teacher leadership.** What beliefs do teachers hold about their identity as well as district leadership hierarchy that may impact their view of themselves as leaders (Killion et al., p. 16)?
4. **Assess the impact of teacher leadership.** How will a district measure the impact of teacher leadership on educator practices and results for students (Killion et al., p. 18)?

Another important resource for district and school leaders to consider as they shape their support for teacher leadership is the Teacher Leader Model Standards, which outline various competencies teacher leaders develop to effectively fulfill informal and formal teacher leadership responsibilities.

The standards were developed by the Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium to "encourage professional discussion about what constitutes the full range of competencies that teacher leaders possess and how this form of leadership can be distinguished from, but work in tandem with, formal

LEARNING PROFESSIONALS: WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU!

The "Ask" column is a way to open a dialogue with learning leaders about the issues you face daily. No topic is too broad or narrow. Whether you are struggling to establish a principal pipeline in a rural county or wondering how to find a literacy coach for your school, we'd like to discuss your concerns.

Send your questions to **ask@learningforward.org**. Take as many words as you need to explain your question(s) — understanding that we may edit them for length or clarity.

We look forward to hearing from you.

---

administrative leadership roles to support good teaching and promote student learning" (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2008, p. 5).

The domains defined in the standards cover a wide range of responsibilities and aspects of teacher leadership:

- **Domain I:** Fostering a collaborative culture to support educator development and student learning.
- **Domain II:** Accessing and using research to improve practice and student learning.
- **Domain III:** Promoting professional learning for continuous improvement.
- **Domain IV:** Facilitating improvements in instruction and student learning.
- **Domain V:** Promoting the use of assessments and data for school and district improvement.
- **Domain VI:** Improving outreach and collaboration with families and community.
- **Domain VII:** Advocating for student learning and the profession (Teacher Leadership Exploratory Consortium, 2008, p. 9).

OUR VIEW

While Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) don't outline processes or definitions of teacher leadership, the Leadership standard explicitly emphasizes leaders' responsibilities to lead learning and make visible their own learning, whether they lead from the classroom, the principal's office, or the central office.

In our view, teacher leaders have the drive to continuously improve their skills and practices so that they can contribute to better learning for all students. They take collective responsibility for all of the students in their sphere of influence, which is why they support their peers in their continuous improvement as well. Teachers may hold this stance from any position, whether classroom teacher, learning team leader, or department head.

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Scott Laurence

Send the message that learning is for leaders, too

We've all seen it happen. A professional learning event is scheduled for the day, and a crowd of teachers is in the room. The principal walks out to introduce the speaker or facilitator, talks about the important professional learning lessons that will be imparted that day — and then walks out of the room as soon as the program begins.

Often, the principal thinks to herself, "Well, I've got a lot of work that I can catch up on now." That is the wrong approach. It sends a clear message to teachers: Professional learning isn't that important.

In fact, good professional learning is not only important for teachers, it's also vital for principals and assistant principals. A principal must be the face of your district's values, so she must show that through her actions. That's why, in my long career in district offices, I wanted to make sure that principals understood and modeled the value of quality professional learning.

That meant that the very things teachers were asking for from principals — time, coaching, and other resources — I had to give to my principals. In other words, I had to empower them. It was a fundamental necessity in establishing a healthy, coherent professional learning environment throughout the district.

To that end, here are four other key takeaways regarding leadership learning from my career in the superintendent's seat:

Don't micromanage. You need to coach principals enough that they see the importance of professional learning, but give them enough freedom to figure out the best method to get the results you're looking for. If I told my principals, OK, now we're going to work on instructional practice in the classroom, I had to understand that might look different from site to site, but we would have a core idea of what we all wanted to ultimately achieve.

Set long-range goals. I had to prove to principals that we would have the same professional learning goals for five years, or they wouldn't believe me. They would assume professional learning was a "flavor-of-the-month" initiative. You had to say over and over, "We're going to do the same thing next year, because you're not going to fix anything in just one year." Growth over time was what we talked about constantly. It's a marathon, not a sprint. It's a continuous learning process, a continuing movement toward best practices.

Use professional learning as a recruiting tool. I can't tell you how many principals and assistant principals I hired who, during the interviews, asked, "How does the district office support us?" Current and prospective principals would explain their area of interest and ask, "Will you help me learn and grow in that area? Will you be supportive?" That comes out in almost every interview these days, because it's at the top of everybody's mind.

Say yes every single time. How did I prove that commitment to them once they were hired? By saying "yes" every time they asked for time, money, or support for leadership professional learning that corresponded to district goals. If it wasn't in the budget, I found it in the budget. If a principal heard about a great professional learning opportunity, I would say, "OK, go. We'll figure it out." If they needed time, I gave them time. You've got to make it a priority, because it not only helps principals, it also produces teacher and student results.

•

Scott Laurence is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees. ■

Examine. Study. Understand.

RESEARCH

IGNITING THE LEARNING ENGINE

Researchers saw three elements in a study of school systems with student achievement growth in high-need populations, according to *Igniting the Learning Engine* by Education Resource Strategies.

1 Rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments.

2 Frequent, growth-oriented feedback.

3 Content-focused, expert-led collaboration.

THIS STUDY AND MORE RESEARCH

p. **20**

Joellen Killion

Study focuses on principal practices that influence student achievement

▶ AT A GLANCE

Principal practices influence student achievement, and identifying those that influence student achievement guides principal development and decision-making.

▶ THE STUDY

Hitt, D. & Tucker, P. (2016). Systematic review of key leader practices found to influence student achievement: A unified framework. *Review of Educational Research, 86*(2), 531-569.

•

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

▶ WHAT THE STUDY SAYS

Twenty-eight principal practices arranged in five domains positively influence student achievement. Researchers unify three existing frameworks of concrete, research-based principal practices associated with student achievement into a single one for use by researchers and practitioners. This study identifies and synthesizes "peer-reviewed, empirical research on how leader practices influence student achievement, which, in turn, provides evidence on how school leaders should direct their efforts" (p. 532).

STUDY DESCRIPTION

The study synthesizes and unifies over 40 years of research on principal effectiveness and its relationship with student achievement into a single framework that identifies 28 behaviors categorized into five domains. The emphasis on practices rather than characteristics makes this work particularly useful to those leading principal preparation and ongoing professional learning programs. The practices delineate specific "actions or 'bundles of activities' in which principals should engage each day to influence positive student outcomes, particularly learning" (p. 532).

QUESTIONS

Researchers sought to answer two questions in their extensive review of the literature on the impact of principal practice on student achievement. They are: "What are the findings from the field regarding effective leader practices, and how can these findings be synthesized to represent what we know in the aggregate?" (p. 542).

METHODOLOGY

Hitt and Tucker applied an earlier conceptual framework for conducting a literature review that is guided by a set of essential questions about purpose, concepts, sources, search procedures, data analysis, presentation of findings, implications, and limitations.

Their review of the literature between 2000 and 2014 resulted in identifying four frameworks, two from previous reviews of the literature. Three of the four frameworks were used to construct the new unified framework. They included the Ontario Leadership Framework, Learning-Centered Leadership Framework, and the Essential Supports Framework. The fourth framework failed to provide sufficient detail about practice beyond the domain level to be useful in identifying specific practices.

In the design of the unified framework, researchers analyzed 56 peer-reviewed empirical studies to verify the empirical base for each study and to cross-reference practices in the existing frameworks.

ANALYSIS

Researchers, based on their analysis

▶ WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

This study provides those who lead professional learning for aspiring, new, or inservice principals the core content for their programs. Much of the previous research on principal effectiveness and its relationship with student achievement has focused on characteristics or attributes. This study emphasizes the practices to emphasize in shaping principals' daily work. It directly relates to several of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

Leadership: The first standard this study connects with is the Leadership standard. It emphasizes the practices of principals associated with serving professional learning of staff and being leaders of learning within their schools.

Learning Communities: This study also serves to highlight the significance of the role of leaders in creating the structures and supports within their schools to ensure that the culture promotes continuous learning and collective responsibility. This directly relates to the Learning Communities standard.

Outcomes: The third standard this study supports is the Outcomes standard. It delineates the essential content focus for professional learning on school leadership by identifying those behaviors that are associated with student achievement.

The use of this research for the design, implementation, and evaluation of professional learning for aspiring, novice, or practicing principals will require it to integrate all the Standards for Professional Learning to have its intended impact.

Two domains, Building Professional Capacity and Creating a Supportive Organization for Learning, delineate those practices of principals who contribute to the development of their staff and invest in their own. The behaviors associated with these domains emphasize how principals demonstrate through their actions their commitment to their own learning and their staff's. The practices included in these two domains are listed above.

DOMAINS AND PRACTICES MOST RELEVANT TO PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Building professional capacity	Creating a supportive organization for learning
• Selecting the right fit. • Providing individualized considerations. • Building trusting relationships. • Providing opportunities to learn for whole faculty to include leader(s). • Supporting, buffering, and recognizing staff. • Creating communities of practice. • Engendering responsibility for promoting learning.	• Acquiring and allocating materials and resources for mission and vision. • Considering context to maximize organizational functioning. • Building a collaborative process for decision-making. • Sharing and distributing leadership. • Tending to and building on diversity. • Strengthening and optimizing school culture. • Maintaining ambitious and high expectations and standards.

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of the 56 empirical studies, cross-referenced the practices specified within each framework to understand their semantic variations, find common practices within each framework, and identify the outliers. All behaviors included in the existing framework were included in the new framework.

After examining the practices, the researchers clustered them into five domains and constructed new labels for the domains that accurately, yet succinctly, represented the overarching category of practices included. Researchers used three criteria for clustering the practices.

RESULTS

After examining the practices, the researchers clustered the practices (called dimensions) into five clusters (called domains) and constructed new labels for each domain that accurately, yet succinctly, represented the overarching category of practices included.

Researchers used three criteria for clustering the practices: the presence of the practice across all three frameworks, the indirect impact on student achievement through influencing the organizational context, and indirect influence on student achievement through influencing routines and responsibilities associated with teaching.

LIMITATIONS

Researchers acknowledge a few limitations in the study. Primary among them is the language used to describe and categorize the behaviors in the original four frameworks.

Hitt and Tucker may have inadvertently misinterpreted the language used within the original studies leading to a potential bias, they indicate. A concomitant limitation may emerge in Hitt's and Tucker's choice of language to describe their framework.

Another limitation is that the organization of the practices into five domains and the presentation of those domains may imply a hierarchy or significance to the practices when there is no desire to do so.

The study occurred concomitantly with the most recent revision of the Interstate School Leaders Licensure Consortium (ISLLC) standards. As such, the domains are not directly aligned with the new standards adopted in 2015. ■

ESSENTIALS

■ STUDENTS' WELL-BEING

PISA 2015 Results (Volume III)
OECD, 2017

Teenagers who feel part of a school community and enjoy good relations with their parents and teachers are more likely to perform better academically and be happier with their lives, according to the first OECD PISA assessment of students' well-being. The findings are based on a survey of 540,000 students in 72 countries.

Teachers play a big role in creating the conditions for students' well-being at school. Happier students tend to report positive relations with their teachers. Students in schools where life satisfaction is above the national average reported a higher level of support from their teacher than students in schools where life satisfaction is below average.

http://bit.ly/2p55rjz

■ PD IN PUBLIC SCHOOL

Teacher Professional Development By Selected Teacher and School Characteristics: 2011-12
NCES, 2017

This Statistics in Brief provides a snapshot of the state of teacher professional development among U.S. public school teachers using data collected through the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey Public School Teacher Questionnaire. Among the key findings:

- The majority of teachers engaged in professional development spent eight hours or fewer on any specific type of activity, with two exceptions: the content of subject(s) taught and reading instruction;
- In addition to formal professional development, 81% of teachers participated in regularly scheduled collaboration with other teachers; 67% observed or were observed by other teachers for at least 10 minutes; and 45% conducted individual or collaborative research on a topic of professional interest;
- Scheduled time during the contract year was the most prevalent type of support for professional development, followed by released time and continuing education credits.

http://bit.ly/2qxb7q6

■ FOCUS ON CURRICULUM

Practice What You Teach: Connecting Curriculum & Professional Learning in Schools
The Aspen Institute, 2017

To improve teaching and advance student learning requires weaving together the curriculum that students engage with every day with the professional learning of teachers. *Practice What You Teach* describes the research supporting this argument, profiles three examples of educators integrating curriculum with professional learning, and provides key takeaways for state, district, and school leaders.

The paper is designed as a resource for system leaders at the district, state, and charter management organization levels looking to improve instructional outcomes for students by improving teacher development in their schools.

http://bit.ly/2q7QlN1

■ STRATEGIC PRACTICES

Igniting the Learning Engine: How School Systems Accelerate Teacher Effectiveness and Student Growth Through Connected Professional Learning
ERS, 2017

ERS studied four school systems that are seeing growth in student achievement, even as they work with large populations of high-need students. Each system took a different path, but all relied on three elements: rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments; content-focused, expert-led collaboration; and frequent, growth-oriented feedback.

This report explores what these strategic practices look like, how to organize resources, and where to get started. The website also includes links to a diagnostic assessment tool, in-depth case studies, and other tools to support the shift.

http://bit.ly/2ppmlHy

Inform. Engage. Immerse.

FOCUS

PRINCIPAL LEARNING

2
Create a climate hospitable to education.

3
Cultivate leadership in others.

1
Shape a vision of academic success for all students.

4
Improve instruction.

5
Manage people, data, and processes to foster school improvement.

FREDERICK BROWN and **KAY PSENCIK** introduce a new model for learning leaders.

p. **26**

WELL DONE!

The Wallace Foundation says that effective principals do the above 5 things well.

Source: www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/Pages/The-Effective-Principal.aspx

Principal Cathy Atria, a graduate of the Commissioner's Leadership Academy, listens to 3rd-grader Harper Jose read samples of her writing as part of the Literary Showcase at P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School in Gainesville, Florida.

INSPIRING GROWTH

ACADEMY GIVES FLORIDA'S EDUCATIONAL LEADERS A SAFE AND SUPPORTIVE LEARNING SPACE

BY STEPHEN FINK AND ANNEKE MARKHOLT

n her 24 years as an educator, Principal Lori Duckstein has experienced many kinds of professional development aimed at improving leadership and instruction. And, like school leaders and teachers everywhere, she has completed many one- and two-day training workshops only to return to her school and reflect on her learning in isolation.

Recently, though, Duckstein and her colleagues in Florida's Hendry County District Schools have embraced a new approach to professional development — an approach that has

them excited about the possibilities of transforming professional learning and practice at every level of their district.

Duckstein and Jodi Bell, district director of federal programs, took part in a yearlong training curriculum through the Florida Department of Education that left them saying, "This is what our county needs."

They graduated from the Commissioner's Leadership Academy, a novel approach to improving the practice of educational leaders at scale across the Sunshine State. Designed by the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, the research-based curriculum is setting a new standard for statewide — and districtwide — school leadership professional development.

What does it mean for a school system to cultivate or build instructional leadership at scale? We have found that it means embracing and developing five key elements:

1. A common language and shared vision for high-quality instruction;
2. Nonjudgmental methods for observing and analyzing instruction;
3. Deepened skills in providing targeted feedback and planning professional development;
4. A broader, deeper culture of public practice; and
5. A collaborative and supportive professional learning community.

Photo: © 2017 CLAY COUNTY DISTRICT SCHOOLS

Emily Weiskopf (seated in back), a graduate of the Commissioner's Leadership Academy, and other Clay County School District leaders participate in curriculum council walk-throughs in 2016.

A COMMON LANGUAGE AND SHARED VISION FOR HIGH-QUALITY INSTRUCTION

Observing classroom instruction is one of the cornerstones of principal practice. One would assume, then, that principals already know what high-quality teaching looks like. If only that were the case.

The Center for Educational Leadership has run the following experiment dozens of times. Take experienced school leaders on a virtual classroom walk-through — watching 10 to 15 minutes of a recorded classroom lesson. After watching the video of a teacher guiding students through a lesson, the leaders are asked to rank the quality of the instruction they saw on a scale of 1 (low) to 5 (high). Without fail, the rankings run up and down the scale. The discrepancy illustrates the

reality that school leaders — teachers and district administrators, too — do not share an understanding of what quality teaching looks like.

