

# THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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## Learning leaders for learning systems

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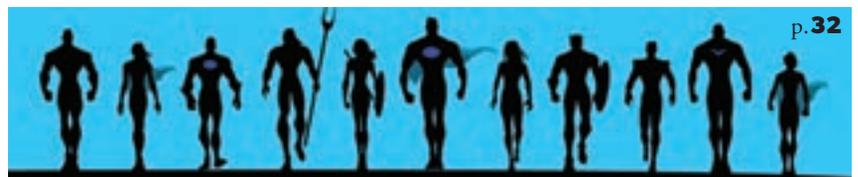
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Thanks to the Learning Forward team for the warm welcome to my new role with *The Learning Professional*.

Taking the baton from Joellen Killion in any activity related to professional



**Elizabeth Foster**

learning is a formidable challenge. As a reader, I have admired her clear and detailed descriptions of all types of studies as well as her ability to connect the research to the Standards for Professional



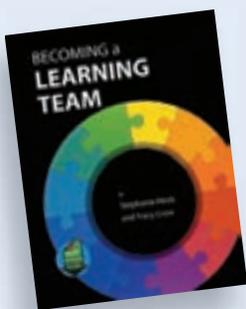
**Joellen Killion**

Learning and good practice. I plan to continue and grow in this tradition while bringing my own perspective and style. I welcome your comments and suggestions.”

**elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org**



# Are your PLCs truly learning-focused?



Implement the cycle of learning described in Learning Forward's bestselling book, *Becoming a Learning Team*.

Learning Forward supports schools and districts to develop cultures of learning. And we know that the heart of a learning system is the school.

We work with school and teacher leaders to set a vision for professional learning communities that ensures school-based learning teams engage in a cycle of improvement that increases their teaching effectiveness and gets results for students.

Our work focuses on teacher collaboration that is intentional and focused on the “L” in PLCs. The five-stage team learning cycle provides teacher teams with the steps toward intentional, collaborative professional learning.

Our work provides school leaders and learning teams with a model of high-quality professional learning that is long-term, sustained, and standards-driven; grounded in a cycle of continuous improvement; and capable of inspiring all to take responsibility for the learning of every adult and student in the school.

## Our support for learning teams includes:

- Understanding what it means for teams to work collaboratively in a cycle of continuous improvement;
- Exploring each stage of the learning team cycle;
- Tools and strategies for sustaining continuous learning;
- Creating a learning-focused school culture that supports teachers' continuous learning.

We want to help ensure that learning is the driving force behind your PLCs. For more information, go to [consulting.learningforward.org](https://www.learningforward.org/consulting) or contact Tom Manning, Associate Director of Consulting and Networks, at [tom.manning@learningforward.org](mailto:tom.manning@learningforward.org).



## HERE WE GO Tracy Crow

# In a learning system, there's still room for 'the boss'

**W**henever we explore particular aspects of leadership, as we do in this issue of *The Learning Professional*, our intent is to help educators build their capacity to lead effectively, offer insights to district leaders responsible for developing leadership in others, and help all educators understand the critical role that leadership at all levels plays in creating and sustaining professional learning systems that lead to improved outcomes for students. This issue is no different. Throughout its pages, you'll find examples of practices to adapt and models that inspire.

We focus on learning systems in this issue to highlight particular aspects of leading that contribute to cultures where learning systems thrive. In Learning Forward's learning ecosystem, learning schools, teams, and systems are all grounded in the Standards for Professional Learning, where a vision for continuous improvement drives how educators do their jobs each day. In the Leadership standard, leaders prioritize learning for others and for themselves. They distribute leadership and create leadership pathways for others.

Yet, as knowledgeable as we become about the value of sharing leadership and establishing collective responsibility for what happens in schools, there are always circumstances that require a boss to take charge.

The word "boss" is old school. When we picture a learning environment where leaders share



responsibility with others, we don't envision that the person in the head office is called the boss. When we say boss, we see workplaces where leadership is held in the tight grip of one person. Those who are called bossy aren't typically recognized for their collaboration or listening skills.

However, other aspects of being a boss are exactly what schools and systems need, and in no way in conflict with a learning system. Bosses know what is right and what is wrong. Bosses have principles and are vocal about them. They have expectations that the people they work with will also be guided by those principles. Bosses know what their responsibilities are, and they know the responsibilities of those who work for them.

In a learning system, the boss doesn't brook adults who won't grow when their students require it. A learning boss isn't afraid to show that

she also makes mistakes and makes time for improvement. A learning boss says no to initiatives that draw team members away from their highest priorities. Such a boss advocates for the resources needed to support effective learning.

She can make a compelling case to her boss, and she'll be heard because she's established herself as a credible, solid force.

Leaders can be both bossy and collaborative when they help other educators operate with clarity around a vision and rigorous standards for students. Bosses share leadership when their demands prioritize growth for all in a school building, and they outline leadership roles they expect others to fill. Bosses show who's in charge when they stand up for the students who aren't yet learning to their full potential and insist on a change of course to address that challenge.

We hope this issue, and every issue of *The Learning Professional*, builds your boss capacity.

•  
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# 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.

**Manuscripts:** Manuscripts and editorial mail should be sent to Christy Colclasure (christy.colclasure@learningforward.org). Learning Forward prefers to receive manuscripts by email. Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are provided at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines). Themes for upcoming issues of *The Learning Professional* are available at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes).

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THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

ISSN 2476-194X

*The Learning Professional* is a benefit of membership in Learning Forward. \$89 of annual membership covers a year's subscription to *The Learning Professional*. *The Learning Professional* is published bimonthly at the known office of publication at Learning Forward, 17330 Preston Road, Suite 106-D, Dallas, TX 75252. Periodicals postage paid at Dallas, TX 75260 and additional offices. Postmaster: Send address changes to *The Learning Professional*, 17330 Preston Road, Suite 106-D, Dallas, TX 75252.

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# VOICES

## HOW TO DISAGREE RESPECTFULLY

**"K**now your intentions in the conversation and choose congruent behavior. The first part is the hardest. Often we interact without being aware of what intentions live beneath the surface of our behaviors. Take a moment to ask yourself: 'What do I intend?'

"If your intention is to convince the other person your view is correct, you are probably doomed to failure, as this is a position opposing the energy coming toward you. To resist the other person's views are to help them persist. They will soften only by being listened to."

RESPECTFUL  
DISAGREEMENT  
CLOSES THE GAP  
BETWEEN POINTS  
OF VIEW.

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## CALL TO ACTION

# Stephanie Hirsh

Whatever name you give it, the PLC plays an important role

In my view, no learning model has captured educators' attention more than collaborative learning structures. Over the last few decades, they've had many names, starting with professional learning communities (PLCs).

In some corners, they became professional learning networks or learning teams. We also use the terms communities of practice and networked improvement communities. The approach to the work of these collaborating professionals has also been described in a number of ways, including cycles of inquiry, the Big Four questions, action research, implementation science, improvement science, and appreciative inquiry.

Learning communities serve a variety of education constituencies, beginning with grade-level or subject-matter teams, vertical-grade or subject-band teams, school leadership teams, cadres of principals, or teams of employees in district offices. Communities cross schools, systems, states, and national borders.

Educators' responses to these opportunities to collaborate depend on a number of factors. Typically, early response is mixed — some are positive, others skeptical. Over time, depending on the quality of implementation, they are embraced or dismissed.

It is in the best interest of educators and their students to ensure such teams can succeed. Only then will they achieve their purpose. These learning

structures are the most important opportunity we have for fulfilling a vision of excellent teaching and learning for every student every day.

When a school district prioritizes a culture of collaborative professionalism — that is, it becomes a true learning system — it invests in building the professional capital of all staff. By engaging educators in shared learning, planning, and reflection, we make it possible for quality instruction to spread from classroom to classroom and school to school. We can ensure that a child's education is not dependent on his or her ZIP code or classroom placement.

This is not easy work. Through my experience, I have identified three core elements I view as essential to learning teams' success. When I say success, I mean these collaborative structures are producing substantive change in participants' practice and better student outcomes. These core elements are a cycle of learning, curriculum, and assessments.

### A CYCLE OF LEARNING

High-functioning collaborative learning teams commit to a process that members consistently follow to achieve the outcomes teams are designed to deliver. Most familiar is the PDSA cycle: plan, do, study, act.

The Learning Forward cycle includes data and root cause analysis; goal-setting for students (SMART format) and educators (KASAB or

knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspirations, and behaviors); an intentional learning agenda that focuses on deep study of curriculum and assessments; implementation with classroom-based support; and monitoring and assessment with intent to determine what worked and what needs to be improved.

Skilled facilitation and protocols and tools ensure that time is spent using the process rather than inventing it.

### CURRICULUM

High-quality curriculum tied to standards students are expected to master is essential for school-level teams. During the collaborative learning cycle, educators engage in deep study for understanding, preparation for instruction, implementation, monitoring, and refinement of lessons.

Without such a curriculum in hand, teams have to take time to develop every lesson and rarely get the opportunity to go deep in understanding and studying the standards students will master within lessons or exploring the challenges students may face and ways in which teachers can prepare to respond.

When teachers have a curriculum, they are doing so much more than reading a script. They apply their understanding of students' needs and interests in the delivery and adaptation of instructional materials, knowing they are starting with solid materials aligned to rigorous student standards.

**These learning structures are the most important opportunity we have for fulfilling a vision of excellent teaching and learning for every student every day.**



## ASSESSMENTS

Formative and summative assessments are essential to informing teacher decision-making, learning, and planning. While a curriculum provides a comprehensive approach to guiding students toward the required standards, aligned assessments provide critical information about what they know and what they need to learn.

Preassessments help educators determine how to spend their limited time and which lessons and strategies are most important for the time allotted. Preassessments provide guidance for grouping and regrouping students to leverage student and teacher strengths.

Daily formative assessments provide insights into the impact of each lesson and where immediate adjustments may need to be made. Post-assessments illuminate the level of success of the overall unit and identify where reteaching may be required.

## SEE THE POTENTIAL

I have been conducting an informal poll over the last several months, asking people how they spend their PLC time and, more importantly, how they know their PLCs are making a difference. Many answers have been disappointing. My hope is that all leaders continue to see the potential of collaborative

learning structures and, at the same time, they consider these three factors and give them the attention they need.

I have no doubt that when all three are integral to team learning, practitioners will have compelling evidence about why investing in collaborative learning structures is essential to the success of all teachers and students.

•  
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# Learning Forward... your partner for school improvement

Are your  
improvement  
efforts getting  
the results you  
want?

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## OUR TAKE

# Melinda George

## Symposium explores ways to turn exemplars of excellence into learning systems

It might seem obvious to say that Learning Forward believes that education is the learning profession. Yet as obvious as that seems, it isn't the norm, particularly for educators in the U.S. The concept of a learning profession combines the ideals of a continuously improving organization and the aspiration that educators be recognized and supported as members of a legitimate profession.