Lori Duckstein agrees. "I don't believe most principals truly see what student engagement is or that every lesson needs a purpose or that it needs to be on grade level," she said.

Adopting a comprehensive instructional framework districtwide is a good start. The Center for Educational Leadership created the 5 Dimensions of Teaching and Learning™ instructional framework (University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2012) to help school leaders develop a shared vision and deep understanding of teaching and learning, but using any similar, research-based framework is sufficient. For administrators, an instructional framework gives them a

shared language and rule book from which to work. For teachers, it gives them a common understanding of what administrators are looking for in high-quality instruction.

"Really looking at those 'look-fors,' that was the purpose of us bringing the academy to our county so that our principals can see what they need to see within a great lesson," Duckstein said.

NONJUDGMENTAL METHODS FOR OBSERVING AND ANALYZING INSTRUCTION

Knowing what to look for in classroom instruction is one thing. Knowing how to look for it is another.

To gauge how well school leaders perform in this role, the Center for Educational Leadership designed an online assessment in which leaders watch a 20-minute video of classroom instruction and then answer the following three questions:

1. What do you notice about teaching and learning in this classroom?
2. What conversation would you want to have with this teacher?
3. How, if at all, does this inform your thinking about and planning for professional development?

An analysis of more than 4,000 assessment results reveals that these leaders' instructional expertise levels average between novice and emerging (Fink, 2015). Their limited instructional expertise shows up in difficulties noticing and analyzing — in a deep way — the various dimensions that make for a powerful learning experience.

The good news is that initial research suggests that principals can show significant improvement in observing and analyzing instruction with as little as one year of interventions and support (University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, 2007).

After going through the yearlong

academy, Cathy Atria, principal of P.K. Yonge Developmental Research School in Gainesville, Florida, gave up the 41-target-element observation checklist she used in the past. "It was just putting a check in a box," she said. "The teachers got feedback about what they did right or wrong, but they didn't have any voice."

Now Atria takes nonjudgmental notes on what she notices in a classroom — from how many students closely read the text of a book to how many closed or open-ended questions the teacher asked. Then she presents the factual data as part of a back-and-forth conversation with the teacher. "We focus on the strengths of a teacher, not on what you don't see or what you think should be happening," Atria said.

Nonjudgment scripting has been transformational for Duckstein as well. "I've learned so much from this that this is how I do all of my observations for every teacher every time," she said.

DEEPENED SKILLS IN PROVIDING TARGETED FEEDBACK AND PLANNING PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How do classroom observations and feedback differ in the academy approach?

In the past, said Duckstein, the stock approach to giving feedback to a teacher was to say two good things and one takeaway. "That's how pretty much every coaching workshop that I have ever been to has been," lamented Duckstein. "But you can't get teachers to grow if they don't struggle through it themselves."

In contrast, the roughly 450 Commissioner's Leadership Academy participants in Florida have learned techniques for providing frequent, targeted feedback that helps teachers take charge of their growth.

Academy participants practiced observations and feedback in a controlled environment, looking for

"noticings," or evidence in a particular area of focus, and coming up with "wonderings," or questions based on what they saw. They learned to use this evidence from classroom observations to help teachers connect their teaching to student learning. Moreover, they learned to provide feedback that teachers can implement immediately and independently, based on teachers' strengths and what they might be on the verge of incorporating into their practice.

Just as teachers should know each of their students' individual learning needs, principals should know each of their teachers' individual learning needs. By knowing their teachers as learners, principals can orchestrate individual and group professional learning. It is only through timely, useful feedback and well-orchestrated professional learning that teachers can begin to improve their practice.

There are two important elements of the targeted feedback process. First, it is generally nonevaluative. Rather than trying to "fix" a wide range of issues, the process focuses on a teacher's identified target area for improvement. The school leader becomes a partner or coach rather than a problem solver. In addition, because the feedback emphasizes nonjudgmental evidence, teachers are less likely to become defensive and more likely to become partners in the process.

Second, the feedback must be situated in a practice that the teacher is already on the verge of improving. In other words, it makes little sense to give teachers feedback on something they cannot immediately integrate into their daily practice. For those larger "reach goals," the principal needs to support a broader trajectory of professional learning.

A BROADER, DEEPER CULTURE OF PUBLIC PRACTICE

The academy uses whole-group

learning institutes and cohort-based learning walk-throughs as powerful tools for developing a culture of public practice.

Learning institutes bring all academy participants together for foundational training in a controlled environment. Learning walk-throughs provide an opportunity for school leaders — principals, instructional coaches, teacher leaders, and central office leaders — to come together in smaller groups to put their learning into practice in real classrooms.

Through a series of three to five classroom walk-throughs, participants calibrate their shared understanding of the elements of high-quality instruction. They also practice nonjudgmental observation and analysis as part of a cohort. For the participating classroom teachers, the learning walk-throughs give them a first exposure to a growth-based — not an evaluation-based — observation process.

Forward-thinking school districts like Hendry County have recognized the power of investing in this approach for their school leaders.

Hendry County District Schools is allocating a portion of Title I funding toward professional development across roles at the school level. "We're starting with just our principals first and allowing them to go through the entire process of the look-fors and the walk-throughs and doing nonjudgmental scripting and everything so that they can see what it is," Duckstein said. "But then our plan is to go to our assistant principals and deans and then to move to our reading coaches."

A COLLABORATIVE AND SUPPORTIVE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

Involving all school leaders in the academy approach not only builds a culture of public practice, it develops a collaborative and supportive

professional learning community.

"Just today, I came back from doing walk-throughs with my assistant principal, having her do the nonjudgmental scripting," said Duckstein. "She and I will do a role-play where I pretend I'm the teacher and she takes on the administrator role. It gives her a chance to try to come up with those feedback question stems because they don't come easy at first."

Collaboration and support such as this take time. As such, we advocate including central office leaders in the academy as well so that they recognize for themselves the importance of the work and the time commitment.

The yearlong academy process means leaders are out of their school buildings for a total of about 10 days per year — a significant time investment.

The grim reality in most districts is that principals spend a paltry 8% to 17% of their time (Jerald, 2012) — fewer than seven hours per week — in instructional leadership activities. Central office leaders need to re-examine the systems, services, and expectations that give school leaders the time and support they need.

INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE GROWTH

Districts that have experienced the academy are finding an approach to professional development that inspires participation.

"As you probably know, sometimes you need to convince principals about a program," Duckstein said. "I have done many different things over the years, and this is probably the best thing I have ever done."

We have found that school leaders are inspired to learn and grow when the learning is tied to real problems of their own leadership practice and conducted in an environment that is safe and supportive. The ability to

embed relevant content learning into their daily leadership practice creates a recipe for program success.

Finally, we know that leadership can be an isolating experience. By developing communities of practice across schools and districts, school leaders have a learning space that seizes on their interest and expertise to inspire both individual and collective growth.

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LEARNING LEADERS
FOR LEARNING
SCHOOLS

PRINCIPALS WHO
PAY ATTENTION
TO THEIR OWN LEARNING
SERVE AS MODELS
FOR OTHERS

6 key behaviors
pp. **28-30**

BY FREDERICK BROWN AND KAY PSENCIK

The field of leadership learning has evolved a great deal since the early 2000s, when The Wallace Foundation began its focus on education leadership.

We now know that leadership is second only to teaching among in-school influences on student success, and the impact is most pronounced in schools with the greatest needs (Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004). We have learned that leaders make a difference for both students and adults in schools.

What principals do every day, how they view and value student and educator learning, how they organize their staff into learning communities, and the designs they support for those teams to learn make a significant difference in the learning of those they serve.

While individual teachers play the primary role in supporting learning at the classroom level, it's the building principal who can create the conditions that enable every child in a school to experience great teaching and learning. That's because principals are "multipliers" of effective teaching (Manna, 2015).

Multipliers inspire teams of teachers to engage in ongoing meaningful learning. Multipliers assist teams in sharing their new practices with others

Authors' note: This article presents a glimpse of our emerging model for learning leaders. In our forthcoming book, we will examine the entire model, which describes strategies districts can use to support the ongoing learning of principals as well as how to make sure the strongest candidates are tapped to do the work and supported in their early years.

so that successes inspire others to engage in the learning and scale up the critical practices. Multipliers celebrate progress and build on the strengths in the school so that all accelerate their learning.

Although principals have significant impact on the success of all teachers in their school, they are the least likely to

1. EXERCISE AGENCY AND ADVOCACY

One of the most significant aspects of principal professional learning is principals' advocacy and agency for their own learning. Principal agency is the capacity of school leaders to act purposefully and constructively to direct their professional growth and contribute to the growth of their colleagues.

Rather than responding passively to learning opportunities or not valuing their own professional learning, principals who have agency are aware of the significance of their professional growth and its impact on teacher learning and student success (Calvert, 2016).

Highly effective learning leaders take ownership of their own learning. These learners engage in a cycle of continuous improvement to address issues in their school. They capitalize on others' expertise and purposefully and intentionally set goals for their own learning.

They establish a community of practice, knowing that the best learning is community learning. They seek out resources essential for them to shift their practices in ways that guide professional learning of everyone in their schools. Instead of waiting for the district or an outside entity to create some type of learning experience, the principal owns her learning gap and takes steps to fill it.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:

The Twin Tiers Principals Coalition, Corning, New York

Unlike typical professional development, the Twin Tiers Principals Coalition in Corning, New York, provided an extended learning opportunity that emphasized depth of understanding. More than 150 principals from nine districts and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services participating in the coalition engaged in a long-term approach to their own learning.

The coalition, which began in 2003, ran until 2015 in large part because principals valued the learning and advocated for others to join the community. Even as state and local districts experienced many shifts during this time, the fundamental approach and structure of the coalition remained intact. Cohorts of principals learned relevant skills and practices during intensive summer sessions, followed by yearlong support and coaching.

Each cohort also formed communities of practice that met frequently throughout the year — no less than twice monthly. These meetings took place on-site so that principals could walk each other's campuses and share the school setting. During the school year, a Learning Forward facilitator met with the entire principal cohort for an additional four full days. These extension sessions provided an opportunity for sharing, coaching, extending ideas, problem solving, and overall support. After completing a three-year cycle, principals graduated. Each summer, all cohorts were invited back for a celebration. The coalition of graduates became advocates for their own learning and encouraged their peers to join the learning leaders' community so all could support each other.

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be supported with systematic, ongoing professional learning. There is growing data that suggests that acting principals are ill-prepared for the work they are called to do.

In a study conducted by Waters, Marzano, and McNulty (2003), a principal's years of experience was the greatest predictor of success for students. Highly effective principals can increase student achievement on standardized tests as much as 10% in one year. Principals can also affect other outcomes, such as student attendance, dropout rates, and graduation rates.

In addition, research by Leithwood et al. (2004) found that experienced, high-quality principals have the greatest impact on low-achieving, high-poverty schools.

And yet, even experienced principals need help meeting the expectations of today's schools. Simply stated, they need effective professional learning aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) — ongoing, embedded work focused on issues in their schools for which professional learning is the response.

This article presents a glimpse

of our emerging model for learning leaders. In the model outlined here, we highlight the importance of principals as the lead learners and lead facilitators of learning in their schools. This model includes six key behaviors (boxes on pp. 28-30) of learning leaders. Principals who are the lead learners and lead facilitators of learning in their schools:

1. Exercise agency and advocacy;
2. Lead professional learning and learning communities;
3. Lead curriculum, instruction, and assessment;
4. Give precise feedback;

2. LEAD PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AND LEARNING COMMUNITIES

Among the many responsibilities of principals is their role in leading professional learning. The Leadership standard of the Standards for Professional Learning identifies a specific set of behaviors for principals as leaders of learning: "Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create systems for professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2011).

So how do principals develop the skills to lead high-achieving learning communities? Principals who are engaged in a community of practice and systematically learn with others know firsthand the significance of systems and structures to foster collective responsibility.

Since they focus on their own learning as a priority, they make time to analyze the needs for the learning communities in their schools and ensure those communities have sufficient time for learning. Though they allow flexibility in the learning agenda for their team, they insist that data conversations determine team and student learning needs.

They ensure teams understand the Standards for Professional Learning, focus on what teams are learning, and provide essential, precise feedback and coaching teams need to get through the hurdles of implementation of new approaches. They foster sharing among teams to encourage them to see that what others are learning can contribute to success around their own goals.

Systems and structures such as setting team goals based on their students' data, studying, planning lessons together, observing each other teach, and using learning designs that accelerate the learning are all a part of what effective principals design at their schools and what they experience in their own communities of practice.

WHAT THIS LOOKS LIKE:
Galveston ISD, Texas

Four experienced middle school principals in Galveston (Texas) ISD have been working for more than two years to assist their teaching teams in developing units of study aligned across the district. Though they've had some success, they didn't see teachers take much ownership of the work. Everything felt like compliance.

In 2016, the principals formed a community of practice and worked in different ways with the teachers to strengthen the teaching teams' commitment and consequently produce better results. As they committed to learning more about effective professional learning by becoming a community of practice themselves, they began to see gaps in their work with others.

They designed a new approach for the start of the year: They would focus with the teachers on the "why" behind the work, the value of it to them, and facilitate the teams developing social contracts to clarify their commitments.

Teams analyzed their student performance data to determine their own learning needs. They observed each other, shared teaching strategies, and celebrated progress. With this new approach, they began to see a higher level of engagement with the teams and realized the power of focusing on "why."

5. Coach effectively; and
6. Tap new talent.

A VITAL ROLE

The research on school leadership is very clear. Principals shape the conditions for high-quality teaching and are vital to the effectiveness of our nation's public schools (The Wallace Foundation, 2017).

As leaders of learning in their schools, principals pay equal attention to the learning experiences of both the students and adults in their schools, which results in effective teaching and learning at scale.

More important, principals pay attention to their own learning so that they are the models of what they want to see in their staff, students, and community.

We believe that every child deserves a great teacher and every school deserves a great principal.

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3. LEAD CURRICULUM, INSTRUCTION, AND ASSESSMENT

One of the primary expectations of principals is that they are instructional leaders. We disagree. Principals' primary role is to be facilitators of learning.

It is not significantly important that principals know calculus — teachers know calculus! But helping teachers of calculus get better at their job requires principals who support and facilitate their learning. Principals need systems and structures to foster the facilitation of teaching teams to design and implement high-yield instruction. Principals need to know how to guide teaching teams to design instruction based on the 21st-century skills essential for all students. Principals need skills to guide teaching teams to develop reliable and valid assessments of and for learning.

While student and staff performance data determine the work of learning communities, principals need to be experts in professional learning and assist learning communities in designing the learning they need to do to get better results for all students.

4. GIVE PRECISE FEEDBACK

Systems thrive on feedback, as we examined in the book *Becoming a Learning System* (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2014). It is the clarity about what we and others are observing (self-reflection and observations of others) that gives teams the information they need to make modifications in their approaches.

Feedback, whether developed jointly or given to a team from observational comments, is essential to the community as it continues to learn. As teams use the feedback to reshape their practice and make modifications in their work, they continue the cycle of continuous improvement.

5. COACH EFFECTIVELY

Coaching is another essential strategy for the principal to use both with others and to increase the effectiveness of the principals. Coaches listen effectively (a key skill) and know the right types of questions so teachers and others arrive at their own conclusions, thus deepening their learning.

6. TAP NEW TALENT

From a district's perspective, decisions about who should pursue leadership shouldn't be left to chance. Districts should take an active role in making sure those emerging leaders who have the knowledge, skills, and dispositions are the ones who get tapped to move into leadership positions.

The principal is uniquely positioned to see those emerging leaders early in their career. Tapping new leadership talent is a core responsibility of learning leaders. This could range from helping identify teacher leaders to encouraging aspiring principals and district leaders to continue on the path to leadership.

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Kenneasha Sloley, standing, observes Kathryn Caviccchi as she works with children at Dr. Michael D. Fox School in Hartford, Connecticut.

WHAT A QUESTION CAN ACCOMPLISH

ASKING THE RIGHT QUESTIONS CAN BUILD PRINCIPALS' PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS

BY ISOBEL STEVENSON

t was the third day of the LEAD Connecticut Summer Institute for Turnaround Principals, a two-week workshop for new principals of low-achieving schools. One of the participants, Kenneasha Sloley, came in late, not exactly flustered but not looking very happy. When there was a break, her coach asked her how things were going, and she talked about how frustrated she was. Summer school was going on in her building, and she had made a promise to herself that she was going to check in with all the teachers every morning to let them know that she was supporting them, even though she was going to be at the workshop most days.

But this morning, other administrative trivia had gotten in the way, and not only was she late to the workshop, she also hadn't had the chance to make her early morning rounds of the classrooms. She felt that she had already broken a commitment, and it was only her fourth day on the job. Her coach asked her, "What other ways could you show them that you're there for them even when you're not in the building?"

A few days later, Sloley texted her coach with thanks for asking the question. After thinking about alternative ways to meet her goal, she had asked her secretary to deliver a note of appreciation to all the teachers, and when she got back to her office the next day, there were many thank-you notes, and even flowers, on her desk. She recognized that she had been thinking that there was only one way to accomplish the goal that she had set for herself and was grateful for being prompted to challenge that assumption and find other paths that worked just as well, and maybe better.

On the one hand, this was an exceedingly small incident. And yet, it sums up the power of coaching. Asking the right question at the right time affords the possibility that there is another way to approach an issue, thereby building that person's capacity to solve not just the problem right in front of her, but future ones, too. As with most things that look simple, there is a lot of thinking and skill behind it.

At the Connecticut Center for School Change, we have been working for several years to provide timely, effective, research-based coaching to principals, particularly those who are new to their role in relatively low-performing schools and districts. We have been studying our efforts with the help of an expert external evaluator, and we can affirm that coaching is a powerful intervention for building the capacity of principals (Birkeland, Kent, & Sherer, 2015).

Asking the right question at the right time affords the possibility that there is another way to approach an issue.

Principals tell us that it challenges their assumptions, helps them build techniques for immediate use and strategies for long term growth, builds their self-efficacy, and provides time for them to reflect and learn from their experiences.

WHY COACHING FOR PRINCIPALS?

Most of the coaching that we provide to principals is part of a suite of services that includes other professional learning, such as a regular community of practice or the summer institute mentioned above. These opportunities provide content knowledge about what effective principals do and what powerful instructional leadership looks like.

Knowing what to do is obviously crucial, but these practices are extremely difficult to implement well because each principal's situation is complex and unique, and implementation is even more challenging for someone new to the principal position. Knowing what to do is simply not enough. Actually doing it is constrained by many factors, such as lack of confidence that a strategy can be employed effectively or

a mental model that fools the principal into thinking that there is nothing to be done in a given situation. A coach can help in many ways.

The primary benefit of coaching is that when it is done well, it is the ultimate in individualized support for planning, action, and reflection. The role of the coach is to support the thinking of the principal as he strategizes, takes action, measures impact, and processes his learning. And like any other scaffold, the goal is to provide assistance while developing the capacity of the principal to do the work of leading a school. The coach is trying to work himself out of a job.

WHAT IS THE ROLE OF QUESTIONS IN A STRONG PRINCIPAL-COACH PARTNERSHIP?

At the Connecticut Center for School Change, our coaching of principals is grounded in their daily work because experience is the most powerful teacher and, therefore, we learn by doing. Our coaching is focused on clarifying the goals of principals, helping them self-assess where they are in relation to those goals and helping them create strategies for getting from where they are to where they want to be. While doing that, coaches listen for, and challenge, assumptions and mental models that shut down possibilities and provide safe spaces for principals to think out loud and even role-play.

Most of this work happens through the asking of questions. Asking questions is a nuanced and difficult skill to master, with the coach having to decide, sometimes many times during a coaching session, two things: first, whether to ask a question, and second, what question to ask. For example, instead of asking a question in response to a statement by a principal, a coach may express sympathy, restate what the principal said, state an opinion or judgment, give advice, or say nothing.

Sometimes, saying nothing can be the most powerful coaching move of all.

And if the coach decides to ask a question, what should the question be? The coach may ask for clarification or more information, probe for evidence behind the principal's statement, ask the principal to generate options for action, ask the principal to make a connection to mission and vision, query an interpretation, ask the principal to explain her reasoning — or many other possibilities.

Through the work of the external evaluator, we know that all these types of questions are being asked. We also know that there is tension around the asking of questions. Coaches feel this tension and struggle to determine when to ask a principal a question and when to make a suggestion. Obviously, if the principal does not know whom to call about services for a homeless student, it does no good to ask, "Well, have you thought about what your options are?"

Sometimes, however, the choice between asking and telling is not so clear-cut, especially when the coach believes that the principal is capable of generating a better solution than the coach can offer, but the principal is tired and frustrated and just wants someone to tell him what to do.

Sometimes the coach believes that the principal simply does not have the knowledge or skill to finesse a tricky situation without input from an experienced administrator. As one coach asked rhetorically: "You go into a school where there's been a huge fight. The principal's in total stress mode. What's the most helpful approach that day or for that hour?" Who would question that coach's judgment that the best thing to do was to step in and help?

Principals also feel this tension. They report valuing their coach's approach to their learning because it forces them to think about what they are doing and why they are doing

it. This is often in contrast to their experience of being given advice that, especially when it comes from their supervisor, may communicate to principals that their superiors have little faith in their knowledge and judgment.

As one principal told us, "The fact that my coach is not telling me what to do all the time has boosted my confidence. I like that because I have a supervisor who just tells you everything that she thinks you need to do. It can be very overwhelming. Sometimes you feel as though the people above you don't have any faith in what you can do."

At the same time, the principals are aware that their coaches were former administrators, and they worry that they are losing out if their coaches don't give them advice. As the external evaluator summarized: "Much as they praised their coaches' efforts to get them to think for themselves, the principals also valued their coaches' advice, opinions, and technical assistance. Nearly all of the principals in the sample described specific times when the coach helped them solve a problem, shared an example from their own practice, pointed out something they had not noticed, or taught them how to do something they did not previously know how to do. They widely expressed their appreciation for such direct, immediate help."

Knowing when to tell and when to keep pushing forward with questioning and, crucially, how to change that balance as time goes on and the principal acquires more skill and judgment may be what differentiates the good coaches from the truly great ones.

An experienced coach employs a diagnostic process in any given coaching situation including, but not limited to, the following steps:

- Does the principal know enough? It is important not to give into the assumption that she does not, perhaps by asking her.

- Is she making assumptions about what she can and cannot do? Ask her.
- Is her proposed course of action likely to get her the result she's looking for? Ask her to explain her thinking.
- Is it possible that she's thinking of doing something unwise? The coach has to be humble enough to know that just because he knows what he would do, that does not mean that the principal is automatically wrong when she wants to do something different.

And if the coach, in all humility, still has doubts, he can be direct without being directive. There is a difference between stating a concern and telling someone what to do. Is the principal stuck? The coach can provide ways of thinking about a problem. Is she worried that she doesn't have the skills to do what she needs to do? Offer to help her prepare. The coach may very well give the principal advice and suggestions, but asking questions is a very good place to start.

A WORD ABOUT TRUST

People become defensive when they perceive that they are somehow at risk — sometimes they just fear embarrassment, sometimes they worry about their job. Safe environments allow people to hear feedback, think about themselves and their contributions to the challenges they face, and consider alternative interpretations and courses of action.

Learning only happens when there is safety. Coaches, therefore, are careful to make sure that they build strong, trusting relationships in which principals know that they can tell their coaches about their problems and failures without fear that their mistakes will be held against them. The principals described here all believed that their coaches had their best interests at heart, and that formed the bedrock for all the other work that was done.

IMPLICATIONS

Evaluating the impact of coaching by asking principals what has been most beneficial to them puts their professional learning needs in the spotlight and results in a trove of actionable information. It has given coaches insight into what makes a difference to principals; it has affirmed the power of listening, of framing strategic questions, and of the close connection between principals and their coaches.

Further, the thoughtful stories and analyses that principals have shared have validated that coaching has had a profound impact on their perceived self-efficacy. The principals feel so much better equipped to approach the challenges of the job having had a coach.

Above all else, coaches need to pay close attention to diagnosing when principals need concrete information, when they need ways to think about problems, and when they will most benefit from questions that challenge their assumptions or help them plan school improvement.

The decisions coaches make about when to ask questions and what questions to ask have implications for the skill development of principals and for the relationships they have with principals. The diagnosis of what a principal needs from a coach in any given moment is a tough skill to master.

The implications of what principals say about their professional learning go beyond coaching. Many districts have rewritten the expectations for principal supervisors in order to create supportive partnerships with principals. Those principal supervisors should be aware that when they give advice and feedback, their attempts at being helpful may not always be perceived as such.

Principals express strong appreciation for questions and feedback that challenge their thinking without assuming that they don't know enough. At the same time, shifting to an approach to building the capacity of principals that leans more heavily on asking questions presents challenges for even trained coaches, and principal supervisors may themselves need some support in making that change.

Likewise, those responsible for designing professional development for principals should bear in mind that putting new ideas into practice is extremely challenging for principals, who operate on a public stage and often do not get the chance to rehearse.

Designing embedded opportunities for them to prepare, practice, and revise as regular components of their work lives could be invaluable as they try to implement initiatives. In addition to coaching, other professional learning opportunities, such as leadership communities of practice, might allow principals to provide much of the same support as they get from coaching to each other.

Whether principals get support for their professional learning from supervisors, coaches, or peers, it is clear that being asked powerful questions by someone who has the principals' success in the forefront of his or her mind has tremendous power for deepening the learning of principals and reinforcing their skills and their confidence.

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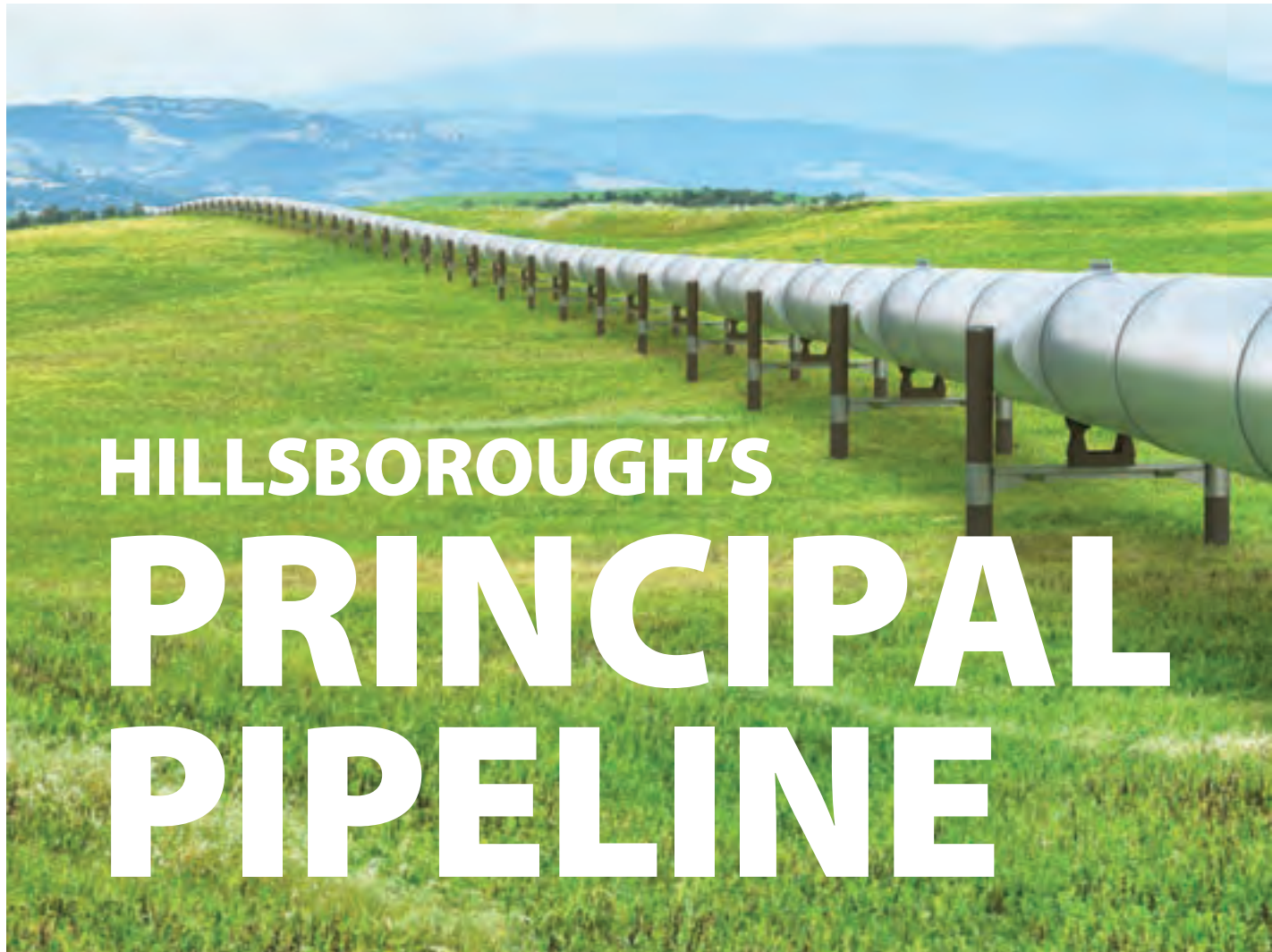
HILLSBOROUGH'S
PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

ALIGNED LEARNING STRENGTHENS LEADERSHIP IN FLORIDA DISTRICT

BY TRICIA McMANUS

The path to principalship in Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida is not one taken lightly. After receiving the Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative grant, Hillsborough was one of six districts that developed a comprehensive principal pipeline based on four key components: leader standards that define the role of principal, quality selection and preservice training practices, effective hiring practices, and on-the-job evaluation and support to provide coaching and ongoing professional learning.

To become a principal, teachers must first obtain Educational Leadership Certification and enter the Hillsborough Principal Pipeline. After serving as an assistant principal and successfully completing the Preparing New Principals program, they can be matched with a principal vacancy. But even after they become a principal, their professional learning continues.

As the district's assistant superintendent of educational leadership and professional development and a former principal, I have a direct view into the efforts the district has undertaken to elevate and improve professional learning. Historically, Hillsborough's professional learning for instructional leaders was described as a one-size-fits-all, sit-and-get experience. There was virtually no follow-up on professional learning. The district lacked a formalized mechanism for gauging

When professional learning is relevant, timely, and high-quality — meaning there is follow-through and coaching support in the field — it has a direct impact on principal practice, which leads to improved teacher practice and student learning.

professional development's impact on improving principal, teacher, and student outcomes. Principals had little access to coaching and were limited in whom they could go to for support.

That changed when the Florida Department of Education awarded the district an Instructional Leadership and Faculty Development grant to develop and implement a one-year professional learning pilot program for principals throughout the district for the 2015-16 school year. The model, Leaders Engaged in Accelerating Performance, or LEAP UP, aligns individual principals' professional learning needs with strategies designed to address challenges unique to each district area.

Area leaders, a largely managerial role, became area superintendents responsible for supervising school leaders and strengthening their practice in instructional leadership, managing and developing people, and building relationships. With this shift, Hillsborough redesigned principal network meetings to allow for principal professional learning and collaboration.

MODEL FOR SUCCESS

LEAP UP's goals were twofold. First, the aim was to provide principals with relevant, timely meetings to improve their practice through aligned learning goals and job-embedded learning. The second goal was to provide area superintendents with autonomy while at the same time shifting their role to focus on supporting principals' professional learning.

LEAP UP's implementation incorporated input from the chief of schools, the executive director of leadership and development, area superintendents, and principal coaches. Intended outcomes included:

1. Area superintendents and principal coaches will provide guidance and support to principals in discovering and

writing the two competency-based goals that drive each principal's professional learning for the year.

2. The chief of schools and executive director for leadership development will support area superintendents and principal coaches by facilitating a session to map out goals for principals in each area, looking for trends, and planning professional development for the year.