Fortunately, educators in many nations experience such a profession, to greater and lesser degrees depending on context and location, and Learning Forward is committed to learning with and from the best practices of successful systems around the world.

Representatives from more than 20 organizations met as part of Learning Forward's Annual Conference in Orlando in December 2017 for a symposium on the future of the learning profession. Co-hosted by Learning Forward, the National Center on Education and the Economy, and the Laster Center at the University of Florida, the symposium's goal was to surface critical questions and themes that advance the development of a learning profession.

Participants explored these overarching questions: What does it take to create and support educators in building an authentic learning profession? What can the United States learn from other high-performing countries?

The symposium focused on the

human capital that makes up effective systems. Themes that resonated throughout the day were teacher efficacy, teacher voice, and the critical leadership that creates the conditions that allow the profession to grow and strengthen.

Participants recognized that, in many schools, educators are not going to wait for a system to be refined or developed so that a learning profession can grow. Instead, effective leaders in such schools have the will to build a culture of collaboration and redesign time, space, and people to build the profession from within. Educators in such schools share an expectation of continuous learning for students and for educators.

Andreas Schleicher, director for education and skills and special advisor on education policy to the secretary-general at the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, defined three elements necessary for the development of a true learning profession: teacher knowledge (increasing what teachers know about the subjects they teach and how students learn), teacher autonomy (allowing teachers to design their learning environments), and collaborative culture (engaging teachers as part of a profession and sharing knowledge on a daily basis). The degree to which these elements are integral to a system predicts the authenticity of the learning profession.

In the provinces and territories of



Canada, recognized internationally as high-performing education systems, there is an emphasis on collaborative professionalism, the ability to cultivate individual and collective efficacy. Leadership is distributed such that educators have both voice and choice in their professional learning and in their students' success.

In addition, respect for educators is very high, they are accountable for their own work, and there is trust. There is a shared notion of the importance of education and its role in society.

There are many schools and districts in the U.S. and other nations that serve as exemplars of excellence. The symposium was an important reminder that we need to continue to explore how to turn those exemplars into a system — not a set of structures, but a culture of collaboration and the home for the learning profession.

Learning from international colleagues and case studies can ensure and enable a brighter future for the learning profession in the United States and abroad.

•

**Melinda George (melinda.george@learningforward.org) is Learning Forward's director of policy and partnerships. ■**



## MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

# Kimberly Honnick

## A champion for learning keeps students front and center

**K**imberly Honnick, principal at Barringer Academy of the Arts & Humanities in Newark, New Jersey, has been a part of Learning Forward since 2003. Then the director of curriculum and instruction, she joined Learning Forward to further her research on curriculum development and professional learning. In 2017, Honnick was awarded the Learning Forward Foundation's *The Principal as a Leader of Professional Learning* scholarship.

### How did you get involved with Learning Forward?

At the Annual Conferences and other Learning Forward events, Honnick participated in professional learning led by former Executive Director Dennis Sparks and Senior Advisor Joellen Killion. "As soon as I met Joellen, I knew I wanted to be her when I grew up," Honnick says. "I had to become more involved with this organization because I learned so much and was impressed with what I experienced."

After that, Honnick jumped in with both feet. "I joined the Academy, the Coaching Academy with Ann Delehant and her colleagues, and the New Jersey Affiliate board. I traveled to China as part of a delegation that included Shirley Hord and Bill Sommers to present at an international conference on educational leadership. I joined the Learning School Alliance twice with two different teams, and, in addition to learning a great deal, we connected with coaches and colleagues from around the world."

Honnick's involvement grew to include becoming a presenter at the Annual Conference and attending Affiliate meetings at the Summer Institutes, where, she says, "I continued to learn and grow. I fell in love with Learning Forward years ago and have been committed to the work and organization ever since."

### How has the Learning Forward Foundation impacted what you're doing as an educator?

Now in her 26th year in public education, Honnick says she's facing more challenges than ever and looks to the Learning Forward Foundation for expertise and guidance. "I felt compelled to apply for the Learning Forward Foundation grant because I needed help, and I knew that I could turn to my Learning Forward family for the support I needed."

That support has made a difference in her work. "The support I have received for my work and the relationships I have made are rooted in genuine care for me and successful outcomes for my students," she says. "I have been prompted to unpack my thinking, reflect on my approach and practices, and received guidance and understanding."

### Describe your professional journey and the lessons you've learned along the way.

Honnick says she has wanted to be a teacher since she was a child. "I loved

school and learning and always knew that I was born to teach."

After earning a degree in education, she completed two master's degrees in curriculum and instruction and educational administration as well as a doctorate in educational leadership. Her student teaching experience was a major influence in shaping her teaching practice.

"As I approached my final year in college, I was assigned to Glenfield Middle School in Montclair, New Jersey, for my student teaching practicum," Honnick says. "I was assigned to a social studies teacher leading a team of four content-area teachers who worked collaboratively in an open classroom setting where the four classrooms were divided by a bookcase and the students cycled through the classes daily."

"This is where my education began. I was not treated as a student teacher, but as the fifth member of the team. The language arts teacher took me under her wing and became my mentor, role model, and best friend," she says. "I learned that the lessons we created to complement the language arts and social studies content is called interdisciplinary thematic curriculum and tailoring instruction to meet the needs of students is differentiated instruction."

Realizing just how important the student teaching experience is in anchoring one's career, Honnick hopes someday to assist in making young

teachers' experiences as powerful as hers was. She also learned early on the value of professional learning.

"As a young teacher, I knew the major impact teachers had on students, and that both good and bad experiences stay with people throughout their lives. While serving as a teacher, I consistently asked my principal if I could attend professional learning offerings. I went to every district and state offering that I could and saw so much growth in my students and myself as I implemented what I learned. I feel very strongly in continually investing in my own learning and applying new ideas into my professional practice."

Since leaving the classroom, Honnick has served as vice principal, principal, and director and assistant superintendent of curriculum and instruction. Her experience at both school and central office levels affirmed her decision to focus on the best interests of students. "In my career, I have experienced many things, but, most importantly, I do this work for the kids. They bring me most joy. It is imperative that we keep them front and center."

### **Tell us how you use what you know about effective professional learning to improve outcomes for educators and students.**

"I believe effective professional learning involves taking the time to build relationships by engaging in team-building activities and showing the staff who I am as person," Honnick says. "I make a really big deal about professional learning and designed the structures of the school to support it. Our school improvement efforts are rooted in professional learning."

Honnick says her professional learning is anchored in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. "My primary goal is to model the learning we want to see in

#### **TAKEAWAYS AND INSIGHTS**

1. Love what you do, even on the days you don't.
2. Keep learning and growing.
3. Take time to invest in your well-being.
4. Form a tribe. Surround yourself with people who are like-minded and can help you grow.
5. Learn about areas different from education, such as business, finance, systems, and social research. You will be surprised by how much you can apply at school.
6. Know your why. It keeps you going through the tough times.
7. Ask for help. You will be amazed and surprised by the support you receive and where it comes from.
8. Be patient. It will fall into place.
9. Involve staff and students in the change, initiative, etc.
10. Do things differently than the way they have always been done. Innovate.

classrooms. I surveyed the staff to see where they needed the most support, and the top three responses were: classroom management, instructional designs, and design thinking, which is our initiative this year."

Honnick uses blended learning models, including various platforms and Google Classroom, to facilitate book clubs and topic studies. She embeds reflection and self-assessment into the learning design and applies various resources from Learning Forward, including the Standards Assessment Inventory, Innovative Configuration

maps, and Learning Forward books and publications.

"Designing, facilitating, and evaluating standards-based professional learning is challenging, as developing and nurturing professional capital is important to the successful outcomes we set for our students," Honnick says. "I frame my content decisions around what the data reveal and sometimes find myself challenged as to how I can provide teachers with what they need."

Trust, she has discovered, is a key component. "I have found that building a culture of trust and cultivating a growth mindset is critical to enhancing collective professional practice, but it often is challenging and takes some time. I am challenged with balancing being patient while having a sense of urgency, wanting to see more growth while celebrating the small victories, and wanting my school to better reflect the 21st-century global knowledge economy rather than the antiquated industrial model practices that still exist," she says.

"I have a clear vision and robust goals, but I take a moment each day to stop, breathe, and find something to be proud about and shout it off the rooftop — or, rather, Instagram, Facebook, and Twitter."

Honnick says the school's culture reflects its core values. "We have three core values: 'Be brave,' 'show up,' and 'I am enough,'" she says. "Unpacking these, teaching them to the children, and modeling them has begun to transform our culture. These core values resonate with my inner being."

Her advice to others: "Champion that which you believe and weave it into the fabric of your learning community. You will manifest a community that values learning and the lifelong journey of self-awareness, growth, and development and attract those who generously give of themselves to help you along the way." ■



## BEING FORWARD

# Alan Ingram

Let's work together  
to keep moving forward

I'm honored to serve on the Learning Forward board of trustees and excited to serve this year as president.

Learning Forward is the premiere professional learning organization dedicated to improving the practice of all educators that leads to better results for students. The importance of our work as an organization is best illustrated in this quote from Nelson Mandela: "Education is the most powerful weapon we can use to change the world."

My introduction to Learning Forward came more than 20 years ago while participating in a collaborative project in Oklahoma City Public Schools with Joellen Killion, now Learning Forward's senior advisor.

At the time, our team was working to leverage limited federal grant funds and district resources to implement a targeted instructional facilitator initiative. Killion shared her consultancy expertise to help us plan implementation, develop content, and facilitate training to build capacity for a cadre of teacher leaders that would be deployed strategically in high-need secondary schools across the district.

I've learned a lot about professional learning since then. My core beliefs about teaching and learning are rooted in the words of former Oklahoma Gov. Brad Henry, "A good teacher can inspire hope, ignite the imagination, and instill a love of learning." My own K-12 experience as a student included stints at nine schools in Michigan and

**Successful organizations must have a clear vision, compelling mission, short- and long-term goals, core values and beliefs, and strategic priorities.**

South Carolina.

I changed schools every year in high school but along the way benefited from a few great teachers, some tough coaches who were staunch disciplinarians, and other caring adults. What I learned to appreciate most from those experiences is the power of great teachers and caring adults. However, developing great teachers requires purposeful collaboration and must be rooted in evidence-based professional learning that gives rise to teacher voice as a part of the process.

As a former superintendent and deputy commissioner at the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education in Massachusetts, I learned firsthand the challenges and opportunities that can be derived from aligned state policies and sound educational practices, rigorous state standards, systems of support, high expectations for all students, and stakeholder engagement. Massachusetts is widely viewed as having the best school system in the nation. We can learn a lot from the Bay State.