3. Area superintendents and principal coaches will facilitate training for principals related to the areas of school culture, developing teacher practice, and improving instructional expertise.

4. The chief of schools and executive director of leadership development will receive planning, coaching, support, and guidance to ensure implementation of professional development, ongoing collaboration between area superintendents and coaches, monitoring, and course corrections as needed.

5. Principals will embed practices learned through area principal learning sessions into their daily practice with teachers and students.

6. Area superintendents and principal coaches will use a principal goal tracker to monitor the effectiveness of development supports in improving instructional practice of principals.

7. Area superintendents and principal coaches will observe and coach principals while they are working with individual teachers and groups of teachers on key focus areas.

8. An outside consultant will

EVALUATION QUESTIONS

The following evaluation strands and questions were central to the evaluation.

Progress monitoring questions addressed:

1. To what extent were the program's components implemented consistently with the program plan?
2. To what extent did key participants participate fully in all program activities?

Formative evaluation questions addressed:

1. What adjustments were made to the program components?
2. What were the opportunities for program improvement?

Program impact questions addressed:

1. To what extent did the program positively influence the target population's behavior?
2. How likely is the program to continue beyond the funding period?

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provide individual coaching and support to each area superintendent and principal coach as they work with principals in the field and plan follow-up professional development related to the core topic areas.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

LEAP UP implementation included three broad phases: preplanning, planning and goal setting, and coaching and delivery. In the first phase, the chief of schools and executive director of leadership development designed the overall LEAP UP model for developing district leaders through continued

coaching and professional learning. In addition, in preparation for LEAP UP implementation, external consultants led train-the-trainer sessions to prepare area superintendents and principal coaches.

During the second phase, the consultant and district leaders worked with area superintendents to identify and assess area priority challenges and identify professional learning goals for all principals. Designed to honor the unique character and address the specific needs of each area, the group developed a professional learning system for principals based on area priorities and individual learning needs. The consultant began mentoring area superintendents and monitored their progress.

In the third phase, area superintendents implemented small-group meetings and professional learning communities (PLCs). A consultant observed sessions and provided individual coaching to area superintendents. Because the sessions would coincide, the consultant relied heavily on self-reports of progress, reserving in-person session observations for those where the greatest needs existed. Feedback was based on the identified needs of each area and according to the key tenets of adult learning theory.

EXTERNAL EVALUATION

The grant provided for an external evaluation that addressed three objectives: monitoring LEAP UP delivery, gauging implementation and identifying opportunities for its improvement, and determining indicators of LEAP UP's impact on principals.

The evaluator's role was to amass data, develop credible yet timely findings, and provide LEAP UP leaders with regular feedback through reports, facilitated discussion, and collaborative inquiry. The evaluation would thus serve both as a reporting function as

well as one of continuous improvement. The box on p. 38 lists the evaluation strands and questions that were central to the evaluation.

As the district refined the program throughout implementation, the evaluation team supplied frequent data analysis summaries to LEAP UP's leaders, followed by facilitated conversations that explored the implications of findings, redirected or added new evaluation activities (e.g. new participants, new protocol questions), and led to program adjustments.

EVALUATING LEAP UP

The program evaluators gathered and analyzed evidence that would be used to improve LEAP UP's model, gauge its implementation, and assess its impact.

The district asked the evaluators to facilitate a collaborative review process. To make the evaluation findings as useful as possible, the project put a strong emphasis on engaging key stakeholders throughout the process. Ultimately, the evaluation was designed to collect credible information, share findings with its intended users in short time frames, and simplify the integration of relevant information into a continuous feedback cycle for LEAP UP.

The evaluation gauged the extent to which area superintendents and principal coaches were sufficiently prepared, willing, and positioned to participate in planning, coaching, and monitoring aspects of the program. In addition, the evaluation examined whether principals reported receiving the professional learning they needed. The evaluation team used a mixed-methods approach to assess professional learning needs, capacity, provision of professional learning activities, and use of follow-up, monitoring, and supports.

The evaluation also sought

KEY COMPONENTS OF THE HILLSBOROUGH PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

1 DEFINED LEADERSHIP: Redesign job responsibilities for principals, assistant principals, and area directors to encompass new leadership standards.

2 PRESERVICE TRAINING: Overhaul the recruitment, selection, and training process to ensure the most effective leaders are included.

3 SELECTIVE HIRING: Recruit, hire, and promote only the most effective and well-trained candidates.

4 ON-THE-JOB EVALUATION AND SUPPORT: Evaluate principals regularly and provide professional development opportunities, including mentoring.

stakeholder-recommended opportunities for improving the process and models and gauged perceived outcomes.

COLLECTING DATA

Evaluators collected data in three ways:

1. **Exploratory interviews and focus groups:** Early on, evaluators conducted unstructured and semi-structured interviews with the project director, the project's data manager, and the external consultant. Evaluators also conducted focus groups with area superintendents, principal coaches, and a sample of principals.

2. **Thematic interviews:** Evaluators conducted semi-structured interviews with all

principal coaches, a random sample of principals, and the LEAP UP project director to home in on topics of interest.

3. **Corroborative interviews:** Evaluators conducted structured and semi-structured interviews to gather targeted self-assessments and feedback from area superintendents and a sample of three randomly selected principals (one from each school level) representing each area.

Evaluators used 81 interviews or focus groups to inform the findings in this report. Among these, the evaluation team conducted interviews or moderated focus groups with 46 principals, nearly one-fifth of all public school principals in the district. Because the evaluators collected information from so many key stakeholders across

areas and levels, the findings are moderately robust.

PRINCIPALS' ASSESSMENT

Most principals echoed the words of one who said that "while the district has historically provided good professional learning for principals, none came close to this school year's level of quality and relevance." Many other principals described what they called a dramatic change from previous years' sit-and-get experiences to a focused learning and support system that includes dialogue, flexibility, and collaboration. All stakeholders described the actionable, problem-solving orientation of LEAP UP as a marked improvement over previous years' professional learning systems.

Most principals said they appreciated the plan to integrate continuous timely and targeted improvement feedback throughout LEAP UP's professional learning and the collaboration created through PLCs. In Area 4, 83.7% (a 28.5% increase) of teachers agreed that professional development provides ongoing opportunities for teachers to work with colleagues to refine teaching practices.

In Area 8, the main focus for professional learning was teacher feedback. Principals learned from national expert Robyn Jackson about differentiating teacher feedback based on a teacher's will and skill level.

This was further extended by offering job-embedded opportunities to practice differentiating feedback through focused principal PLCs. During these PLCs, Area 8 principals learned to fine-tune their teacher feedback and feedback systems as they visited schools and collaborated on the one piece of feedback that would improve instruction. Of the principals who participated in these quarterly Principal PLC Feedback sessions, 71% maintained or increased their school grade.

Feedback that was direct and targeted to meet the needs of individual teachers was a key aspect of the grant. In Area 4, 73% of teachers agreed that professional development was differentiated to meet the needs of individual teachers, up from 54% in 2015.

In Area 8, one principal remarked that a challenge he has always faced was giving feedback to the teachers who are highly accomplished or exemplary in their craft.

By hosting a PLC session at his school that focused on fine-tuning feedback for these high performers, he was able to collaborate with colleagues who helped him improve his ability to provide high-quality differentiated feedback to each teacher.

In Area 7, all principals interviewed commented on the benefits of their PLC in applying the learning at their schools.

Other assessments of LEAP UP include:

- **Professional learner input:** Many stakeholders, especially principals, said that LEAP UP improved the use of principal input in the learning process. Several principals stated that having more input into topic choices improved relevance and motivation. Some principals, however, said that, at least in their area, there was still limited opportunity to share their voice or actively participate in professional learning.
- **Small-group sessions:** Small groups were a central feature of professional learning for principals. Most principals said that, overall, they were very satisfied with small-group sessions and that the sessions were more effective in reaching principals than meeting formats used in the past.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS

Most importantly, LEAP UP had a positive impact on student learning in 2016. In Area 4, 92% of teachers responding to the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning survey said that the professional development enhanced teachers' abilities to improve student learning, up from 62% in 2015. Additionally, 90% said that professional development enhanced teachers' ability to implement instructional strategies that meet the diverse student learning needs, up from 58%.

One key indication of improved student achievement is the fact that the graduation rate for Hillsborough schools increased by 3%, from 76% in 2014-15 to 79.1% in 2015-16. Additionally, Hillsborough is closing the achievement gap for minority students. In 2016, graduation rates increased:

- From 67.6% to 72.9% for Hispanic males;
- From 68.5% to 74.6% for African-American females; and
- From 58.6% to 64.7% for African-American males.

When professional learning is relevant, timely, and high-quality — meaning there is follow-through and coaching support in the field — it has a direct impact on principal practice, which leads to improved teacher practice and student learning.

Hillsborough County's LEAP UP implementation shows that investing in the professional learning of its school leaders leads to a more effective and enhanced school learning experience for all.

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> **I had always perceived myself as a successful principal, but supervising principals is different than knowing how to be a principal.**
>
> — *James G. Martin*

SUPERVISORS NEED SUPPORT, TOO

COACHING PRINCIPALS EFFECTIVELY TAKES TIME AND SKILLS

BY JAMES G. MARTIN

n recent years, there has been an increasing focus on professional learning structures for teaching and finding ways to embed this learning into the daily work of teachers. This is premised on the understanding that one-shot professional development yields little transfer or change of practice to ultimately impact student learning.

But how has this shift from professional development to professional learning filtered into the world of school leadership? I would contend that the reach has been limited and that when districts are juggling limited resources, they rarely prioritize the professional learning needs of school-based administrators (principals and assistant principals).

This article is not meant to be

principalship, our district office had replaced area directors with school support directors. The district office promise was that schools would see these individuals more often — and we did. School support directors met with principals regularly, attended meetings, and eventually evaluated performance of the principals.

Toward the end of my eighth year as a principal, the associate

THE JOB OF A PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR

When I started as a principal supervisor, I was given little instruction other than to be in the schools on a regular basis.

I reached out to principals to introduce myself and set up a consistent visitation schedule. This transition was not met with enthusiasm by all of the principals in my charge. Some of them preferred the former system, where area directors and school support directors were available sporadically and when called. They didn't relish the idea of consistent and regular interactions focused on building their leadership capacity.

During this first year, I struggled. I had always perceived myself as a successful principal, but supervising principals is different than knowing how to be a principal. I had conflicts with a couple of principals who resisted my attempts to mold them into the principal I had been. As with other principals, I had my own style of approaching the work. I didn't understand that expecting others to replicate my approach and style would not necessarily work for them.

At the end of my first year as a principal supervisor, some of my schools improved their performance as measured by end-of-level district and state assessments. Others declined in student achievement. I didn't know how to measure my impact and wondered if I was making a difference. I contemplated returning to a school as a principal.

One of my colleagues did just that. She had been overseeing the turnaround schools. I was asked to take her position and thought it might be an opportunity to work with a different set of principals who, in their designation as turnaround, had committed to a high level of change through a collaboration with the University of Virginia's Partnership for Leaders in Education national program.

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a research study. It is one person's reflection on two years spent at the district office as a principal supervisor. It is meant to examine some of my own learnings about ways to support principals as learners.

BACKGROUND

The Wallace Foundation recently published a report on principal supervisors (Corcoran et al., 2013) that highlights districts across the country attempting to strengthen their principal support network by hiring principal supervisors. These principal supervisors play a variety of roles, including evaluator, conduits to district resources, and coaches.

When I began teaching in Utah's Salt Lake City School District in 1998, there were two individuals, called area directors, assigned to supervise all of the elementary, middle, and high schools. It was a running joke among schools and school leaders that they never saw these area directors.

By the time of my first

superintendent announced a change to the principal supervisor structure: There would be more principal supervisors, reducing the number of schools each was assigned. This would enable principal supervisors to be in school buildings more and to take on more of a leadership capacity-building function.

This sounded appealing to me, so I applied and was accepted for a position called school leadership support director. The first year, I was assigned to eight schools — seven of the eight identified as Title I.

The next year, one of the directors in our group returned to a school, leaving her director position open. She had been overseeing the turnaround schools in our district. These turnaround schools had been plagued by low performance. The district felt that, by reducing the number of schools the turnaround director was responsible for, this director could provide even more support to the neediest schools. So my responsibilities shifted from eight schools to six.

PRINCIPAL SUPERVISOR, YEAR TWO

I now was assigned six principals instead of eight. This allowed me to create a schedule to support these six principals more regularly. I could be in the schools weekly, meeting with principals at least twice a month. I spent the remainder of my time in professional learning community (PLC) meetings, faculty meetings, and observing classrooms alongside principals.

I was definitely a presence in my six schools. During meetings with principals, we looked at data, discussed talent development, and planned next steps. Every meeting concluded with action items for me and action items for the principal.

During our one-on-one meetings (occasionally assistant principals joined us), I was able to impact the capacity of principals directly through on-the-job coaching. We met in their offices. We looked at their own data from school interims and other assessments. We talked about what the data suggested we ought to do to support teachers.

I use the term "coaching" in this article. I realize that coaching practices typically demand a clear delineation between coach and evaluator. However, there is a need for principal supervisors to act as instructional leaders who focus on building principal capacity through the "coaching relationship" (CCSSO, 2015, p. 5). Similar to the way that we now expect principals to coach teachers toward improved performance, principal supervisors must do the same with principals. Effective principal supervisors are able to navigate between the coaching and supervisory roles to get the most out of principals (CCSSO, 2015).

During my second year, I spent four to six hours a week in classrooms, calibrating observation protocols and improving feedback quality. Principals and I would often role-play feedback that they needed to give teachers. This

all served to help principals gain more confidence in observing, recognizing quality teaching, and providing actionable feedback.

WHAT I LEARNED

I'm hoping that my learning from two years as a principal supervisor can lend support to other principal supervisors and districts and that it helps them rethink the way that principal supervisors are supported and deployed to provide on-the-job professional learning to school-based leaders.

Principal supervisors need training, too.

As mentioned, I received little to no direction in supervising or coaching principals. Until this time, principals viewed me as a colleague, so there was some resentment at a role shift that not everyone welcomed. Districts contemplating the use of principal

supervisors need to be mindful about creating conditions where these principal supervisors can be successful.

When I was reassigned to supervise the six turnaround schools, I also benefitted from some professional learning through the University of Virginia. This helped me bolster my skills as a principal supervisor/coach. All principal supervisors need this type of professional learning in an ongoing, systematic way (CCSSO, 2015).

Overseeing fewer schools is better.

Our associate superintendent was

on the right track when he advocated a transition from principal supervisors who oversaw many schools to principal supervisors/coaches responsible for a small number of schools.

Since working with the six turnaround schools, I, too, decided to re-enter a school as principal. The district didn't replace me as a principal supervisor, meaning that the remaining principal supervisors had to cover more schools. Here is what one of the principals I worked with said about the difference between having a principal supervisor with a small number of schools and her current reality:

"When my school support directors had six schools versus 16, I was able to receive weekly support rather than monthly," the principal said. "This was especially needed when I was a first- and second-year principal in a turnaround school. The support I received was tailored to my individual

> During my second year, I spent four to six hours a week in classrooms, calibrating observation protocols and improving feedback quality. Principals and I would often role-play feedback that they needed to give teachers. This all served to help principals gain more confidence in observing, recognizing quality teaching, and providing actionable feedback.

needs and was key in helping me develop my leadership skills.

"We [the principal and the school leadership support director] did observations together, looked at data and planned next steps, worked through all the compliance elements of a principalship, and navigated the social and relational aspects of being a school building leader. While I have 2½ years under my belt, I still need the support in a position that is often isolating and always taxing.

"During my first two years, my directors were able to help relieve

some of my day-to-day stresses while allowing me the space and time to step back and look at the big picture on a regular basis. I would love to get the kind of support I had in my first two years. Their support was invaluable. My directors knew my school, they knew me, and they had a positive impact on my school."

Having fewer schools allowed me a better picture of what was going on in all the schools. I could attend meetings and special events. I could spend time in classrooms. I could meet with principals regularly. Getting a comprehensive view of a school better allows a principal supervisor/coach to identify opportunities for principal professional learning and growth.