One of the critical factors in Massachusetts' educational achievements is that the state remains

committed to closing persistent gaps in student achievement while working to address poverty-based obstacles. For example, to help mitigate high concentrations of poverty, the state is giving more attention to social emotional learning and wellness of the whole child.

Another factor in Massachusetts' success is the state's ongoing efforts to find the right balance between accountability and assistance, which has significant implications for professional learning policies and implementation at the school, district, state, and provincial levels.

Since its inception, Learning Forward has worked with educators at all levels to provide a wide range of supports. The organization's purpose — excellence in teaching and learning — connects professional development with student learning and emphasizes that all educators have a responsibility to engage in continuous learning to improve student performance. In effective professional learning systems, professional development is aligned with rigorous state standards along with district and school improvement goals.

Successful organizations must have a clear vision, compelling mission, short- and long-term goals, core values and beliefs, and strategic priorities. They must also embrace continuous improvement, use resources effectively and efficiently to execute on high-yield strategies, deliver high-quality products and services, and adapt to change or



**I changed schools every year in high school but along the way benefited from a few great teachers, some tough coaches who were staunch disciplinarians, and other caring adults. What I learned to appreciate most from those experiences is the power of great teachers and caring adults.**

new challenges.

Learning Forward is no exception. Board members continue to invest considerable time on aspects of those components while working together for the good of the organization. A look at some of Learning Forward's impact affirms we are heading in the right direction as an organization:

- More than 35 states have adopted or adapted the Standards for Professional Learning.
- There are 40 Learning Forward affiliates at the state, regional, provincial, and international level.
- Learning Forward is actively

engaged in 35 states, supporting schools and systems to develop effective learning teams, strong instructional coaching programs, effective school and district leaders, and a vision for systemwide professional learning.

Each of us brings his or her own unique experiences, skill sets, and belief systems to our work. My personal strengths include a proven commitment to improving equity, excellence, and access opportunities for all students, a passion for learning, a deep belief that teachers and public schools matter, and a strong desire to make a difference.

As president of the board of

trustees, I want to work with the other trustees and Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh to ensure we have a high-performing governance team that can take Learning Forward to new heights.

The challenges ahead for all of us will require a total team effort, adaptive and innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to excellence in moving professional learning systems beyond the status quo.

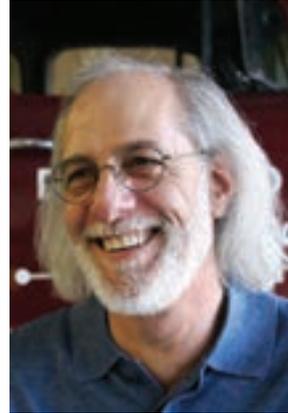
**Alan Ingram is president of Learning Forward's board of trustees. ■**

## WHAT WE'VE LEARNED

### Robert Garmston



### Kendall Zoller



## Respectful disagreement closes the gap between points of view

**E**ducators, more than in most professions, have an opportunity — actually, a responsibility — to practice and model constructive ways of disagreeing. We wish to frame the context for this obligation and suggest ways we can all get better at respectful disagreement.

To disagree well, one first must listen. Listening conveys respect of the person speaking, especially when your listening includes restating ideas to confirm understanding and let the speaker know you are making this effort.

Most of us know this, but still can get caught in angry, argumentative, or defensive engagements. You may know someone who unfriended a person on Facebook because of comments about politics, religion, or even food or child care. This is indicative of a new norm emerging in much political discourse, which is amplified on talk radio and television, and diminishes civility in many quarters. So what can educators do to release us from this seemingly unavoidable trap when speaking with someone who has strong views different from our own?

While preparing seminars on this topic, we've discovered three things:

1. Emotions are more persuasive than facts.
2. Group affiliation mires speakers in conceptual quicksand from which it is hard to escape.
3. Guidelines for “fighting fair” do exist, but they are hard to maintain in the heat of interaction.

Because facts take a lesser role than emotion and group affiliation can determine people's decision-making, disputed viewpoints often trigger reactions similar to when one is in physical danger. This partially explains the findings that to debate another's opinions deepens the other's attachment to them (Maeli, 2016).

When triggered, our brains shift to high alert as in a threatening situation: We hear less and think less clearly. Breathing quickens, the oxygen supply is diminished in our neocortex, and our capacities for rational thought and empathy are reduced. Finally, we see the person as “other than me.” You can test this by noticing your reactions when hearing opinions on television or radio.

Here's an example of how extreme reactions can become. Rumors surfaced that Barack Obama was born outside the United States and, as such, not qualified to be president. A birth certificate documenting his birth in Hawaii elicited this response: “Anyone can counterfeit a birth certificate. It's fake.” This is not rational, yet from the orientation of group identity, it makes sense.

Group identity, or tribal affiliation, as some authors refer to it, makes it important that we stay within group boundaries of the collective truth or risk expulsion. When humans are divided into groups of any kind, the group outside one's own is subject to dehumanization and regarded without empathy.

### SO HOW DO WE RESPOND?

So how do we respond to the person who argues blindly for a point of view different than our own? Here are some little-known but practical ways of closing the gaps between points of view.

Let's start with the extreme case of zealots. David Brooks (2017) asserts that, “It's fruitless to engage with people who are impervious to facts.

There are some ideas — like racism — that are so noxious they deserve no recognition in any decent community.”

Fortunately, it would be rare to encounter people like this in our work. They are recognizable because in conversations they work to destroy the rules of social etiquette. For such extremists, Brooks cites Stephen Carter, who wrote in his book *Civility* (1998) that the only way to confront fanaticism is with love. Ask genuine questions. Paraphrase so they know they’ve been heard. Show some ultimate care for them even if you detest what they are saying.

But, for the most part, we rarely encounter zealots in our work. We are more likely to interact with people with strong, seemingly immovable, positions. People so intent on sending their truth, they lack ability to hear ours. So what can we do?

As Carter suggests, start with love. This is the foundation of the martial art aikido: to love the combatant one faces, wishing him no harm, but moving in harmony with the person’s own energy in order to deflect him to another path.

Next, look for ways you can become one of his tribe. We all belong to many — for example, parent, sibling, sports fan, quilter, or auto enthusiast. Find a place where you share a community with the other person. Connect and spend some time there establishing a relationship.

A third step is to consider the possibility that you are wrong, opening your mind to that possibility and modeling for the other that movement is possible. Become curious about the other’s point of view and seek to understand it.

Certain ways of listening put you in a better position to attend to



the other person without inserting yourself in his views. Autobiographical listening, or “me, too” listening, engages you internally in your own stories rather than attending to what is being said. “Me, too” listening can help make social connections as you are mentioning your membership in, say, a community of parenthood. The trick is to notice the moment you’ve gone autobiographical and step out of that frame so you can attend to the other.

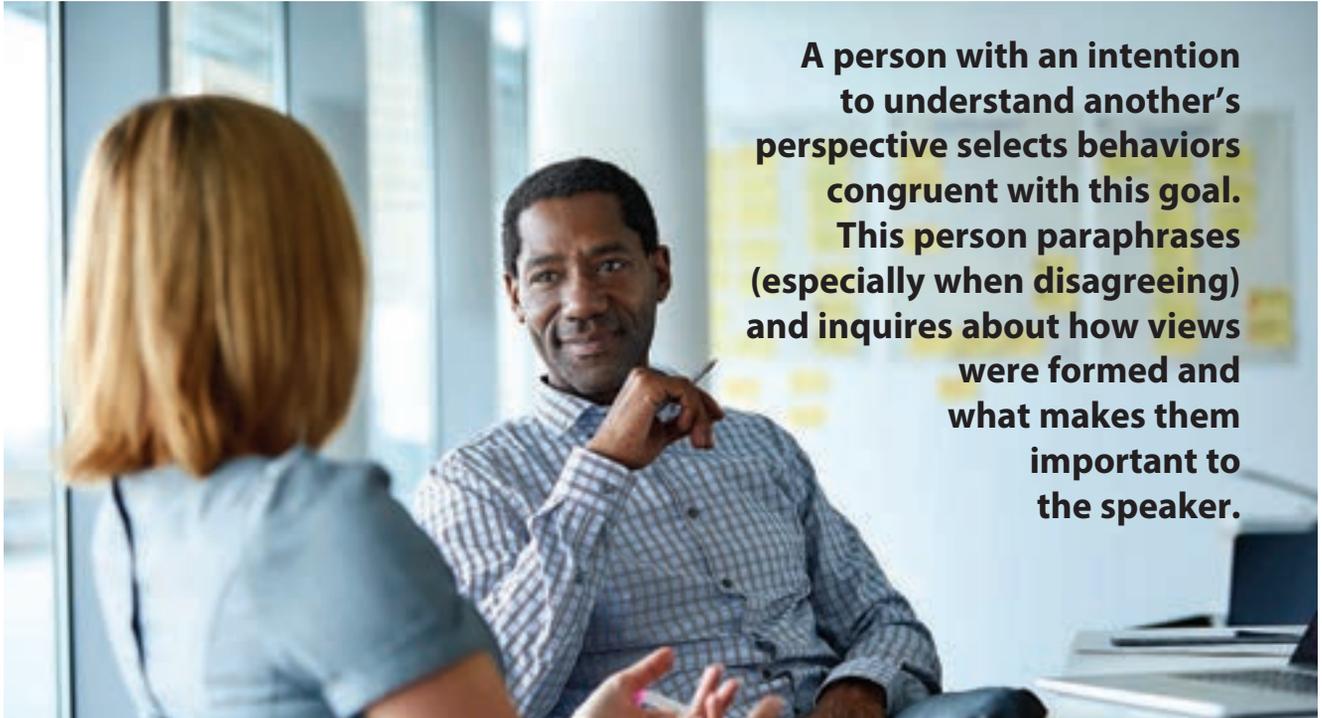
Solution listening is a great way to miss what the other is saying. When solution ideas trigger inside your mind, you can no longer hear the other and you have predisposed a mindset on what they are saying.

Finally, know your intentions in

the conversation and choose congruent behavior. The first part is the hardest. Often we interact without being aware of what intentions live beneath the surface of our behaviors. Take a moment to ask yourself: “What do I intend?”

If your intention is to convince the other person your view is correct, you are probably doomed to failure, as this is a position opposing the energy coming toward you. To resist the other person’s views are to help them persist. They will soften only by being listened to.

The word intention is from Latin — *intendere*, to stretch toward, to aim at. It is characterized by a desire to reach a specific end. Knowing what you intend allows the selection of behaviors that help you achieve your goal. Not



**A person with an intention to understand another's perspective selects behaviors congruent with this goal. This person paraphrases (especially when disagreeing) and inquires about how views were formed and what makes them important to the speaker.**

knowing what you intend promotes random, ineffective interactions with others.

A person conversing with others who intends to be observant will select behaviors that will serve this end. Those behaviors are: Be quiet, listen carefully, and watch all the speaker's messages, including the nonverbal.

A person with an intention to understand another's perspective selects behaviors congruent with this goal. This person paraphrases (especially when disagreeing) and inquires about how views were formed and what makes them important to the speaker.

Unless we are a coach, counselor, or therapist, our intentions typically go beyond understanding. Wishing our views to be heard or desiring a blending of ideas still requires listening first to the other.

To get your views heard, voice them softly, avoid the deity voice — sounding like you are God with the ultimate and only truth — and be clear that this is not the “truth” but the way you are thinking at the moment. State

your assumptions to allow the other a window into your mind. Allow ideas in their tentative form to be heard. Remember that if you think this is about winning, you lose. Seek common ground or, if not possible in the moment, some understandings.

Tali Sharot, author of *The Influential Mind* (2017), feels that we all have an obligation to affect others. According to Sharot, most efforts to change the minds of others are ineffective because they are incompatible with the way the mind works. One pattern that does work is to find a point of view both parties can agree on and make that the heart of your argument.

A back-and-forth of “Is not!” and “Is too!” might be appropriate for very young children but is destructive when adults engage in this form of conversation. We teach others when we raise the dignity of discourse at work, at home, and in our social lives.

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Examine. Study. Understand.

# RESEARCH

RESEARCH  
REVIEW

p. **20**

## HOW CURRICULUM SHAPES TEACHING

In her first Research Review column, Elizabeth Foster examines a recent research study that looks at how curriculum materials impact teaching practice and student learning. The study offers general design principles for educative curriculum materials. Foster writes:

“Educators continuously interact with, adapt, and use curricular materials, individually and collaboratively, as they engage students and implement standards. Engaging with materials can shape the teaching experience, teachers’ practices and mindsets, and, ultimately, students’ learning experiences.”



## RESEARCH REVIEW

# Elizabeth Foster

## Design principles guide educators in choosing and using curriculum materials

### ► THE STUDY

Davis, E.A., Palincsar, A.S., Smith, P.S., Arias, A., & Kademian, S.M. (2017, August-September). Educative curriculum materials: Uptake, impact, and implications of research and design. *Educational Researcher*, (46)6, 293-304.

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**Elizabeth Foster (elizabeth.foster@learningforward.org) is associate director of standards, research, and strategy at Learning Forward. In each issue of *The Learning Professional*, Foster explores a recent research study to help practitioners understand the impact of particular professional learning practices on student outcomes.**

In this issue, we take a look at an area of emerging interest: curriculum materials and the role they play in the daily work of educators and leaders. Educators, researchers, and policymakers are interested in what materials schools and districts use and how best to develop and share them in order to understand and support improved teacher practice and student learning.

Learning Forward is particularly interested in the professional learning implications of this body of research and knowledge, and in better understanding how to increase and improve teacher professional learning related to curriculum and instructional materials, which would increase access to learning experiences for more students.

Curricular materials — the resources that support teaching, from curriculum to lesson plans — vary widely among contexts, as does their use. Educators continuously interact with, adapt, and use curricular materials, individually and collaboratively, as they engage students and implement standards.

Engaging with materials can shape the teaching experience, teachers' practices and mindsets, and, ultimately, students' learning experiences. What a curriculum's design intends can shift by the time it is enacted. Increasingly, such materials are designed to be *educative*, meaning they are designed to support teachers' learning as well as students' learning.

### ABOUT THE STUDY

Davis and colleagues look at how curriculum materials impact teaching practice and student learning and suggest general design principles for educative curriculum materials. The researchers synthesized the findings of the literature, observational case studies, and a three-year empirical quasi-experimental study of educators' use of educative curriculum materials to draw implications for research and design.

They explain that educative elements can “take the form of ‘callout’ boxes with teacher tips, graphics illustrating conceptual relationships among the ideas in a unit, guides to the use of readings, or suggestions for providing students feedback on their writing” (p. 294). The researchers also looked specifically at what they call “uptake” — “the ways teachers adopt, in language and/or action, ideas or practices recommended in the educative features” (p. 294).

Two key assumptions undergird the study:

- Educative materials should support educator learning in multiple domains, including subject matter knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and specific teaching practices.
- The rationale for the educative guidance or suggestions should be made explicit for teachers to apply the ideas in multiple contexts.

These assumptions set the stage for

## ► WHAT THIS MEANS FOR PRACTITIONERS

This study clarifies how curriculum use moves from what is written and intended to what is enacted. This process is clearly happening in varying ways, making the presence of aligned and relevant professional learning especially critical.

The researchers suggest that educative features embedded in curriculum can support teacher learning as well as student learning. Although this study touches only briefly on professional learning, there are implications for educators, coaches, principals, and professional learning designers when selecting and engaging with curricular materials.

The suggestions and principles for materials developers seem especially relevant to designers and leaders of professional learning, such as the suggestion that designers emphasize the rationale for shifts in practice, or the idea that multiple explanations and examples be employed in helping teachers understand their own practice, content knowledge, and use of materials with a range of students.

This study is based on the acknowledgement that teachers adapt curricular materials as they use them. For that adaptation to further improve teaching practice and student outcomes, professional learning must incorporate and align to the existing materials and must assess how teachers are currently using them and to what effect.

The authors also note an opportunity here: “Educative curriculum materials have potential to provide sustained, scalable, job-embedded, discipline-specific professional learning opportunities that teachers need” (p. 295). The science-specific design principles point to the helpfulness of very specific guidelines and content markers in clarifying how a teacher’s use of educative features improves practice.

Mapping this study to Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), two of the standards in particular stand out: **Learning Designs** and **Outcomes**.

The **Learning Designs** standard provides an entry point to thinking about implementation of the study’s design principles. The findings and design principles also align with important design elements of effective professional learning: differentiation, alignment, meaning making, and grounded



in teacher practice. The design principles developed through this research provide important look-fors for educators, coaches, and leaders of professional learning.

This study offers a better understanding of the **Outcomes** standard because it shines a light on the process by which teachers engage with their content and how they work with materials to help students achieve their goals. It follows, too, that teachers who are able to incorporate the suggestions and strategies the educative features provide expand their options for reaching and supporting students.

Given the findings that educators regularly and consistently adapt instructional materials and respond to prompts and suggestions in educative features, this is an opportunity for a connection with professional learning efforts.

Of particular interest is the finding that different teachers respond to different prompts and suggestions in the educative materials. Professional learning that is ongoing and embedded encourages teachers to not only select the guidance that is most effective in their context but also develop an understanding of the tools that are most useful to them in their own individualized practice.

## REFERENCE

**Learning Forward. (2011).** *Standards for Professional Learning*. Oxford, OH: Author.

the Davis study and also align nicely with the way Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning recognize the complexities of educators’ needs and development pathways.

Researchers looked at three questions:

1. How do teachers use and adapt curriculum materials in their enactment? What are some of the key influences on their
2. What evidence do we have of teachers’ uptake of ideas

decision-making while using curriculum materials, including educative curriculum materials?

## DESIGN PRINCIPLES

► **DESIGN PRINCIPLE 1**

Teachers will adapt curriculum materials. These adaptations are likely to be informed by teachers' concerns about time and student capabilities and experiences. By anticipating these adaptations, educative features can facilitate principled and productive adaptations. Therefore, educative features should provide suggestions for adaptations of lessons that would take different amounts of time and meet a range of students' needs while still meeting the intent of the reforms embedded in the curriculum materials. Examples of such educative

features could include narratives describing choices that may reduce time needed while maintaining opportunities to learn.

► **DESIGN PRINCIPLE 2**

Educative features that provide representations of practice can support teachers' uptake of the ideas in the features. Educative features that can be used as teaching tools can support concrete changes in teachers' practice. Furthermore, sample student work can help teachers set higher expectations for their students than they might otherwise have. Therefore, educative features should be situated and grounded

in teachers' practice.

Some features grounded in practice can be directly applied as teaching tools in the classroom. Examples of educative features that are situated in teachers' practice include (a) rubrics that illustrate essential features of key ideas of reforms along with sample student work and possible teacher comments that reflect those key ideas and (b) narratives that describe teachers' enactment of lessons in ways that demonstrate key ideas of reforms. Examples of teaching tools include rubrics, examples of key scientific ideas, and student-friendly definitions of terms.

► **DESIGN PRINCIPLE 3**

As expectations for students and teachers change, demands on teachers' subject matter knowledge grow. Multiple vectors may help teachers to identify the "big ideas" to highlight in lessons. Therefore, designers should use multiple forms of support for highlighting important content. Examples include content storylines, student-friendly definitions, and graphics.

► **DESIGN PRINCIPLE 4**

Different teachers will need and take up different kinds of educative features (in terms of substance and form). Teachers' variable uptake

from educative features in the educative curriculum materials?

3. What evidence do we have of impact of educative materials on teacher and student outcomes?

**METHODOLOGY**

The study's methodology included three phases:

- **Year 1:** A pilot study observing how three teachers used a curriculum along with a review of literature to develop educative components to add to existing curriculum;
- **Year 2:** An expanded pilot with four teachers using the curriculum with the added educative materials; and
- **Year 3:** A quasi-experimental efficacy study with 20 elementary schools randomly assigned to use either the curriculum materials with

the educative features or the original curriculum.

The treatment group included 28 teachers, and the comparison group included 22 teachers. Researchers gathered common data for all teachers — such as lesson logs, samples of student notebooks, and pre- and post-assessments of student content knowledge — and analyzed selected video clips.

They looked for what they call "tracers" — these include particular phrases or teaching moves that were in the educative features but not in the original curriculum. Their use would indicate that the teachers were tapping into the suggestions in the educative materials.

The study focused on elementary science teachers, but the authors looked for generalizability across subject and grade level in analyzing their findings and developing their design guidance.

A helpful feature of this paper is how findings from observations and the efficacy study are clearly linked to findings from the literature.

**FINDINGS**

The authors report, "We found extensive evidence of uptake of the ideas and recommendations in the educative features. Yet our evidence of impact on outcomes was more limited" (p. 297).

The study found that teachers adapt curriculum materials as they use them and that this adapting process is informed by competing goals, such as time constraints, understanding of and comfort level with scientific practices, and perceptions of student abilities (p. 296).