Another principal I worked with reflected that "[a] school director who supervises a small number of schools connects with teachers and staff in each school … well-known by all, seen as a resource and help, [contributing] to the overall success at the school as a member of the team."

The Council of Chief State School Officers (2015) advocates for principal supervisors whose main responsibility is principal supervision and coaching. I was able to devote myself completely to my role as a principal supervisor and coach because it was my primary job, not one of many jobs I was expected to complete. When the supervision of principals is one of many tasks assigned to a district-level administrator, the support provided to principals suffers (CCSSO, 2015).

Principal support should be systematic.

I knew where to find my area director or my school support director. I could call them and ask for help whenever. This is similar to the coaching model that some teachers enjoy. They can call a coach and get what they need when they need it. To some, this is an appropriate role for a coach to play.

As demands on schools continue to grow, the support structure also needs to grow. Coaches need to step outside of a service role into one that is about coaching for impact (see The University of Florida Lastinger Center for Learning, Learning Forward, & Public Impact report, 2016). Coaching for impact means that coaches and teachers are assigned to work together deliberately.

One of the reasons my second year as a principal supervisor was stronger than my first is that I was better matched with the principals I coached. The first year, there was not much thought put into the schools or principals I was assigned.

In the second year, I was chosen because of my knowledge of turnaround efforts and the turnaround work I had done in one of my principal assignments.

When matching coaches with teachers, there ought to be consideration of need. The match ought to be deliberate to address the needs of the teacher as evidenced by student learning outcomes. Similarly, principal supervisors/coaches ought to be matched according to principal and school needs.

While it is great for principals to have a resource when needed or called upon, principal supervisors/coaches should function in a more deliberate professional learning role. Their time in schools should be scheduled and unscheduled.

Principal supervisors/coaches need to create conditions where the principal is challenged to recognize additional needs emerging from student outcome data and coached to act on this in ways that positively impact student learning. Interactions between principal supervisor and principal ought to be collaborative and abide by adult learning best practices (CCSSO, 2015).

THE RESULTS

Three of the schools I worked with in my second year had notable student growth. The district awarded one of the schools as the top-performing Title I school (meaning it had the best growth of any Title I school in the district).

I am not willing to accept credit for this growth. I was just part of a larger picture that included regular, systematic, on-the-job professional learning for principals. The most telling results are the reactions of the principals with whom I worked. A majority of them have reflected on the difference they now feel in not having the same level of professional learning support. Now, as a return principal, I am longing for the kind of intensive professional learning that I was able to provide to my schools as a principal supervisor.

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Reach. Investigate. Discover.

IDEAS

WHY THE BIG DIFFERENCE?

Even as many school systems use similar tools and procedures, there still is a wide range of quality in instructional observation and feedback.

❝ *Many observers lack the full set of knowledge and skills to employ those tools and procedures as intended. This isn't their fault. Quality observation is highly challenging. … You can't just hand a rubric to someone and say, 'Go observe.' ❞*

From "6 skills every observer needs — and how to build them"

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6 SKILLS
EVERY OBSERVER NEEDS
— AND HOW TO BUILD THEM

BY JEFF ARCHER,
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Classroom observation has changed dramatically in recent years. Trivial checklists have given way to research-based rubrics that describe important aspects of teaching and, for each aspect, explain the difference between more and less effective practice. Instead of asking if the lesson objective was posted, these new instruments typically ask to what extent the objective was clear to students, how well the teacher connected the objective to students' prior knowledge, and to what extent the teacher reinforced the objective throughout the lesson.

This clarity around what to look for in a lesson has tremendous potential. It makes it possible for different observers to reach the same conclusions about how well a lesson demonstrates a set of practices that matter to student learning. This is essential for trust and aids decision-making. Teachers need to know their ratings reflect the quality of their lessons, not a set of arbitrary or idiosyncratic criteria that may or may not be associated with student learning. District leaders also need observers to produce trustworthy data to inform their systemwide investments in professional development.

Perhaps less widely understood is that the same agreement about the indicators of effective teaching also enables observers to give more effective feedback. Feedback becomes meaningful when observers call attention to specific examples from the lesson that align with an observation instrument's descriptions of practice. It lets an observer say, "Let's talk about that check for student understanding. What did you learn from it that told you students understood? What follow-up questions could you ask to probe more deeply?" In this

> **Teachers need to know their ratings reflect the quality of their lessons, not a set of arbitrary or idiosyncratic criteria that may or may not be associated with student learning.**

OBSERVATION KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

Prerequisites			Core skills		
1	2	3	4	5	6
KNOW THE RUBRIC	COLLECT EVIDENCE	UNDERSTAND BIAS	RECOGNIZE EVIDENCE	USE CRITERIA FOR RATING	COACH TEACHERS
Understand the key rubric elements that define each teaching component and performance level.	Record objective description — efficiently and without judgment — of what occurs in a lesson.	Awareness of how observer preferences may influence observation and of ways to reduce the impact of bias.	Identify in a lesson all the evidence related to each teaching component defined in a rubric.	Apply a rubric's rules for rating teaching components correctly and without the influence of bias.	Provide feedback that helps teachers implement specific techniques to address areas for growth.

way, quality observation reveals the opportunity to fine-tune instruction.

Yet for all the promise, the quality of observation remains highly uneven. In some places, teachers report getting meaningful feedback — but not everywhere. In some districts, we see evidence that observers can apply their system's criteria with consistency. But elsewhere, observation results suggest that teaching still is being judged based on different standards. In others, it appears that observation remains part of a perfunctory evaluation system in which nearly all teachers receive a rating of proficient or above.

Why such inconsistency, when so many systems now use similar tools and procedures? A big part of the answer is that many observers lack the full set of knowledge and skills to employ those tools and procedures as intended. This isn't their fault. Quality observation is highly challenging. It involves filtering a dynamic and unpredictable scene for a common set of indicators, making an accurate record of them, and applying a set of criteria to reach the same conclusions as would any other observer who's doing it correctly.

IDEAS

It also includes feedback that provides teachers with specific ways to make small changes in their practice, which over time can translate into measureable improvements in teaching and learning. A lot of what that entails is new to many administrators and instructional leaders. You can't just hand a rubric to someone and say, "Go observe."

Fortunately, researchers and leading school systems have identified what observers need to know and be able to do — and the kinds of activities that can be used to develop, monitor, and reinforce those skills. Like effective instruction, these activities entail a good deal of modeling and practice — and significant investment in time.

A well-developed initial professional learning program may keep observers occupied for four days, and even then their skills will need sharpening each year. But keep in mind that the effect of a cadre of skilled observers is multiplied over the many teachers whose professional learning they support. Here are six skills every observer needs and how to build them.

1 Know the rubric.

Observation rubrics define a system's vision for effective teaching. As such, they pack a great deal of information into a single document. They have their own structures, terms, and rules. When observers understand these features, they can read the tool and answer the questions, "What am I looking for?" and "How will I judge what I see?" When they don't, they'll answer differently.

Hence before observers try to apply a rubric, even in professional learning, they need to learn their way around it. That may sound obvious, but a rubric overview often gets left out of professional learning or addressed too quickly — causing multiple problems

down the line as observers miss important distinctions in the instrument.

Helping observers understand how to read a rubric is akin to helping students learn how to read a map: Give them the high-level view, explain the elements, and *then let them practice*. You might assign them one aspect of teaching in the rubric (e.g. use of questioning) and have them read across the descriptions of the different performance levels, noting what changes as it goes from high to low. It may be the extent to which a teacher uses appropriate wait time and asks students to explain their reasoning. The point is not to memorize the indicators, but to build the practice of reading the rubric to understand what's valued.

2 Collect evidence.

Evidence is the basis of quality observation. It's what grounds agreement on the level of performance and the conversation about how to improve. Pointing to specific examples from an observed lesson demystifies why a rating is given and provides a clear starting point for planning improvements.

But a lot happens in a few minutes of teaching: Teachers and students respond to each other, they move about the classroom, and they use materials and tools. Getting an accurate account of what matters — without getting overtaxed by writing down everything — is no small challenge. Even experienced instructional leaders need coaching and practice on evidence collection.

First, observers need to understand what evidence is. Evidence is objective description of something observed. It makes no suggestion of quality. "Lesson objective clearly explained" is not evidence. It's the observer's interpretation of evidence. Evidence would be the statements the teacher made to explain the objective and how

students responded.

You can build an understanding of the distinction by providing observers with examples of evidence, contrasted with nonexamples (e.g. generalizations, judgments, etc.). Then give additional statements, ask which represent evidence, and why or why not.

Videos of teaching are great tools for professional learning on evidence collection. An expert observer models the process by taking down evidence in real time, so observers-in-training can see the instruction observed while the notes are being taken.

This shows that not everything observed is collected as evidence (e.g. a wall chart that's not part of the lesson), and yet it's possible to record a great deal of information efficiently through coding and shorthand (e.g. using tick marks to note repeated behaviors, as in "T: 1-2-3 Eyes on me: √√√√"). After seeing the process modeled, observers can practice themselves with additional videos.

3 Understand bias.

Consider your image of an ideal lesson. What do you think is most important thing to see in the classroom? No two educators will answer exactly the same way. One might say, "Lots of student talk," and another, "Students following procedures." Of course, both are part of effective teaching. But a preference for one over the other can color one's impression of the lesson as a whole. When evaluators who favor quality discussions see lots of it in the classroom, that favorable impression may bias their judgments of other aspects of the same lesson.

Observers can counter the effects of bias when they understand what bias is and build an awareness of their own preferences. Sensitivity is important when asking observers to examine their biases. They may be defensive, thinking,

"I don't have biases." But everyone does.

The point is not to eliminate one's instructional preferences, but to recognize them and keep their influence in check. It helps for professional learning facilitators to talk about their own biases first. ("I like student discussions so much that I need to make sure I don't discount evidence of other aspects of teaching.") Then observers should ask themselves: What would cause me to have a favorable impression of a lesson?

Recognize and sort evidence.

4

How can two observers record objective evidence from the same lesson and yet still assign different ratings? One reason is that one or both observers hasn't collected all the evidence that's relevant to the rubric.

To rate a teacher's "checks for student understanding," an observer might need to note the frequency of such checks in a lesson, the extent to which a teacher called on nonvolunteers, and whether the check was likely to yield useful information for the teacher. But an observer who doesn't know to look for all those things won't collect all the evidence needed to rate the practice correctly and provide accurate feedback. Hence the challenge of observation is not just to collect objective evidence, but also to collect all the objective evidence that's relevant.

Understanding what evidence is relevant to a particular aspect of teaching begins with a close study of the rubric's language and asking oneself: "What might I see or hear that would indicate this?" Then comes practice in collecting relevant evidence, ideally with videos of teaching. Observers get increasingly proficient when they can compare their own attempts to identify relevant evidence to the work of experts who have reviewed the same lesson.

A closely related skill is sorting.

Sorting is the categorizing of recorded evidence to the right components of teaching. Sorting puts all the evidence of "checks for understanding" into one bucket and all the evidence for "student discussion" into another. That way, all observers are considering the same examples from the lesson when determining a set of ratings, and they easily can refer to relevant evidence in providing feedback to the teacher. Novice observers typically sort their recorded evidence after they observe, while experts may develop the skill to sort as they take their notes.

As with every other skill involved in observation, it takes practice to learn how to sort correctly. It may not be clear initially, for example, when a teacher's particular question is a "check for student understanding" versus a "discussion technique."

Observers learn how to sort consistently when given feedback on their attempts to place evidence where it belongs — when they hear things like: "That question actually demonstrated discussion techniques. It didn't probe students' mastery of the concept, but rather pushed their thinking."

Use criteria for rating.

5

An observer assigns ratings by reviewing his or her collected and sorted evidence, then finding the performance indicators in the rubric that best describe it. That involves interpretation and judgment.

Determining if a teacher checked for student understanding at all key moments in a lesson requires judgment about how many moments there were in a lesson when a check for understanding was warranted.

The challenge in preparing observers is making sure all observers are interpreting and judging correctly. When observers' interpretations of a lesson's key moments are different, so

will be the ratings and feedback they will give for the same lesson.

An essential part of learning to rate accurately is to practice with videos of teaching that have been scored carefully by expert observers. Having several accurate examples of rating will accelerate novice raters' progress.

But it's not just a matter of saying, "Here's a level two, here's a level three … now go rate." Observers need a primer on a rubric's rules for ratings before attempting to apply those rules, and after applying them they need feedback on their attempts. A primer on rating "use of questioning" might clarify that a proficient rating requires evidence that students had to explain their answers, while an exemplary rating requires additional evidence of students posing questions to each other.

Coach teachers.

6

Little is more frustrating than getting feedback that's so vague as to be meaningless (e.g. "You should use multiple strategies to increase engagement"). When this is the norm for feedback, a school system has missed an important opportunity to improve teaching and learning. It's a waste to invest in the effort required to ensure accurate ratings if the resulting feedback doesn't lead to professional growth and a change in practice.

Feedback needs to be specific, practical, and focused on improvement. A teacher should leave the feedback conversation with something to use in an upcoming lesson (e.g. a wall chart to clarify key ideas for students in a lesson on topic sentences).

Few principals and other instructional leaders have really had the chance to practice applying a consistent set of ideas about what makes feedback effective. For this reason, a shared vision of effective feedback must be proactively developed. Observers need

THE SOLUTION IS IN THE ROOM

TEACHER VOICES
POWER CONVERSATION
PROTOCOL

BY DONNA SPANGLER

Professional learning can encompass a wide range of formal or informal activities and interactions: seminars, informal hallway discussions, university courses, workshops, local and national conferences, co-teaching, mentoring, data discussions about student work, book clubs, teacher networks, and inservice days.

While many experiences may lead to professional learning, participation alone isn't enough. We also need to know whether these learning experiences are effective. What structures, processes, and forms of evaluation are useful to consider when designing effective professional learning and evaluation?

For example, consider the term "inservice." It has become a dreaded word that makes teachers cringe and roll their eyes. That's not because of a lack of interest in increasing their teacher knowledge and skills, making effective changes to instruction, and improving student learning. The problem is that, all too often, professional learning doesn't give teachers the tools and voices to make that time meaningful.

Stakeholders want evidence that professional learning results in meaningful outcomes. Administrators and school boards want assurances that the investments of time and school funds are not going to waste. Teachers want professional learning that nurtures learning communities, injects new knowledge and life into classrooms, and engages students academically, socially, and emotionally in increasingly successful learning experiences.

They also want to feel that professional learning is something they want to *participate in* and not something that is *done to* them. Parents want to see that the time and money being spent results in positive changes for their children.

So what assurances can we make to these various groups to demonstrate that professional learning is working and achieving desired educator and student outcomes? Here are some factors to consider as we evaluate the professional learning occurring in our schools.

THE IMPORTANCE OF TEACHER VOICE

An often-overlooked element in designing effective professional learning is to include teacher voices in creating relevant and timely topics. It is critical for schools to develop plans that

Photo by KATELYN HARLEY

Janelle Hromyak, teacher of English language learners, makes her point at a professional learning session called The Solution Is in the Room at Hershey Middle School in Pennsylvania.

foster a learning culture that ensures high-quality teaching for all students, with teacher voices included in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of the professional learning.

Because teachers have daily contact with learners and are in the best position to directly influence student learning, promoting and supporting timely, high-quality, and teacher-driven professional development are crucial to the success of any education reform effort.

Teachers want professional development that is teacher-driven and recognizes teachers as professionals, and this learning must be relevant, interactive, facilitated by someone who understands their experience, sustained over time, and treats teachers like professionals (Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, 2014).

In addition, for real professional learning to take place, adult learners must be both decision-makers and agents of their own learning (Calvert, 2016). Finally, another important component in educator professional learning is treating teacher learning as interactive, social, and based in communities of practice (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1999).

BACKWARD DESIGN

Guskey (2000) asserts that effective professional development must have clear goals along with assessment procedures to document progress. In other words, it is important to begin the professional learning process focused on the end in mind.

Beginning with the end in mind (i.e. what students should know and be able to do) is critical both to a teacher's learning and for lasting impact on student achievement. Starting with clear goals helps keep everyone focused on the task and prevents wasting time, energy, and peripheral agendas.

Beginning with questions about what are the intended student outcomes and what evidence best reflects these outcomes makes for more effective professional development planning and evaluation.

IMPACT ON TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE AND SKILLS

To assess the effectiveness of any professional learning, schools need to measure common features about what research shows increases teacher knowledge and skills, changes instruction in the classroom, and positively impacts student learning.

Desimone (2009) created a core conceptual framework for studying the effects of professional development on teachers and students. No matter what activity is designed, schools must decide how to measure teacher experiences, learning, and instruction. Evaluation questions must determine if the professional learning increased teachers' knowledge and skills, changed their attitudes and beliefs, or both.

Because the goals of effective professional learning are ultimately to change educator practice and improve student learning, evaluation questions need to measure these outcomes. Intended outcomes should be clear from the start and assessed individually in quality evaluation tools like surveys, interviews, and observations.

Questions that measure participants' reactions, like impressions of the presentation, the comfort of the room, and initial satisfaction of the learning, provide little to the ultimate learning outcome goals.

IMPACT ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

This is perhaps the most important stage in evaluating professional learning impact, and yet it can be one of the most challenging. An initial survey isn't enough. To see the impact of that learning, schools need to do sustained follow-up over time — one month, three months, six months — to see if it has, in fact, affected students' learning.

It takes a significant amount of time and energy for that professional learning to result in Desimone's (2009) last two stages of professional development: changes in instruction and pedagogy and changes in student learning. Until those two things occur, a school really cannot evaluate the effectiveness of its professional learning.

FOCUS ON OUTCOMES AND EVIDENCE

When schools evaluate the effects of professional learning, they should carefully consider the evaluation tool that is most appropriate for inquiry. Surveys, interviews, and observations are the most common ways to collect data.

Because goals in professional learning are to change educator practice and improve student learning, these two items must be the focus of evaluation, and both are important. Changes in educator practice that do not lead to improved student learning aren't effective. Likewise, changes in student learning without clearly defined changes in instruction cannot be attributed to professional learning.

Surveys provide information about events, behavior, and practice and will allow a comparison of teacher experiences across schools, districts, and trend analysis over time. Interviews with teachers often provide detailed insights into challenges and successes that teachers experience and can provide answers to the professional learning questions about what happens next.

Observations allow colleagues, coaches, and administrators to determine if the professional learning is being used in the classroom in a way that is perfunctorily compliant or truly embraced change. It also provides information about what happens next for continued professional learning with that topic.

Photos by KATELYN HARLEY

Table hosts write a question or problem on chart paper, then take notes on participants' feedback.

TEACHER-DRIVEN LEARNING IN PRACTICE

What might structures, processes, and forms of evaluation look like in practice? Let's examine teacher-driven professional learning at Hershey Middle School in Pennsylvania's Derry Township School District that exemplifies teacher voice and shows the importance of evaluation to the learning process.

The school created a professional learning committee because, as Principal Erick Valentin explains, "Professional learning must be personalized to meet the needs of all staff. It is impossible to do this successfully without collaboration with those staff members."

The committee includes six teachers and one administrator. The committee helps set professional learning goals, assists in planning, delivery, and evaluation of some professional learning, and, provides two-way communication about the district's and teachers' professional learning needs.

Lisa Butler and Renée Owens, two members of the committee, recently attended a conference for Pennsylvania

Renee Owens, from left, Erick Valentin, and Lisa Butler adapted an activity from a professional learning conference to create The Solution Is in the Room.

and New Jersey educators where they participated in an activity called Pro Action Café that is designed to stimulate conversation that leads to action. After sharing what they learned with the professional learning committee, the committee adapted the activity for use in a two-hour professional learning session at the school. We called this activity "The Solution Is in the Room."

We started with backward design, knowing that we wanted to address many of the questions, projects, and challenges our teachers were facing. We designed an initial survey to capture teachers' expectations about the learning experience (i.e. impact, what they planned to change in their

classroom, what they learned), then followed up with with interviews.

HOW IT WORKS

This activity is a structured three-round protocol for creative and inspirational conversation where participants are invited to share their questions (around projects, problems, technology, inspiration, ideas, etc.) and get input (deeper questions, knowledge, experience) from colleagues to help move from questions to actions. At the end of the activity, each table host leaves with an actionable plan.

The amount of time for the protocol is flexible, but we recommend two hours for setting up, explaining the process, and reflecting on the activity.

Before the day of the activity, we sent a brief survey to staff asking them to share a question, problem, or challenge they were experiencing in their classroom and if they would be willing to serve as a table host, a role that would allow them to walk away from the session with an action plan for their project or challenge.

Of those who responded, 79% were willing to serve in that capacity — an amazing turnout for a first-time effort. Given that we wanted to limit the people at each table to one table host and four or five participants, we knew we needed at least 12 table hosts. More than double that number volunteered.

We began by showing a brief YouTube video that describes the process and rationale used in a business setting. We then explained the process to the staff with a brief slide show:

- The host will do most of the talking in three conversational rounds explaining the question, project, or challenge.
- As a visitor to the table, your first job is to listen actively.
- Ask thoughtful questions to provide feedback to the host about the learning, the steps,

and any insights or further support needed.

- Finally, the host makes conclusions from the questions — not the visitors, as it is the host's question, project, or challenge.

QUESTIONS, PROJECTS, AND CHALLENGES

We asked teachers to bring forward their question, project, or challenge. Once we selected table hosts, we supplied them with chart paper and markers to take notes during the three rounds.

On a spreadsheet projected on a screen, we typed the table number, the host teacher's name, and the question. Some examples include:

- How can I make students take more ownership over their progress?
- How do I promote equity in class discussions?
- How do we promote prosocial behaviors in our students?
- How is a team to help support students in their homework and quality of work?

The next stage of the activity consisted of three conversational rounds. At the start of the first round, we invited the remaining participants to move to a table, reminding them to limit each table to four to five participants.

CONVERSATIONAL ROUNDS

When participants arrived at their first table, they found that the table host had listed his or her question, project, or challenge at the top of the chart paper. The table host shared his or her topic and made notes for himself or herself on the paper as participants asked questions and talked.

The first round's projected question was: "What is the quest behind the question? [Participants are invited to challenge the host to find the deeper meaning of his or her question.]" This round lasted about 25 minutes, and participants focused their questions and input around this focus.

When the first round ended, participants got up and walked to another table while the table hosts remained seated. The next question probed a little deeper: "What is missing? What are some challenges? [What is a question not asked yet? What are perspectives or options not yet considered?]" The table host reviewed his or her topic and round one discussion with participants. Then participants asked focused questions and gave input on the second question for 25 minutes.

We then took a brief break. During that time, table hosts consolidated the information talked about at their table.

After the break, we again projected the table group topics and asked participants to move to a table they had not yet visited. The projected question in this round was an opportunity for table hosts to consolidate their learning into an action plan. The projected questions were: "What did I learn? What next steps will I take?"

During this 25-minute round, we asked hosts to share their thoughts with the third group. We also asked participants to think about what they had learned and share what their answers would be to those two questions.

At the end of the activity, we allotted 15 minutes for teachers to take an online survey and asked them to submit their names with the survey so that a member of the professional learning committee could follow up with table hosts on their action plans and with participants on any questions.

RESULTS

Evaluation results from the staff were overwhelmingly positive. For example, 98% said the professional learning was relevant to their work as a teacher, while 91% said it was timely. "It was powerful to hear about other colleagues trying things like different discussion strategies, service projects, and guest speakers," one teacher responded. "I loved hearing other people's ideas for solving problems because it also helped me reflect and come up with strategies to make my own teaching stronger."

The learning was especially effective when teachers saw more experienced colleagues struggling with similar issues. "I have gained new insights on ideas I am incorporating in my room from colleagues I do not spend much time with," one teacher noted. "Specifically, this year we are helping our kids track their growth to show them they are actually learning something. It was nice to see and discuss how other teachers are doing this in their rooms."

Other changes teachers said they would take back to their classrooms included having students track their own progress, rethink equity in classroom discussions, and adding new tools for student reflection.

Principal Erick Valentin said the activity was valuable for a number of reasons. "It fostered collaboration between colleagues that do not regularly get to work together," he said. "It provided lots of ideas for the host teachers to take their projects to the next level. Also, it created an opportunity to spark the curiosity of teacher participants. Finally, it allowed the faculty to practice giving and receiving feedback in a noncritical manner."

In our school, we have learned the importance of developing formal and informal professional learning to ensure high-quality teaching for all students. Teacher voices must be included in the planning, delivery, and evaluation of professional learning to cultivate an authentic learning culture in a school.

Teachers bring with them untapped talent and expertise that schools must identify, elevate, and share.

The activity illustrated in this article is an example of a structured protocol that accesses teacher voices, engages in immediate problem-solving, and leverages teachers' experiences and expertise. Because teachers have daily contact with learners and are in the best position to directly influence student learning, timely, high-quality, and teacher-driven professional development is crucial to the success of any education reform effort.

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to learn what it means to prioritize a narrow but potentially high-leverage area for improvement from among all the strengths and weaknesses in a lesson. They need to learn the kinds of questions that can prompt teachers to analyze what happened in their lesson, and they need to learn how to work with teachers to co-produce solutions.

A straightforward way to promote this kind of feedback is with protocols for post-observation conferences. A good protocol helps evaluators avoid common pitfalls, like starting off with what a teacher did poorly (which reduces receptivity) and overwhelming a teacher with too much information. Along with protocols, observers need guidelines and opportunities to practice identifying areas for improvement, preparing reflective prompts, and coming up with suggested actions steps for teachers.

PUTTING THE PIECES TOGETHER

None of these skills is optional. They build on each other. You can't rate accurately if you can't identify relevant evidence. You can't collect relevant evidence if you don't know what evidence is. More broadly, you can't coach teachers to improve their practice if you can't accurately identify effective teaching.

Nor is one-shot professional learning sufficient to ensure these skills are developed. Observers need to be assessed and their work in the field monitored to make sure they learned these skills — or, if they haven't, to make sure they get additional professional learning. Observers also need regular follow-up to sharpen and extend their skills.

The good news is that all of what we've described is being done in various places and in ways that fit the needs of local contexts. In Minneapolis, observers take part in face-to-face professional learning in which they practice identifying and rating relevant evidence, then get immediate feedback on their attempts. In the District of Columbia Public Schools, the same is accomplished with a blend of online and group sessions. The Rhode Island Department of Education has disseminated guidelines and tools for reviewing the quality of feedback. What's needed is for such practices to take hold in more places. Then the true potential of observation will become evident.

*This article is excerpted and adapted from the book, **Better Feedback for Better Teaching: A Practical Guide to Improving Classroom Observations,** published in May 2016 by Jossey-Bass.*

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LET'S REALLY TALK ABOUT DATA

HOW TO INFUSE MEANINGFUL DATA INTO DAILY DECISIONS AND CONVERSATIONS

BY ROBBY CHAMPION

While designs of professional learning have expanded exponentially beyond the required-attendance inservice day workshop model, infusing meaningful data into daily decisions and conversations has not gained as much traction. Leaders of professional learning are increasingly coming under pressure to demonstrate that evidence is not an anathema in the field.

Not much longer will "program evaluation" be sufficient as documentation (totals of hours

of program activities and totals of participating educators, summaries of seat time, and lists of different types of onsite services provided), all commonly required in the not-so-distant past by grant funders. Getting unstuck from head counts, customer satisfaction surveys, and anecdotal data (i.e. incidental hallway conversations) — deeply ingrained habits of mind — has proven difficult.

Moving to a more intentional focus on results-driven professional learning can happen when leaders have a clearer vision of what is possible in the next generation of professional learning. Here we step back to ponder what it would look like when learning leaders converse about and connect relevant data with their decision-making about initiatives, the work itself, and their spirit of inquiry about data and program evaluations.

What would it look like when data and program evaluation get attention on a regular basis, not as topics that get addressed apologetically, occasionally, and usually near the end or at a critical juncture in an initiative's life cycle?

Today, the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), after multiple iterations and with widespread input and testing, can be a valuable starter resource in making the paradigm shift. Thomas Guskey points us to the essential role that data must play in the professional learning arena: "Because of its indispensable and fundamental nature, no other standard is more important or more vital to the purpose of the Standards for Professional Learning" (Guskey, Roy, & von Frank, 2014, p.1).

In a telephone interview with Guskey, I lamented the lack of enthusiasm and conversation today in moving toward stronger evaluation of professional learning. Guskey explained the situation from his perspective: "Part of that comes from a widespread misunderstanding of evaluation in general," he said. "Educators think of evaluation as something you do only at the end. You swoop in at the end and try to find out if anything changed.

"But, in reality, 90% of evaluation questions should be posed before you start — what results do you want to achieve, and what evidence best reflects those results? These critical impact questions start the whole planning process. The problem is we typically plan professional development focusing on what we are going to do, not what impact we want to have on students."

Guskey's point about evaluation still being viewed as a one-time task that gets done at the very end reminds us that this confused habit of mind is deeply ingrained. In my own experience, the distorted notion that program evaluation comes at the end is actually at the heart of the decades-long conundrum. Because evaluation tasks are not on the weekly or monthly calendar, evaluation is most often a scramble to gather whatever documentation can be done quickly at an end point (Champion, 2004a).

A paradigm shift about professional learning and data is overdue. This next era, with up-to-date data available everywhere all the time, demands that the field mature and move toward strong, credible program evaluation. The boldest leap that future leaders

must make is to be deliberate and purposeful in your evaluation work, using the Standards for Professional Learning and starting every evaluation effort at the same time the whole initiative is being planned.

Joellen Killion, Learning Forward senior advisor, has often pointed out the overlooked but inestimable power of starting evaluation discussions very early in an initiative's life. It is imperative to assess the evaluability of any initiative plan.

That early process involves identifying the extent to which a program plan is clearly articulated, has the scope needed, includes powerful enough learning activities for the particular context, and is based on a logical approach to change such that it will be possible to achieve the intended results (Killion, 2008, p. 31).

To extend the notion of evaluability, pausing with the help of a team of stakeholders could be considered essential as your Level 0 evaluation. It happens when your initiative is still in early planning. Getting everyone's fingerprints on the plan achieves two important steps: It builds a powerful plan and jump-starts the early momentum needed to build a critical mass of supportive stakeholders. From a survival standpoint, starting evaluation at Level 0 helps prevent squandering both the resources and the credibility of professional learning teams or departments (Champion, 2004b).

As learning leaders, we need to take the reins to lead the paradigm shift with three important steps: Rethink our work, engage our co-workers, and embed student learning into our conversations.

IDEAS

1 **RETHINK THE WORK.**
Working with data requires time and expertise. Fundamental to making this paradigm shift toward more intentional use of data will be for leaders to rethink how work time is allocated. Whether you allocate five or 10 or 50 hours a week as a professional learning leader, pausing to figure out how to carve out some time to focus on data as a priority will be essential to make this shift.

Creating time needed can happen different ways: seeking out collaborative partnerships, bartering for help from assessment experts within the organization, engaging technology more creatively, making use of help from interns, and inviting help from outsiders, such as local university experts. It nearly always helps to analyze the rituals and traditional tasks that consume more time and energy than they can possibly warrant.

Rethinking the work might also require that learning leaders gain more expertise about program evaluation and data. They might, for example, take the lead in initiating a study group, learn and use evaluation terminology, and share new learning in meetings, conferences, newsletters, and online chats.

Everyone's path forward will be different depending on the context, but the goal is to raise everyone's level of competence and spirit of inquiry in the arena of data and program evaluation. In some instances, the path forward will be simple and straightforward. But in more contexts, learning leaders will face an uphill trek with a path that needs more clearing out and with twists and unexpected challenges (Champion, 2015). A spirit of inquiry will be a valuable mindset to making headway on the path toward building a critical mass of leaders around a data-driven paradigm.

The actual work of program evaluation presents some new challenges. It calls for thinking big, then thinking through and managing the minutiae, while simultaneously making a plan for communicating about the evaluation efforts as they unfold, and then using results in making decisions.