In addition, the study illustrates that teachers' knowledge, beliefs about teaching, and beliefs about learners, as well as characteristics of the materials themselves, shape how teachers use the

will be based on the needs they perceive in themselves (e.g. their knowledge of content, assessment, or reading strategies) and their students (e.g. their typical content struggles). Therefore, designers should develop a constellation of educative features that have the potential to meet these various needs. Designers also should help teachers recognize how the recommendations differ from their current practice, in part through emphasizing the rationales for the recommendations. A constellation could be constituted purposefully using different forms of

educative features (e.g. narratives and callout boxes) with different foci (e.g. subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge). An example of an educative feature that would highlight how recommendations differ from current practice could include a reading guide that signals change from typical literacy practices.

### ► DESIGN PRINCIPLE 5

Teachers take up the practice of scientific explanation in a limited way. Therefore, educative features should help teachers (a) appreciate the definition, intention, and value of constructing

scientific explanations and (b) learn how to support students in engaging in explanation construction and argumentation. Examples include narratives, expository text, capstone questions, and rubrics that synergistically define, illustrate, and guide explanation construction and argumentation in the classroom.

### ► DESIGN PRINCIPLE 6

Certain scientific practices, including making and recording observations and making and justifying predictions, were taken up effectively by most teachers. Therefore, educative features should support easier-to-

enact scientific practices, with the idea of moving incrementally toward more ambitious science teaching in elementary classrooms. Designers should connect to teachers' existing teaching practice to create leverage points while helping teachers recognize salient differences. Examples of such educative features could include narratives and how-and-why support for prediction that reinforces the need for justification, points the path toward argumentations, and connects to ways teachers may already use prediction (e.g. in English language arts).

**Source:** Davis et al., 2017, pp. 297-300.

curriculum materials.

Adaptations can either augment or limit students' opportunities to learn. For instance, when teachers provide additional opportunities for students to engage with scientific practices and share practices' rationales with students, that augments students' opportunities to learn. When teachers limit students' exploration of predictions due to time constraints, that limits opportunities to learn.

These study findings "highlight the need for educative curriculum materials to anticipate and support teachers' adaptations to curriculum materials" (p. 297). The study further found that educative strategies and tools that are grounded in practice, such as those that reference student work or teaching moves, can be especially supportive.

This study sheds light on which particular educative features teachers respond to while also underlining the

idea that teachers do, in fact, respond to such features. The patterns observed (along with a review of related literature) led the authors to conclude that uptake is best when the educative features are "highly situated" — meaning that they are directly relevant to the current classroom teaching experience — and multiple methods and strategies for delivering educative guidance are important because different teachers respond to different options.

The findings on the question of evidence related to the impact of educative materials on teacher and student outcomes were directly related to the efficacy study, which did not reveal significant effects on student or teacher knowledge.

### LIMITATIONS

Limitations of the study include the relatively small sample size and the fact that only a single science item was used

in the efficacy study.

### DESIGN PRINCIPLES

The analysis of findings as well as the related literature led to the development of six design principles for educative features in instructional materials, which offer guidance for selecting and using materials with educative features. See the explanations and examples of these design principles on pp. 22-23.

The takeaway from the domain-general design principles is that educative features should:

- Suggest adaptations of lessons that would take different amounts of time and meet a range of students' needs;
- Be situated and grounded in teachers' practice;
- Take multiple forms; and
- Work together to meet a range of teacher needs. ■

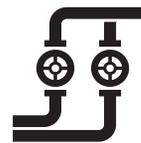
# ESSENTIALS

## ■ PRINCIPAL PIPELINE

The Principal Pipeline Podcast: Practitioners Share Lessons From the Field

*The Wallace Foundation*

This six-episode series features principals, district and state leaders, and university officials who've developed strong principal pipelines. Topics discussed include how to attract and retain effective school leaders, improving job standards, and a critical partnership between districts and universities.



[www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/podcast-principal-pipeline.aspx](http://www.wallacefoundation.org/knowledge-center/pages/podcast-principal-pipeline.aspx)

## ■ BUILDING COLLABORATION

The Schoolhouse Network:

How School Buildings

Affect Teacher Collaboration

*Education Next, Spring 2018*

Teachers are far more likely to speak with one another about their practice when they are assigned to nearby classrooms, say the study's authors. Their finding suggests that, even within the limitations of traditional school building design, thoughtful classroom assignments can promote beneficial teacher interactions.

The authors spent four years surveying instructional staff in a Midwestern suburban district about their work-related interactions and measuring the distances between teachers' walking routes.

Their analysis finds that "physical proximity predicts

staff interactions, with teachers and school leaders more likely to interact about instruction with colleagues who are located physically close to them or with whom they are likely to cross paths during the school day. ... Our study suggests that even in an egg-crate building, teachers are more likely to share their insights with one another if they are nearby."



<http://educationnext.org/schoolhouse-network-how-school-buildings-affect-teacher-collaboration>

## ■ THE TIME DILEMMA

Finding Time

for Collaborative Learning

*Education Resource Strategies,*

*January 2018*

Education Resource Strategies studied school systems and states with improving student outcomes to learn best practices for teacher professional learning. Observers noted that these organizations connected professional learning to what teachers do every day and connected every part of the system into one coherent vision. They also found that these systems and states invested in rigorous, comprehensive curricula and assessments; content-focused, expert-led collaboration; and frequent, growth-oriented feedback.

The challenge in all of this, however, is finding enough time for meaningful collaborative planning. In this brief, Education Resource Strategies provides context on how American teachers currently spend their time and offers six practical strategies for how principals can create more collaborative planning time. Each strategy includes an explanation, sample school schedules, and examples of the strategy in action.



[www.erstrategies.org/tap/finding\\_time\\_for\\_collaborative\\_planning](http://www.erstrategies.org/tap/finding_time_for_collaborative_planning)

## ■ ADVANCING EQUITY

States Leading for Equity:

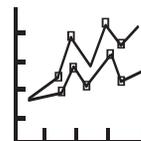
Promising Practices Advancing

the Equity Commitments

*CCSSO, February 2018*

This report highlights 10 promising practices states are currently engaging in to advance equity. These promising practices include: setting an equity vision and measurable targets, creating accountability for equity, providing tailored and differentiated support, and monitoring equitable implementation of state standards and assessments.

The report concludes that, "While our work toward achieving educational equity is far from finished, states are leading with policies, practices, and engagement that is bold and rooted in a firm belief that each and every child has a right to an excellent education."

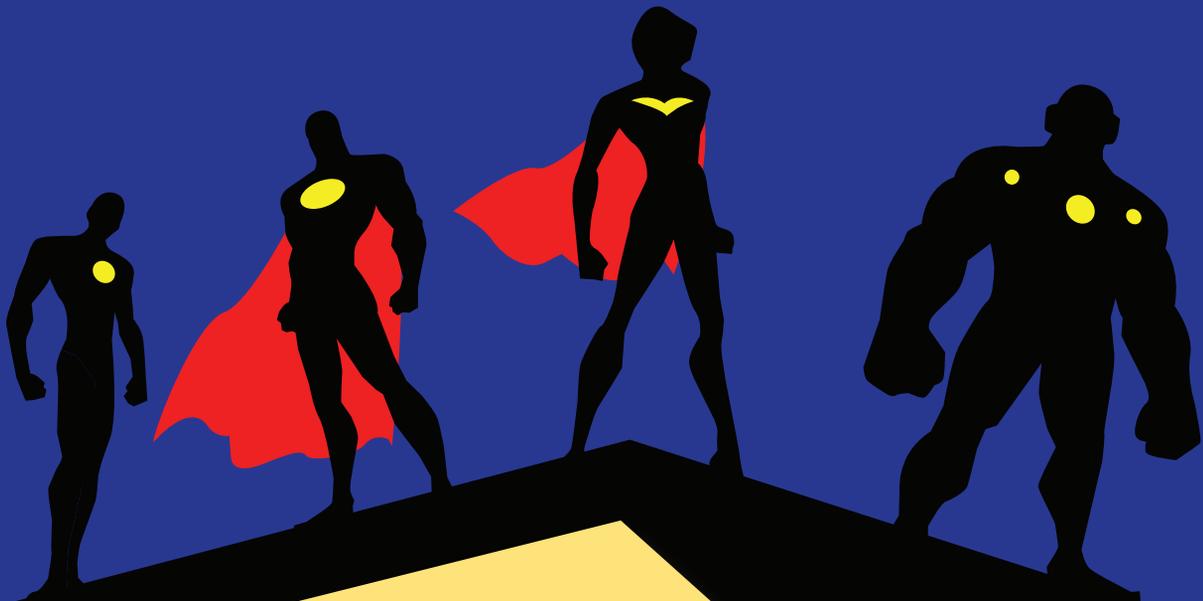


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# FOCUS

LEARNING LEADERS FOR LEARNING SYSTEMS



## THE POWER OF SHARED LEADERSHIP

**J**ust as it takes a village to raise a child, principals need a surrounding cast that is willing to not only support their efforts to raise student achievement, but also share the responsibility and accountability for making those efforts happen. Sharing leadership is not a program or a model. Rather, it's a culture that is enabled and sustained through a principal's efforts to create and work with a leadership team focused on the achievement of all students."

**EVEN  
SUPERHEROES  
NEED HELP**  
p. **32**



# A SYMPHONY OF SKILLS

HERE'S WHAT IT TAKES TO LEARN IN CONCERT WITH OTHERS

BY LYN SHARRATT AND BEATE PLANCHE

**S**killed collaborative leaders are in high demand in schools, school systems, and districts worldwide. The success of schools as learning organizations hinges on how well people can work together as they seek to build collective capacity and problem solve to improve student outcomes.

As the Leadership standard of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning states, we need "skillful leaders who develop capacity,

advocate, and create support systems for professional learning" (Learning Forward, 2011). Collaborative learning has now emerged as the vital strategy for learning — both for staff and students.

According to a recent OECD education paper, schools that are learning organizations share these seven characteristics:

- Develop a shared vision centered on the learning of all students.
- Promote and support continuous professional learning for all staff.
- Promote team learning and collaboration among all staff.
- Establish a culture of inquiry, exploration, and innovation.
- Embed systems for collecting and exchanging knowledge and learning.
- Learn with and from the external environment and larger system.
- Model and grow learning leadership (Kools & Stoll, 2017, p. 10).



Building on these characteristics, we have reframed collaboration to be defined as “co-laboring”: While being responsible for their own learning, leaders also commit to being responsible and accountable to support each other in their learning. In so doing, they foster mutual interdependence and strong learning relationships.

Our research into how best to build, nurture, and sustain collaborative learning highlights key leadership dispositions, skills, and capacities (Sharratt & Planche, 2016). The word “leader” is a broad term that includes those with formal authority, such as principals and superintendents, as well as those who may not have formal titles but who have significant influence, such as teacher leaders and instructional coaches. Formal and informal leaders who work together and measure their impact are essential to meet the needs of students and staff.

In our experience as school superintendents and educational consultants, district leaders cannot make assumptions about the

preparedness of their central office and school leaders. System or district leaders must assume responsibility for their own growth as much as individuals seeking advancement. Thus, two questions emerge: What kind of capabilities do collaborative leaders need to work together with others? And how do we nurture needed skills and dispositions so that *all* leaders can improve over time?

It is easier to define the *what* than the *how*. For example, a leader who wishes to engage others in collaborative inquiry as a learning approach would need to ensure that the learning team:

- Explores a needs-based focus determined from co-assessment of student work;
- Has a clear question of inquiry determined by analyzing student data;
- Co-constructs the operating norms for collaborative work;
- Investigates the knowledge and skills needed to change instructional practice;
- Determines first steps for

## NEW VOCABULARY FOR COLLABORATIVE LEADERS

The credibility of collaborative leaders includes “**knowledge-ability**” — having a deep understanding of high-impact classroom practice.

The authenticity of collaborative leaders includes “**mobilize-ability**” — focusing others on work through shared beliefs and understandings.

The integrity of collaborative leaders is demonstrated in “**sustain-ability**” — building safety, trust, and strong relationships.

The creativity of collaborative leaders is demonstrated in “**imagine-ability**” — encouraging innovation and an openness to possibilities.

The influence of collaborative leaders and team members is demonstrated in “**collabor-ability**” — using a co-learning approach to co-work.

**Source:** Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Sharratt & Harild, 2015; Sharratt & Planche, 2016.

planning and rehearsal of a refined practice;

- Assesses the impact of new staff learning on student learning;
- Reflects on progress before considering next steps; and
- Continuously models expectations and monitors progress so refinement of practice can continue.

### SKILLS FOR LEARNING LEADERS

The *how* of this work is where leadership capabilities come to the fore. These include:

**Leaders need to know how to assess the conditions for collaborative learning.** System and school leaders create the conditions for learning by their attitudes and actions. Have leaders articulated a clear vision and rationale for collaborative work? Have leaders positioned themselves as co-learners in the process? Have key influencers in the system and schools been invited to co-plan and co-lead the work? Have leaders considered how to mentor or coach those on the fringe of the work so they become engaged?

**Leaders (both teacher leaders and formal leaders) need to be able to create safety in collaborative work.** Safety builds trust and trust builds stronger working and learning relationships. The following quotes are examples from our research participants regarding the importance of building a collaborative learning culture:

“A culture of safety and risk-taking has been developed.”

“Mutual trust and respect are evident.”

“Individual contributions are valued and encouraged.”

“Staff are consulted as to what would assist them with collaborative work.”

“Leaders must be the motivating force to aid resistant teachers to incorporate collaborative learning in the

classroom.”

Leaders involved in the work need to develop and/or refine important knowledge, skills, and dispositions. Lyn Sharratt and Michael Fullan coined the terms leader “knowledge-ability,” “mobilize-ability,” and “sustain-ability” (2009, 2012). Sharratt and Gale Harild coined the term “imagine-ability” as being key to the development of innovative leaders (2015).

Based on our research and experience, we added the term “collabor-ability.” We have determined through our research that this leadership dimension is critical to leading collaborative learning and supporting the other abilities (Sharratt & Planche, 2016). (See text box on p. 27.)

For example, leaders with collabor-ability:

- **Establish and implement** norms and protocols for collaborative engagement;
- **Support** goals with ongoing scheduled time, resources, and time for reflection;
- **Project** a growth mindset by modeling a belief in the capacity of others to learn;
- **Model** responsibility and accountability for individual and collective learning;
- **Facilitate** the work by using learning protocols;
- **Empower** by including all voices in the work;
- **Articulate** a clear purpose for collaborative work;
- **Organize** time periods and schedules for collaborative work;
- **Reinforce** shared beliefs and understandings about student and staff success;
- **Build** consensus on what specific areas for collaborative learning stand out through the analysis of student data;

- **Research** high-impact practices;
- **Determine** clear learning intentions and their success criteria for learning through collaborative discourse and analysis; and
- **Solidify** a commitment to employing an inquiry approach to collaborative work.

### Leaders need strong facilitation and communication skills for leading collaborative learning communities.

The Learning Communities standard of Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) specifies learning communities that are “committed to continuous improvement, collective responsibility, and goal alignment.” Facilitation and communication skills focus on strong communication and interpersonal interaction as well as effective collaborative processes. These skills include the ability to:

- **Articulate a vision** that brings life to the stated goals;
- **Listen respectfully to many voices**, some of which may be opposing;
- **Seek and ensure inclusivity** in representation around collaborative working tables;
- **Ask for help** and know when and **how to delegate**;
- **Give and accept advice** with sensitivity and diplomacy;
- **Probe for deeper understanding** through open-ended questions;
- **Clarify key points** for others;
- **Integrate the opinions of those who disagree** with the majority while redirecting focus as needed;
- **Take responsibility for the challenges** in collaborative work when needed;
- **Let others take the lead** once the work is underway;
- **Let others take the credit** to

spur on motivation;

- **Listen intently and restate** what was heard when needed;
- **Encourage those on the fringe of the work** to become more engaged;
- **Respond calmly** to frustration or anger;
- **Advocate with passion** to keep interest high;
- **Redirect the work** when needed;
- **Help groups reach consensus** when differences appear to stall the work;
- **Help self and others move** from expressing good intentions to taking accountable and purposeful action; and
- **Model and monitor** using a reflective feedback stance (adapted from Planche, 2017, 2004; Bens, 2012; Sharratt & Planche, 2016).

These skills become system and school leaders' success criteria — meant to be used as a reflective, self-assessment tool for ongoing growth in and refinement of impactful leadership practices.

## HOW TO DEVELOP THESE SKILLS

We need to consider whether district and school leadership programs specify the kind of development in knowledge, skills, and dispositions outlined above. The pertinent leadership work becomes how to reframe leadership preparation to support aspiring leaders in developing and practicing these skills and dispositions so that their knowledge becomes grounded in collaborative practice. What are the processes needed?

Course work, workshops, case study scenarios, and video clips provide content knowledge; on-the-job practice, simulations, and reflective role-playing provide process knowledge; and



## LEARNING WALKS AND TALKS

**L**earning walks and talks are a systematic, nonevaluative approach to knowing what is happening in classrooms and in the school. It is a collaborative, growth-promoting process.

Using a defined protocol, leaders walk into classrooms to listen and observe. (Learning walks and talks can include students and teachers, too, if appropriate.) Observers do not interrupt the lesson, and the walks take three to five minutes.

Walks focus on what students are learning and the level of challenge of the tasks in which students are engaged. Observers look for evidence of deconstructed learning goals and

clear co-constructed success criteria and descriptive feedback to students based on the success criteria.

Observers also look for evidence of professional learning in the school that aligns with the needs identified in student work.

The process of learning walks and talks includes five key questions for students:

1. What are you learning?
2. How are you doing?
3. How do you know?
4. How can you improve?
5. Where do you go for help?

**Source:** Sharratt & Fullan, 2012; Sharratt & Harild, 2015; Sharratt & Planche, 2016.

mentoring and side-by-side coaching provide important feedback to fuel progress.

Collaborative co-work puts theory into action and moves leaders from good intentions to purposeful practice. Often, it is the intentionality of specific learning and practice as well as ongoing reflection on learning that stand out as the missing components in preparation programs.

Research we shared in *Leading Collaborative Learning: Empowering Excellence* (2016) highlights that purposeful collaborative learning makes an impact on student achievement. For example, system leaders co-learning with school leaders in Parramatta

Diocese in Australia implemented three high-impact approaches that included the co-construction of data walls, case management meetings, and learning walks (Sharratt, in press) in every primary and secondary school in the diocese.

Their success is tangible, as Sharratt reports in her ongoing work with the diocese, which serves 55,000 students (Sharratt, in press). Students' average reading scores are one example. In all grades, 1-10, except for Year 8, students have improved and are performing above the expected norm set by the Progressive Achievement Tests in Reading Comprehension (PAT-R) assessment standards. (For

more detailed results, see [www.australiaeducation.info/Tests/K12-Standardized-Tests/pat-r.html](http://www.australiaeducation.info/Tests/K12-Standardized-Tests/pat-r.html).)

System leaders Sue Walsh and Greg Whitby attribute this success to school leaders, teachers, and system support staff working together, with a focus on increasing all students' achievement, by fully implementing the three collaborative processes across their system with differentiated system supports as needed (Sharratt & Planche, 2016, p. 83).

In addition, leaders engage in ongoing professional learning experiences called learning walks and talks (see box on p. 29). Clear direction setting, articulated expectations, support, and collaborative learning structures across the diocese are key to Parramatta's efforts (Sharratt & Planche, 2016, p. 95).

In the Canadian province of Ontario, the Ministry of Education supported collaborative efforts by infusing tangible resources for collective capacity building initially in the area of literacy (Sharratt & Planche, 2016, p. 21). This includes opportunities for school leaders to collaborate with provincially assigned student achievement officers as critical supporters and friends. In addition, school boards received resources so that a certain number of days could be translated into professional learning opportunities.

The Ontario Ministry of Education developed and is still developing online curricular and leadership supports in the form of videos, monographs, and conversation resources so that superintendents and principals can engage with staff in the area of building collective capacity. There is an intentional co-learning stance expressed in many of the Ministry's publications, which reinforces a capacity-building effort rather than a punitive or judgmental approach.

Their efforts paid off. In 2007,

in almost 800 elementary schools in Ontario, 50% of grades 3 and 6 students were scoring below expected level in reading, writing, and mathematics on the standards-based provincial assessments. In 2016, just 63 of Ontario schools had similar proportions of students scoring below the expected provincial standard in reading, writing, and mathematics. These results demonstrate that enacting authentic collaboration at every level achieves sustained improvement in student outcomes (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2013).

In another example, Ronfeldt and colleagues (2015) reported on a study involving more than 9,000 teachers in 336 Miami-Dade public schools in Florida that concluded that leader and teacher collaboration on assessment practices was predictive of student achievement gains in both reading and math.

Developing new leaders through co-learning and co-laboring processes, such as data walls, case management meetings, and learning walks and talks, strengthens the skills of all participants and benefits both staff and students. Ultimately, leading collaborative learning demands a commitment to investigative, reflective learning for all leaders. Growing the leaders we need depends on how we build their capacity and nurture their confidence to become co-learners.

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# **EVEN SUPERHEROES NEED HELP**

PRINCIPALS WHO SHARE LEADERSHIP HAVE GREATER IMPACT  
ON STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

BY MEL SUSSMAN

It's not clear exactly when school leaders first started wearing an "S" on their chests and began defiantly uttering the phrase, "I can do it all myself!" But after days, weeks, months, or even years of racing wildly from task to task, many a superhero principal has come to the stark realization that nothing could be further from the truth.