Thinking must be crystal-clear about big decisions such as what questions you want to investigate and which specific indicators of impact you are aiming toward. You must also think through details of how and when various data will be collected and systematically analyzed long before you reach that juncture.

Backward mapping becomes an essential long-range strategic planning tool. It forces planning teams to be realistic about what is key and what is not key to getting results within a specified time frame. Projecting milestones to be measured in bold for each semester and working backward to the starting date is a reality check about the work calendar and promised deadlines for reporting on promised outcomes.

Whether you manage electronically or with paper, keep the work of evaluation on everyone's mind by creating an interactive public calendar. A visual reminder helps to keep attention on projected milestones and ensure that critical evaluation tasks get done on schedule.

Formative data, in particular, get stale fast, so they need to be analyzed and then used to make adjustments where needed. Juxtaposing the key evaluation tasks next to the long-term student learning targets, projected milestones, and program activities will help to make the critical connections between the program being implemented and the related evaluation tasks.

Your spirit of inquiry is critical if data are to really become useful in your decision-making. Be open to surprises in the formative data and dig deeper to understand what is going on by triangulating the various data collected. Take the time to connect the dots to better understand interim results.

If the various formative data lead you to make some quick adjustments in the program, let it be known how the data, not hunches, helped get the program on track to ensure impact on teachers and students. Using formative data is not about fixing a mistake; flexibility is part of the process of getting results. Formative data help highlight what is going well and what needs to be changed to reach the intended results. The process of achieving change is iterative and one step at a time.

2 **ENGAGE OTHERS IN CONVERSATIONS ALONG THE WAY.**
Part of leading others toward a new paradigm will be to learn the art of keeping your stakeholders involved. Evaluation results should never be announced as a big surprise that no one expected. Technology now makes it easier to keep people in the loop — websites, electronic newsletters, blogs, videos, podcasts, etc., can help spread news.

Most stakeholders will not read a full evaluation report or even a bare bones factual abstract. Be creative in keeping your people informed and involved in interesting ways. Photographs, videos of students at work in classrooms, examples of student learning artifacts, charts displaying data — all can be powerful ways to communicate evidence of progress and student learning results.

An educational leader shared with our group in an institute one of her most successful strategies to share the progress of a collaborative reading initiative targeted at primary students who needed special help learning to read. Using a specific combination of
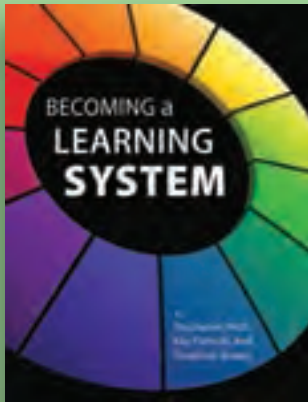
strategies they had learned, teachers gave intense help to the students. To report progress on the initiative, a group of students attended a meeting of the board of education, and each student sat with an individual board member to read aloud a book of the child's choice. No slide presentation needed!

Sometimes a 10-minute briefing opportunity seems intimidating to craft and deliver, given all of the machinations and data involved in an evaluation effort. You will learn by your mistakes and get better at updating. Remember that your spirit of inquiry and emphasis on the valuable lessons the current evaluation effort is helping your team learn is critical — no apologies or emphasis on missteps, delays, or miscalculations needed.

Prioritize and be selective. Figure out what this particular audience would want to hear rather than trying to give a prepackaged speech to every group. I have discovered that it also pays to come prepared with the big picture, such as comparable data trends or initiatives in neighboring districts, states, nationwide, or even in other countries.

Know your stuff — avoid referring broadly to "the research." That statement can lead to misstatements and spreading inaccurate generalizations in the rush of the moment. Track the questions you are asked so that you learn the kinds of information most requested. A well-crafted handout with key points and pertinent contact information can be very useful and conveys your eagerness to share information.

3 EMBED STUDENT LEARNING INTO EVERYDAY CONVERSATIONS.

A third essential skill of leading this professional learning paradigm shift will be to converge student learning data with professional learning in natural conversations embedded in the work day. I asked Keith Young, formerly of West Ed and now senior consultant for Focused Schools in San Francisco, California, to describe the status of data and learning conversations. His description of guiding a team conversation points out the skills professional learning leaders need to transform examination of student data into job-embedded professional learning:

"Data analysis is probably the biggest area of need I see in the treatment of student work and teacher professional learning data," he said. "Often teams do not take sufficient time to drill down and see what teacher and student actions were leading to the results that were produced. A lot of people jump too quickly to see how the lowest students performed. I notice that when teachers are pressed about what brought about the gains with the higher-performing students, there are a lot of ahas from the other teachers."

As an example, Young said that when a teacher is asked about her high performance results from students, she might say, "I had the students practice the skill a lot more than I did in the past." Typically, everyone will nod in agreement and just move on, he said. But it's helpful to press for more information: how often and where she practiced, for example.

When this happens, we find out she actually had students using the skill five times more than the other teachers. "This is a significant learning for the entire team," he noted. "We make a lot of assumptions as educators that we all mean the same thing when we use terms like 'practice,' 'model,' 'bell work,' etc., when, in fact, there are tremendous differences in how these concepts play out in day-to-day work in classrooms. Without some press for specificity, the adult group work and analysis (of student data) might not catch these subtle and significant differences. I see examples of this at least once a month in multiples states."

My key takeaway: Young's conversation about student results data is getting their work done and embedding professional learning into the conversation. Young's approach is inductive, developmental, and deliberate. He subtly takes advantage of a teachable moment in this meeting about real student data.

He does not portray the conversation as primarily a form of interactive needs assessment that will possibly lead him to offer a formal three-hour workshop sometime in the future. Professional learning happens right here, right now, in a few minutes, and in a familiar place. This is an example of the sort of data-informed professional learning and conversations that give me great hope moving forward.

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TINY BUT MIGHTY CREDENTIALS

Micro-credentials within the professional learning space is a credentialing system "based on evidence of progress in specific instructional skills," as *EdWeek* put it last year.

In that article, Learning Forward executive director **Stephanie Hirsh** discussed the peer oversight and reviewing that would give micro-credentialing weight and meaning:

"You hope that, over time, people who have demonstrated these skills agree to become reviewers for others," Hirsh said. "And you hope … that it really is a powerful peer-review, peer-learning opportunity."

The promise of micro-credentials

p. **62**

The promise
of micro-credentials

Micro-credentials are an emerging learning design that shows promise for offering educators an on-ramp for identifying and meeting classroom-specific professional learning needs.

Four key features define educator micro-credentials: They are competency-based, personalized, on-demand, and shareable. As a personalized learning design, micro-credentials allow educators to focus on a discrete skill related to their professional practice, student needs, or school goals.

Here's how micro-credentialing works:

Teachers identify the micro-credential they want to earn based on their needs and interests. Each micro-credential provides details about what the teacher should know and be able to do, recommends resources to support the development of the skill, and specifies appropriate evidence an educator must submit to demonstrate his or her competence to earn the micro-credential.

Teachers pursue their learning. Educators pursue development of the stated competency until they are ready to submit evidence for assessment.

Learning can take place at a time and location chosen by the educator.

Teachers gather and submit evidence of their competence. Required evidence might include a portfolio, video, student work, classroom observations, teacher and student reflection, and/or other documentation of their learning in action.

Trained assessors evaluate the evidence educators submit. After the reviewer completes the assessment, the issuing organization reviews that assessment and determines whether the educator should be awarded the micro-credential.

Teachers earn the micro-credential and are awarded a digital badge. Educators can display their earned micro-credentials on websites, résumés, and online profiles, and share them directly with colleagues and administrators.

Because educators can select the micro-credentials they wish to earn, they can create their own professional learning path. Districts and state education agencies are beginning to consider the promise of micro-credentials to recognize educators for

the ongoing and informal learning they are already undertaking to best serve their students, whether through YouTube, Pinterest, partnering with other educators, or in traditional, more formal ways. These tools are designed to help stakeholders begin a micro-credential discussion within their school, district, or state eco-systems.

When developing a micro-credential plan, it's important to ensure that consideration is given to the research-based elements of professional learning essential so that educators achieve ambitious outcomes. Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) provide a road map for doing this. Two of the tools that follow are discussion facilitators for micro-credentialing through the lens of two of these standards — Leadership and Resources. The third is a sample micro-credential description and tool on generating ideas and the brainstorming process.

REFERENCE

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MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND LEADERSHIP

Standard: LEADERSHIP

Definition: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Role: Teacher

Micro-credentials show great promise for supporting the development of leadership in schools. Teachers can customize their learning to develop the leadership knowledge, skills, and practices they seek. Educators in other roles can pinpoint specific areas for growth and seek out specific learning opportunities to fill gaps. Because of their responsibility to stay informed about new developments in professional learning, learning leaders need to understand what micro-credentials are and the role they can play in advancing a comprehensive professional learning system.

When it comes to the Leadership standard, here are critical questions for teachers to consider include:

1. What micro-credentials are available that align to teacher leadership competencies?

2. How will gaining this competency enhance my leadership knowledge and skills?

3. What support do I need from my principal, instructional coach, or district leaders as I undertake developing my leadership competencies?

4. How can I share stories of my success in this learning experience to advocate for and sustain this kind of learning?

5. How might leaders in my school or district better understand or advocate for the kinds of learning that are valuable to me?

FOR MORE INFORMATION

The text and tools are adapted from two reports: *Micro-credentials for Impact: Holding Professional Learning to High Standards* (2017), by Learning Forward and Digital Promise; and *Micro-credentials: Driving Teacher Learning & Leadership* (2016), by the Center for Teaching Quality and Digital Promise. Download the full reports and other micro-credential resources at **www. digitalpromise.org/initiative/educator-micro-credentials/micro-credential-resources-hub.**

MICRO-CREDENTIALS AND RESOURCES

Standard: RESOURCES

Definition: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Role: District, central office, or state official

As more educators select micro-credentials for their learning, schools and districts will need to maintain an awareness of the resources personalized professional learning requires and support it accordingly. One draw of micro-credentials is the convenience of scheduling learning during open windows of time outside of the school day or week. However, this doesn't remove the need for dedicated professional learning time during educators' workdays. Districts should allocate resources to support a system of options that accommodate the professional and unique needs of individual educators.

When it comes to the Resources standard, here are critical questions for district, central office, and state leaders to consider:

1. Can we include micro-credentials as a method to support transparency around how decisions are made about which learning investments are funded and prioritized?

2. How can we ensure micro-credentials create choices for educators that ensure professional learning is aligned with needs of the students, professional interests, and school/district goals?

3. What steps need to be taken to develop capacity of district and school leaders and coaches to support personalized professional learning around micro-credentials?

4. How can we gather data associated with resource usage (time, money, coaching, etc.) for earning micro-credentials that will support resource allocation?

5. What steps can we take to monitor resource use related to micro-credential learning to ensure equity and impact?

SAMPLE MICRO-CREDENTIAL: GENERATING IDEAS, PART 1

Following is a sample micro-credential description and tool from Digital Promise. Use this to better understand and guide construction of your own micro-credential concept. See other samples at **www.digitalpromise.org/initiative/educator-micro-credentials/sample-micro-credentials.**

KEY METHOD

Use this tool to guide a multistep, structured, student idea-generating and brainstorming process with clear rules, group interactions, idea visualization, and focused refining of ideas designed to enhance expansive creative thinking and focused innovation skills.

METHOD COMPONENTS

As students engage in an activity or task, the instructor facilitates a focused idea-generating session through a structured conception and curation process. Students can improve this process over time by carefully documenting and refining their conclusions throughout. This can be done individually, in small groups, or in whole-group instruction. Here are components of an idea-generating/brainstorming session.

- **Establish ground rules for generating ideas. Examples of ground rules include:**
    - o There are no bad ideas; no judging.
    - o Encourage wild ideas.
    - o Build on other's ideas; Yes, and, not Yes, but.
    - o Stay mostly focused on the topic or challenge.
    - o Keep to one conversation at a time.
    - o Be visual and expressive.
- **Group and select ideas.**
    - o Students begin the brainstorming session, following the established ground rules.
    - o When a wide range of ideas have been generated, have students group similar ideas.
    - o Students decide on their favorite idea, then put a dot (vote) on that item.
    - o Students discuss the results.
- **Sketch and describe promising ideas.**
    - o Students sketch out a promising idea.
    - o They then brainstorm further to expand the idea.
    - o Students share their expanded ideas/sketches.
    - o Students name and summarize their promising ideas.
- **Review.**
    - o Students review their idea-generating experiences and discuss how they could be improved.

SUGGESTED PREPARATION

- Students discuss where good ideas come from and how they are generated.
- Students clearly define a topic, challenge, or problem to brainstorm about.
- Choose a comfortable space for brainstorming and provide idea-capturing tools (sticky notes, markers, idea-mapping and collaboration apps, and other tools).
- Do a quick 3- to 5-minute warm-up brainstorm on a fun topic.

SAMPLE MICRO-CREDENTIAL: GENERATING IDEAS, PART 2

Following are the items you must submit to earn this micro-credential and the criteria by which they will be evaluated. To earn the micro-credential, you must receive a passing evaluation for Parts 1, 3, and 4 and a "Yes" for Part 2.

PART 1. OVERVIEW QUESTIONS
(200-word limit for each response)

- **Activity description:** What kind of project activities did you and your students engage in to become more proficient at generating ideas? Please describe the learning activities and strategies you used.
- **Activity evaluation:** How do you know your students increased their proficiency by engaging in the brainstorming activities, and what evidence did you collect that demonstrates these learning gains?

PART 2. EVIDENCE/ARTIFACTS

Please submit work examples from two students (writing, audio, images, video, and other products) that demonstrate progress toward the idea-generating competency, including items such as examples of brainstormed lists, sketched visuals of selected ideas, voting processes for the most promising ideas, evidence of presentations of final results, and other relevant items.

PART 3. STUDENT REFLECTIONS
(200-word limit for each reflection)

For the two students whose work examples were included above, submit their student-created reflections on the idea-generating activities they experienced. Use the following questions as guidance:

- How did going through the idea-generating process help you and your group come up with good creative ideas?

- How did this learning activity change your view of what it takes to generate creative ideas that could be useful to others?

PART 4. TEACHER REFLECTION
(200-word limit)

Provide a reflection on what you learned, using the following questions as guidance:

- What was the impact of engaging your students in the idea-generating activity?

- How will experiencing these project activities shape your daily future teaching practice?

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UPDATES

INSPIRATION FROM KEYNOTE SPEAKERS FOR THE ANNUAL CONFERENCE DEC. 2-6

FERNANDO REIMERS

"EDUCATION should simultaneously cultivate academic excellence with character development and social-emotional competence."

Source: www.thefivethings.org/fernando-reimers

KAYA HENDERSON

"WE DECIDED that we were going to create a place where the best teachers would want to come and stay."

Source: www.impatientoptimists.org/ Posts/2016/03/Leaders-Lessons-A-Conversation-with-District-of-Columbia-Public-Schools-Chancellor-Kaya-Henderson

HAHRIE HAN

"OUR POWER comes not from the money we raise, it comes not from the messages we craft, but it comes from our humanity."

Source: www.carnegiefoundation.org/blog/ organizing-for-transformational-change

More information on Learning Forward's Annual Conference at www.learningforward.org/conference

UPDATES

LEARNING FORWARD ANNOUNCES SCHOLARSHIP AWARDEES

The Learning Forward Foundation scholarship contest encourages educators to put the Learning Forward vision and ideas into action and apply their research and creativity to impact education's most profound challenges. The 2017 Learning Forward Foundation Scholarship awardees are:

For more information on each award and a list of new awards for 2018: **www.learningforward. org/publications/blog/learning-forward-blog/2017/05/04/announcing-the-learning-forward-foundation-scholarship-awardees.**

Ronnie Edwards   **Shannon Bogle**

LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION ACADEMY SCHOLARSHIP

SCHOOL-BASED RECIPIENT: **Ronnie Edwards,** principal at Mayde Creek High School, Katy ISD in Houston, Texas.