In most cases, principals who try to raise student achievement through their efforts alone find that they're not only physically and mentally exhausted, but that they've also lost the efficacy needed to succeed. What's worse, their students are likely to have fallen further and further behind, largely due to a mindset that is both outdated and misguided.

Just as it takes a village to raise a child, principals need a surrounding cast that is willing to not only support their efforts to raise student achievement, but also share the responsibility and accountability for making those efforts happen. Sharing leadership is not a program or a model. Rather, it's a culture that is enabled and sustained

through a principal's efforts to create and work with a leadership team focused on the achievement of all students.

The creation of an instructional leadership team is more than just an interesting concept — it is a necessity for any school leader who wants to increase student achievement. This team carries out a variety of functions, but its major focus will be leading schoolwide instructional initiatives from beginning to end.

An initiative may be decided at the district level, or the principal may have the autonomy to choose one. Either way, the focus area should be determined by data-driven decision-making and by what students most need to learn. For example, a school with low reading scores may choose an initiative that focuses on *"increasing by 10% the number of students scoring proficient or above on the state reading assessment for the current school year."*

But merely creating a team that you want to focus on such initiatives won't necessarily make it so. A leadership team must possess the *capacity* to assist with

instructional leadership efforts. And a principal must understand that it is only through voluntary shared leadership and the incorporation of positional authority that he or she can ensure the team has the capacity to succeed.

So how does a principal make shared leadership a reality? Taking the following crucial steps — none of which can be bypassed or abbreviated — will ensure the success of a leadership team.



### LOOK IN THE MIRROR.

1 Possibly the most difficult step for superhero principals is acknowledging that they cannot do it alone. It's imperative that these principals have a heart-to-heart conversation with themselves and accept that only through shared leadership will they have the greatest impact on increasing student achievement.

Giving up authority can be a gut-wrenching process, but when principals

come to understand that positional authority increases the potential for success, they can move forward with building a team that works.

However, this will only occur when the principal becomes secure with the following three premises:

- Leadership demands more than one person can provide.
- Shared leadership creates conditions for maximizing individual and collective strengths.
- Shared leadership requires that others assume responsibility and take action for the good of the whole.

When the school-level leader can accept relinquishing parts of his or her authority and comes to the realization that there is far greater strength in numbers, then the shared leadership process — rooted in the formation of a collectively efficacious instructional leadership team — can begin.

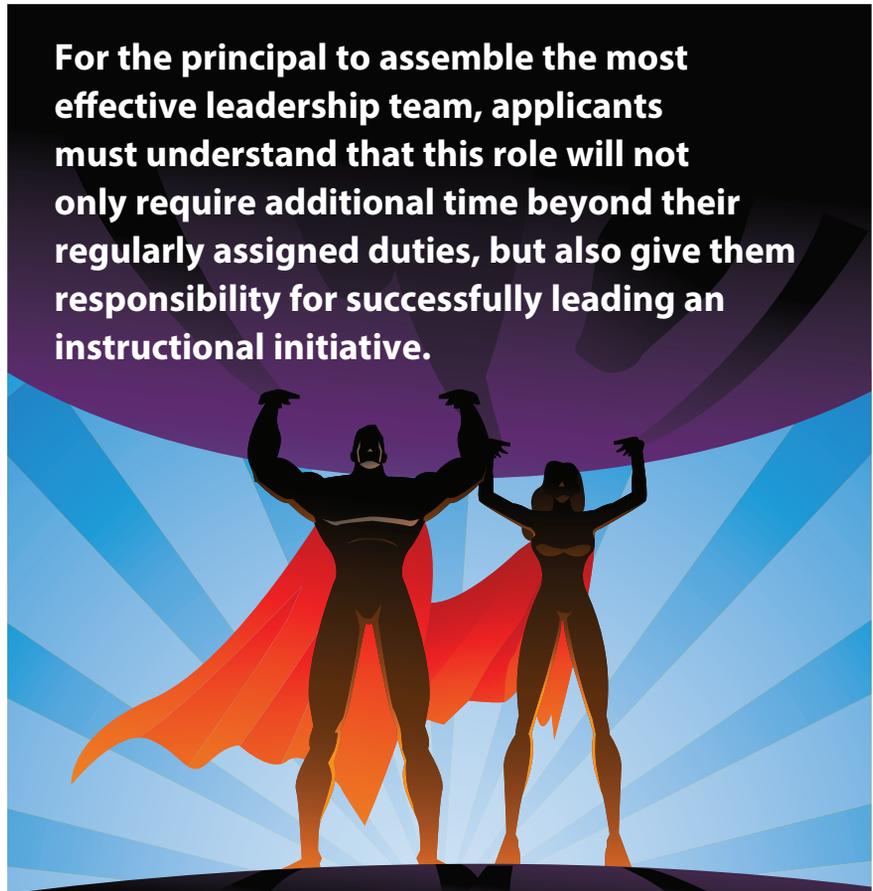
## 2

### **START WITH A TEAM.**

The principal must now try to build the strongest leadership team possible. This happens by communicating clearly to all potential leadership team members that they have the opportunity to participate on a newly constructed leadership team and what this team will be required to do.

This communication should extend beyond faculty members to all staff, parents, and potential applicants from the business community. One never knows where people with hidden talents may be found. Those who express an interest in applying for membership should be asked to submit a letter of interest that explains why they would like to be a part of the group and what strengths they could bring to the team.

The number of people chosen to be on the leadership team depends on the



size of the school. A larger staff creates the need for a larger team, whereas a smaller school will have to rely on fewer team members.

Because instructional initiatives are complex and principals have to let go of some of their control, it's important to note that the principals must also create an instructional leadership team that they're comfortable with and that they feel they can trust to provide outstanding assistance.

## 3

### **GATHER THE TALENT.**

The principal should then interview all interested candidates and make sure that each applicant understands what his or her position on the team may entail as the initiatives progress. Applicants should understand that membership on the team is a one-

year appointment. This enables the principal to remove anyone from the team who is not carrying his or her share of the load and provides an out for those members who feel that they are not suited to continue. It also allows for new aspiring leaders to join the team.

For the principal to assemble the most effective leadership team, applicants must understand that this role will not only require additional time beyond their regularly assigned duties, but also give them responsibility for successfully leading an instructional initiative. This means increasing the quality of instruction and lowering the variability of instruction throughout the building for a particular content area. In other words, team members will need to understand the curriculum, instruction, and assessment involved with the specific content area, and they

will become increasingly involved with the implementation and assessment of that initiative.



#### GET ACQUAINTED.

Once the leadership team is in place, an initial meeting will help members get to know one another and share their perceptions about what the team should accomplish. Having an informal, open conversation sets a positive, optimistic tone for the group and allows members to talk candidly about themselves and the strengths they bring to the table.

We know that certain research-based practices have a significant effect on increasing student achievement (Marzano, Waters, & McNulty, 2005). Having team members take on tasks on the basis of their individual strengths increases the potential for success. For example, some team members may be more skilled than others in their abilities to communicate, build relationships, accept input, lead professional development, maintain an optimistic approach, or monitor and evaluate the initiative.

The principal should carefully take note of who offers these qualities and line up tasks accordingly. Above all, any tasks that members take on should be taken on *voluntarily*. Assigning responsibilities increases the pressure to succeed and may negatively affect the completion of the task.



#### UNDERSTAND THE INITIATIVE.

Once the team chooses an instructional initiative, the principal must ensure that all team members clearly understand the associated curriculum, instructional practices, and assessments. To gain this knowledge and adequately present the initiative to teachers, students, parents, and other

stakeholders in the community, the leadership team will need to participate in professional development. This reinforces the shared leadership concept and strengthens the potential for success.

For example, if a literacy initiative focusing on academic vocabulary is chosen, the principal may need to provide the leadership team with targeted professional development. Leadership team members will need to understand not only the content, but also the strategies teachers can use to increase student performance in that area. A school or district curriculum specialist typically can supply such professional development.

In addition, it would be strategic to have one or two members of the leadership team who are experts in the area of building academic vocabulary. Therefore, as new instructional initiatives emerge, the makeup of the leadership team could very well change from year to year.

The bottom line is this: The more people know about what you are asking them to do, the better the odds for achieving that objective.



#### CHOOSE A PIECE OF THE PIE.

Numerous leadership responsibilities and actions are necessary to implement an initiative successfully. However, because leadership teams vary in size and each individual has other responsibilities that may take priority over and above his or her team duties, team members must be cautious when determining just how many actions they will be able to undertake.

Research on school leadership has revealed that the following 11 roles and responsibilities of school leaders have an impact on an initiative:

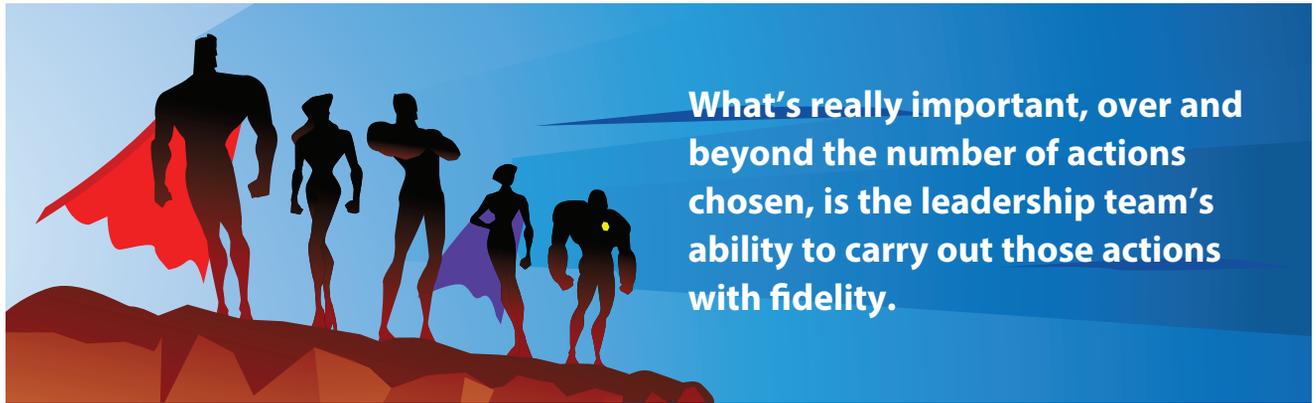
- Knowledge of curriculum, instruction, and assessment;

- Optimization: Inspires and leads new and challenging innovations;
- Intellectual stimulation: Makes sure staff is aware of and discusses new theories and practices;
- Change agent: Willingly and actively challenges the status quo;
- Monitoring/evaluating;
- Flexibility: Adapts behavior as necessary and is comfortable with dissent;
- Ideals/beliefs: Communicates and operates from strong ideals and beliefs about schooling;
- Culture: Fosters shared beliefs and a sense of community and cooperation;
- Communication;
- Order; and
- Input: Involves others in decision making (Marzano et al., 2005).

Because most teams cannot fulfill all of these responsibilities at once, team members must strategize which actions they will focus on to most positively affect instruction and achievement. Again, principals should never assign specific actions — individual team members should choose them on the basis of their strengths.

Although some of these responsibilities will require extra planning, others are straightforward and quite doable — if, in fact, a team member possesses that strength. Consider, for example, the role of “optimizer.” Having the ability to inspire teachers and staff to accomplish things that might initially be beyond their grasp is key to the success of any instructional initiative. A leadership team member with this important skill can help the principal by going out into the building and spending time supporting instruction and teacher morale.

Or a team member with good input



**What's really important, over and beyond the number of actions chosen, is the leadership team's ability to carry out those actions with fidelity.**

skills, such as being a good listener, may take the time to get feedback on the initiative from various staff members. Having one or two individuals who possess this strength can make all the difference in helping individuals feel more connected with an initiative.



**CREATE THE INSTRUCTIONAL TIMELINE.**

Equally important as *what* is going to happen is *when* it's going to happen. Leadership actions do not all occur at the outset but rather are spread out over the course of an initiative. The recommended time frame is implementing actions every one to two months, which not only makes the team feel less overwhelmed about everything they need to do, but also allows them to focus on the present and makes tasks seem more doable.

Creating an instructional timeline involves simply laying out a monthly calendar for when events need to occur and, more important, who is responsible for ensuring they occur. It may take more than one leadership team member to carry out a task, which further emphasizes the importance of shared leadership and promotes accountability. This process is a team effort. Sharing the load is essential in the leadership team design.

Strategic actions might include

leading professional development; monitoring and evaluating the quality of instruction; determining and providing contingent rewards for outstanding teaching; checking student work to determine whether progress is occurring in all classrooms; offering consistent emotional support to teachers, students, and parents; and, above all, ensuring that teachers have the necessary resources to succeed.

The leadership team's creativity will determine the list of actions needed to support the success of the school's instructional initiative. The size of the team will determine just how many actions they can choose to implement. What's really important, over and beyond the number of actions chosen, is the leadership team's ability to carry out those actions with fidelity.



**HOLD WEEKLY STAND-UP MEETINGS.**

Accountability means everything when it comes to shared leadership. If each individual is not pulling his or her own weight, it can reduce the potential for success of any initiative, big or small. One way to ensure accountability is to have weekly stand-up meetings, which last no longer than 10 minutes.

During this time, each person briefly reports on how they are moving forward with the actions they

volunteered to implement. This is not to make team members feel good or bad about their accomplishments, but, rather, to push individual and group accountability and allow the team to see just where they are in the process and what adjustments they need to make.

This could very well mean that team members must modify their instructional timeline, add or subtract responsibilities, or even rethink their overall plan. The team must always remain flexible and willing to tweak the plan to achieve success.

Although principals are ultimately responsible for their schools' academic achievement, they will find greater, more long-lasting success if they share that responsibility with those who are able and willing to take it on. Building a team whose members all wear an "S" on their chests may be the most heroic and meaningful thing a principal can do to create a culture focused on better outcomes for all.

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*Joellen Killion and Cindy Harrison*

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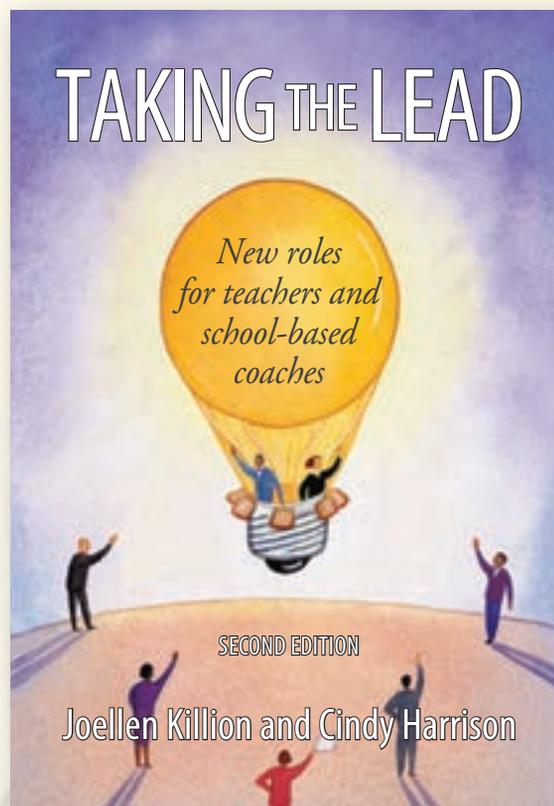
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- Deep discussions about the 10 roles of coaches;
- Real-world vignettes based on authentic experiences of coaches;
- Focus on the culture of coaching and the power of team coaching;
- Strategies for troubleshooting challenges to coaching; and
- Guidance for school- and system leaders who create the conditions supporting coaches and coaching programs.

With new content ranging from the strategic to the specific, this practical resource guides school-based coaches and leaders in the practice of student-focused coaching. System leaders may use *Taking the Lead* as they advocate the design of a coaching program focused on team, school, and district learning goals. School-based coaches and teacher leaders will find advice for coaching a reluctant colleague, drawing up an effective working agreement, reflecting on their own practice, or troubleshooting a challenge.

**B606**, 244 pages, **\$36** Members, **\$45** Nonmembers



THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION



*Taking the Lead*  
outlines 10 practical and  
powerful roles for school-  
based coaches responsible  
for helping teachers  
increase their capacity  
to serve all students.



**A legacy of leadership  
is more than a park bench  
with a bronze plaque.**

# LASTING LEGACIES

KENTUCKY SUPERINTENDENTS CREATE SUCCESS STRATEGIES THAT REACH INTO THE FUTURE

BY MICHAEL CHIRICHELLO

It was near the end of the interview, and the candidate for district superintendent faced one last question: “What is the legacy you are leaving behind in your current district?”

“It’s a bench,” he said, explaining that the district had placed a bench outside the district office with an inscribed bronze plaque thanking him for his service.

He was not hired.

A legacy of leadership is more than a bench, as demonstrated by six Kentucky school superintendents who share a common commitment to providing a resource for continuous professional learning for district superintendents. The six leaders met at the end of their doctorate of education program at Northern Kentucky University in May 2015 to contribute strategies for what they hoped would be an integral part of their leadership legacy in their districts.

The six superintendents believe these strategies will find lodging in the hearts and minds of school leaders who, like them, feel compelled to make a significant difference, to matter, and to know their lives count for something more than a bench.

They developed a website ([www.aspirationalschool.com](http://www.aspirationalschool.com)) that provides overarching strategies and numerous resources to help new and experienced superintendents lead from the head and the heart — to matter and make a difference in the lives of their students. Each focus — strategic planning, effective communication processes, continuous professional learning, innovative instruction, succession planning, and student success during post-secondary education — becomes a professional learning resource for district superintendents.

Here are their stories.

•  
**Michael Chirichello**  
([michael@leadershipmatters.us](mailto:michael@leadershipmatters.us))  
is a consultant with  
**Leadership Matters**  
in Swartswood, New  
Jersey.

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## STRATEGIC PLANNING

### 12 STEPS TO SUCCESS

**JAMES NEIHOF,**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
SHELBY COUNTY, KENTUCKY

**J**ames Neihof, superintendent in Shelby County, Kentucky, believes that strategic planning for the 21st century stems from a conviction that strategy must become more



James Neihof

than what a leader does. Rather, it is something one becomes: a strategic leader. This requires a conscious effort and deliberate practice to plan, develop, and execute an authentic strategic plan.

The district's 12-step process, the result of a districtwide action research project focused primarily on the strategic journey toward habitual effectiveness, begins with dreaming impossible dreams. From imagination and aspiration to celebrating the accomplishment of successes in a strategic plan, the impact on student growth and achievement in this district is beginning to increase. By fall 2016, two years into the plan, both college- and career-readiness percentages and high school scores were at record high levels for the district. Elementary and middle school state achievement scores remained comparable to 2014 levels, and achievement gaps had not yet been eliminated. While encouraged, everyone knew that work remained to be done to fully achieve the plan's goals.

An outgrowth of the district's strategic planning is what the district calls plan-

on-a-page, a self-monitoring process for principals to indicate one's measurable leadership impact on the strategic plan's implementation.

At the end of the year, each principal in the district shares his or her data based on the plan and reflects on the process during individual interviews with the superintendent. During these conversations at the end of each school year, principals' comments suggested that each had developed a high level of self-efficacy as they described what they chose to self-monitor to achieve the district's strategic plan. Here's one example of that self-efficacy in action.

In the early days of using the plan-on-a-page process, an elementary principal identified stagnant reading scores in a cohort of 4th graders, tracked the flatlining data back two years, and created a plan to double the students' growth. Using the plan-on-a-page structure, she designed and provided intervention for the group for one school year. She succeeded and, the following year, trained others on the staff to use her system, expanding her impact schoolwide.

Now, in the final year of the strategic plan, the district has achieved the plan's goals: writing and deploying a robust digital curriculum for teacher, parent, and student use; administrators routinely assessing the impact of their leadership actions and sharing data to prove the outcomes; teachers leading professional learning for each other; and community leaders engaging with the school district to create a new strategic plan for 2022 to achieve the outcomes of the graduate profile they helped create.

To learn more, visit  
[www.strategicschoolleader.com/action-research](http://www.strategicschoolleader.com/action-research).

## MEET THE SUPERINTENDENTS

◆ **James Neihof** is superintendent of Shelby County, Kentucky.

◆ **Anthony Orr** is interim superintendent of Powell County, Kentucky, and former superintendent of Nelson County, Kentucky.

◆ **J. Robin Cochran** is superintendent of Washington County, Kentucky.

◆ **Buddy Berry** is superintendent of Eminence Independent Schools, Kentucky.

◆ **Ron Livingood** is interim superintendent of Carroll County, Kentucky, and former superintendent of Grant County, Kentucky.

◆ **Robert Stafford** is superintendent of Owen County, Kentucky.

## EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION PROCESSES

### A COMMON LANGUAGE

**ANTHONY ORR,**  
FORMER SUPERINTENDENT,  
NELSON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Legacy leaders focus on a common language that refers directly to a district’s core values, highlighting connections between seemingly disparate initiatives. District leaders in Nelson County, Kentucky, realized that, despite thorough newspaper coverage, emailed superintendent messages, and web-based coverage of student achievements, communication efforts were falling short. The local community, parents, and even school staff lacked awareness and understanding of improvement efforts and resulting growth.



**Anthony Orr**

The communications system needed a significant overhaul to effectively integrate information about homework, school