DISTRICT-BASED RECIPIENT: **Shannon Bogle,** supervisor of teacher training in Hillsborough County Public Schools in Tampa, Florida.

PATSY HOCHMAN ACADEMY SCHOLARSHIP

Tammy Chambers, curriculum coordinator for Los Fresnos ISD in Los Fresnos, Texas.

THE PRINCIPAL AS A LEADER OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING SCHOLARSHIP

Kimberly Honnick, principal of Barringer Academy of the Arts & Humanities in Newark, New Jersey.

LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION TEAM GRANT

The team from **Christian County Public Schools** in Hopkinsville, Kentucky, under the leadership of **Amy Wilcox,** chief instructional officer.

ABOUT THE LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION

The Learning Forward Foundation is dedicated to impacting the future of leadership in schools that act on the belief that continuous learning by educators is essential to improving the achievement of all students. The monies raised by the foundation provide grant opportunities and scholarships for individuals, schools or teams, principals, and superintendents to further Learning Forward's vision, "Excellent teaching and learning every day."

The foundation supports the development of educators' capacity to improve student learning through innovation and improvement that transforms professional learning, framed by Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning and implemented with a coherent design through grants, scholarships, and professional support.

For more information or to donate, visit **www.learningforward.org/ foundation.**

UPDATES

**The Leader's Guide to Coaching in Schools:**
Creating Conditions for Effective Learning
By John Campbell and Christian van Nieuwerburgh

This guide equips school leaders with an eight-step model for coaching staff to define individual goals and identify what it takes to achieve and sustain desired results. Expand the leadership capacity of your school through:

- A simple but powerful coaching framework;
- Eight critical skills required to become a great coach;
- The latest research on emotional intelligence and strengths-based and solutions-focused approaches; and
- International case studies illustrating the coaching framework in various school settings.

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 July 15. For more information about this or any membership package, call **800-727-7288** or email **office@learningforward.org.**
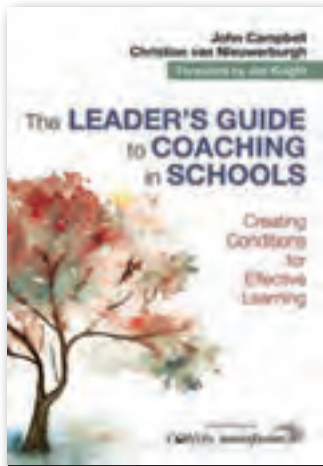
Applications open for 2017 Hord Award

The Shirley Hord Teacher Learning Team Award honors a team of teachers that demonstrates excellence in professional learning. This annual award recognizes a school-based learning team that exhibits evidence of successful implementation of a cycle of continuous improvement that results in increased teaching effectiveness.

Learning Forward is now accepting applications for the 2017 award. The submission deadline is Oct. 6, 2017. The winning team will be contacted Oct. 16.

The winners of the 2017 Learning Team Award receive:

- A cash gift for their school to support collaborative professional learning, courtesy of award sponsor Corwin.

- Complimentary 2017 Annual Conference registrations, airfare, and hotel for learning team members. The team will be honored during Tuesday's conference general session.

- A profile in *The Learning Professional* and on Learning Forward's website.

For more information and to apply:
www.learningforward.org/get-involved/awards/hord-award.

Monica Martinez joins Learning Forward board of trustees

Monica Martinez has joined Learning Forward's board of trustees. Martinez is senior school support strategist for XQ Institute, an organization dedicated to rethinking school in America. She was a senior fellow to the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and appointed by President Obama to the President's Advisory Commission on Educational Excellence for Hispanics. Her career encompasses programmatic, management, and executive leadership

Monica Martinez

roles primarily around secondary reform and college readiness.

Before working at XQ, Martinez was an independent consultant, president of the New Tech Network, and vice president for education strategy at KnowledgeWorks. In Washington, D.C., she was a senior associate at the Institute for Educational Leadership. She is the author of *Deeper Learning: How Eight Innovative Public Schools Are Transforming Education in the Twenty-First Century* (The New Press, 2014).

FOCUS
PRINCIPAL LEARNING

Inspiring growth:
Academy gives Florida's educational leaders a safe and supportive learning space.
By Stephen Fink and Anneke Markholt

Educational leaders in Florida are participating in the Commissioner's Leadership Academy, a novel approach to improving the practice of education leaders at scale across the Sunshine State. Designed by the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership, the research-based curriculum is setting a new standard for statewide — and districtwide — school leadership professional development. Key elements of the curriculum include a common language, shared vision, nonjudgmental observation, targeted feedback skills, and a supportive professional learning community.

Learning leaders for learning schools:
Principals who pay attention to their own learning serve as models for others.
By Frederick Brown and Kay Psencik

What principals do every day, how they view and value student and educator learning, how they organize their staff into learning communities, and the designs they support for those teams to learn make a significant difference in the learning of those they serve. To meet the expectations of today's schools, principals need effective professional learning aligned to the Standards for Professional Learning — ongoing, embedded work focused on issues in their schools for which professional learning is the response. An emerging model highlights six key behaviors of principals who are the lead learners and lead facilitators in their schools.

What a question can accomplish:
Asking the right questions can build principals' problem-solving skills.
By Isobel Stevenson

The Connecticut Center for School Change provides research-based coaching to principals, particularly those new to their role in relatively low-performing schools and districts. The coaching focuses on clarifying principals' goals, helping them self-assess where they are, and creating strategies to reach their goals. Most of this work happens through the asking of questions. Asking questions is a nuanced and difficult skill to master, with the coach having to decide, sometimes many times during a coaching session, two things: first, whether to ask a question, and second, what question to ask.

Hillsborough's principal pipeline:
Aligned learning strengthens leadership in Florida district.
By Tricia McManus

The path to principalship in Hillsborough County Public Schools in Florida is not one taken lightly. After receiving The Wallace Foundation Principal Pipeline Initiative grant, Hillsborough was one of six districts that developed a comprehensive principal pipeline based on four key components: leader standards that define the role of principal, quality selection and preservice training practices, effective hiring practices, and on-the-job evaluation and support to provide coaching and ongoing professional learning.

Supervisors need support, too:
Coaching principals effectively takes time and skills.
By James G. Martin

A former principal supervisor reflects on the two years he spent coaching other principals. What he learned along the way: Principal supervisors need training; overseeing fewer schools is better; and principal support should be systematic. These lessons can help districts rethink the way principal supervisors are supported and deployed to provide on-the-job professional learning to school-based leaders.

WRITE FOR *THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL*

• Themes are posted at **www.learningforward.org/learningprofessional.**

• 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/learningprofessional.**

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.

The Learning Professional 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.org/learningprofessional.**

IDEAS

6 skills every observer needs — and how to build them.

By Jeff Archer, Steve Cantrell, Steven L. Holtzman, Jilliam Joe, Cynthia M. Tocci, and Jess Wood

Quality observation involves filtering a dynamic and unpredictable scene for a common set of indicators, making an accurate record of them, and applying a set of criteria to reach the same conclusions as would any other observer who's doing it correctly. It also includes feedback that provides teachers with specific ways to make small changes in their practice, which over time can translate into measureable improvements in teaching and learning. Here are six skills that observers need to know and be able to do and the kinds of activities that can be used to develop, monitor, and reinforce those skills.

The solution is in the room:
Teacher voices power conversation protocol.

By Donna Spangler

An often-overlooked element in designing effective professional learning is to include teacher voices in creating relevant and timely topics. Because teachers have daily contact with learners and are in the best position to directly influence student learning, timely, high-quality, and teacher-driven professional development is crucial to the success of any education reform effort. The professional learning committee at Hershey Middle School in Pennsylvania created a conversation protocol that exemplifies teacher voice and shows the importance of evaluation to the learning process.

Let's really talk about data:
How to infuse meaningful data into daily decisions and conversations.

By Robby Champion

A paradigm shift about professional learning and data is overdue. This next era, with up-to-date data available everywhere all the time, demands that the field mature and move toward strong, credible program evaluation. The boldest leap that future leaders must make is to be deliberate and purposeful in your evaluation work, using the Standards for Professional Learning and starting every evaluation effort at the same time the whole initiative is being planned. As learning leaders, we need to take the reins to lead the paradigm shift with three important steps: Rethink our work, engage our co-workers, and embed student learning into our conversations.

VOICES

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Michael Garren, deputy director of schools, Loudon County Public Schools, Tennessee.

OUR TAKE

The Wallace Foundation lights the way to better principal learning.

By Frederick Brown

The theme of The Wallace Foundation's initiatives and this issue of *The Learning Professional* is that leadership practice, development, and support cannot be left to chance.

CALL TO ACTION

Build your advocacy skills with this powerful strategy.

By Stephanie Hirsh

A laser talk states your case concisely and ends with a request.

ASK

How can we develop leadership options for teachers?

By Tracy Crow

Resources are available for districts looking to strengthen career pathways for educators and develop learning leaders.

BEING FORWARD

Send the message that learning is for leaders, too.

By Scott Laurence

A principal must be the face of your district's values and show that through her actions.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH REVIEW

Study focuses on principal practices that influence student achievement.

By Joellen Killion

Identifying principal practices that influence student achievement guides principal development and decision-making.

AT A GLANCE

PRINCIPAL LEARNING: A DATA SNAPSHOT

> **"** ...the collaborative activity of teachers is higher in schools in which principals are more engaged in instructional leadership. This means that principals who take action to support cooperation among teachers to develop new teaching practices, and who stimulate teachers' responsibility for their teaching skills and students' learning outcomes, more often work in schools where teachers are inclined to exchange their practices."

Source: OECD. (2016). *School leadership for learning: Insights from TALIS 2013.* Paris, France: OECD Publishing.

HOW OFTEN IS PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING AVAILABLE?

A recent RAND survey of a representative sample of U.S. principals showed significant differences among districts of different sizes.

- ● Not at all
- ● Less than monthly
- ● Monthly
- ● Every 2–3 weeks

SMALL DISTRICTS: 24%, 45%, 31%

MIDSIZE DISTRICTS: 45%, 51%, 4%

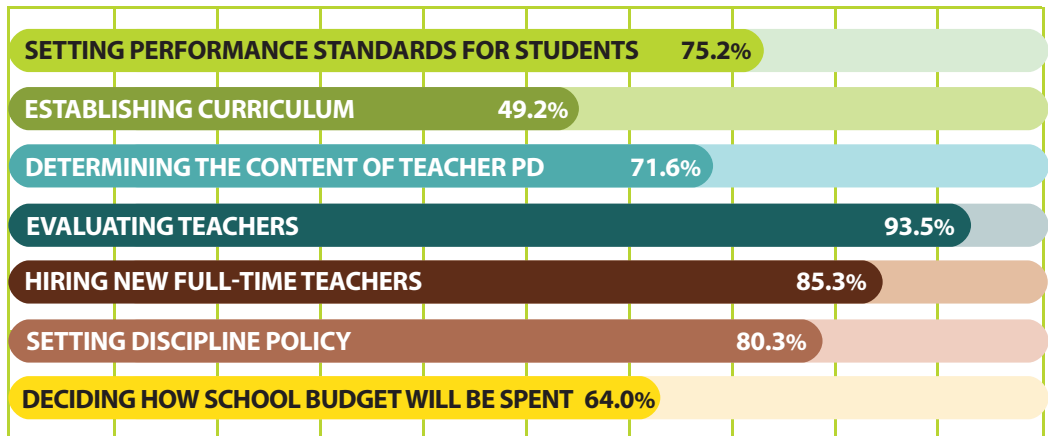**LARGE DISTRICTS:** 3%, 25%, 72%
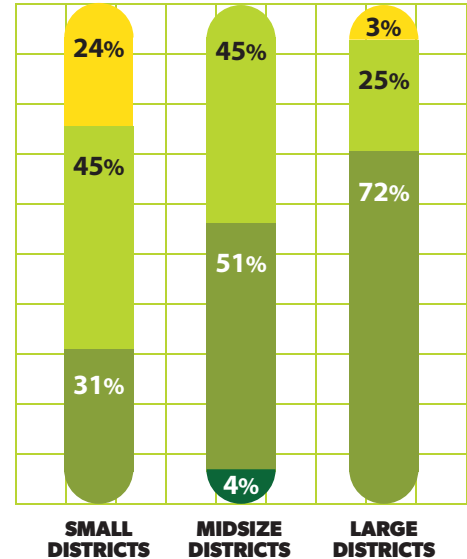
Source: Johnston, W.R., Kaufman, J.H. & Thompson, L.E. (2016, November). *Support for instructional leadership: Supervision, mentoring, and professional development for U.S. school leaders: Findings from the American School Leader Panel.* Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation.

PRINCIPALS' PERCEIVED INFLUENCE ON VARIOUS ACTIVITIES AT THEIR SCHOOL

Source: Bitterman, A., Goldring, R., & Gray, L. (2013). *Characteristics of public and private elementary and secondary school principals in the United States: Results from the 2011-12 Schools and Staffing Survey (NCES 2013-313).* Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics.

Activity	Percentage
SETTING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS FOR STUDENTS	75.2%
ESTABLISHING CURRICULUM	49.2%
DETERMINING THE CONTENT OF TEACHER PD	71.6%
EVALUATING TEACHERS	93.5%
HIRING NEW FULL-TIME TEACHERS	85.3%
SETTING DISCIPLINE POLICY	80.3%
DECIDING HOW SCHOOL BUDGET WILL BE SPENT	64.0%

PERCENTAGE OF SCHOOL DISTRICTS ALLOCATING TITLE II, PART A FUNDS IN 2014-15

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES FOR:

31% PRINCIPALS

66% TEACHERS AND PARAPROFESSIONALS

9% SUPERINTENDENTS

Source: U.S. Department of Education. (2015). *Findings from the 2014-15 survey on the use of funds under Title II, Part A.* Washington, DC: Author.

PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERS 2015.

STANDARD 6: PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY OF SCHOOL PERSONNEL

Leaders will "...tend to their own learning and effectiveness through reflection, study, and improvement, maintaining a healthy work-life balance."

Source: National Policy Board for Educational Administration. (2015). *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015.* Reston, VA: Author.

THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

LEARNING FORWARD'S **STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students ...

Learning Communities

… occurs within learning communities committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.

Leadership

… requires skillful leaders who develop capacity, advocate, and create support systems for professional learning.

Resources

… requires prioritizing, monitoring, and coordinating resources for educator learning.

Data

… uses a variety of sources and types of student, educator, and system data to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning.

Learning Designs

… integrates theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its intended outcomes.

Implementation

… applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change.

Outcomes

… aligns its outcomes with educator performance and student curriculum standards.

Many of the articles in this issue of *The Learning Professional* demonstrate Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning in action. Use this tool to deepen your own understanding of what standards implementation might look like and to explore implementation in various contexts. In this issue, we highlight three examples.

STANDARD	IN ACTION		TO CONSIDER
LEARNING COMMUNITIES	In "Inspiring growth," the authors say that a key element for building instructional leadership at scale is having a collaborative and supportive professional learning community (p. 22).		1. Role play between principal and assistant principal is one example given of a school-based leadership learning community. What are others? 2. Besides a yearlong academy, how can districts support build capacity for leadership learning?
DATA	In "Hillsborough's principal pipeline," the authors examine a one-year professional learning pilot program for principals throughout their Florida district (p. 36).		1. Given that interviews were often unstructured or semi-structured, what contributed to "robustness" of the data? 2. How could you get an equally robust data set using more structure but fewer interviews?
LEARNING DESIGNS	In "6 skills every observer needs — and how to build them," the authors say that leading school systems have identified what observers need to know and be able to do. These activities, the authors say, entail a good deal of modeling and practice (p. 46).		1. Videos are one example of how observers can practice collecting relevant evidence. What are others? 2. How can you and your team develop a shared vision of effective feedback? 3. Should you integrate a rubric overview into your learning design for observers? How?
FIND YOUR OWN!	There are many other examples of the standards in action throughout *The Learning Professional*. Find a story that you think exemplifies this and create your own questions.		**Bonus question:** Can you find other standards within your story that are relevant? Many data stories, for example, also deal with implementation. Good luck!.

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at
www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning.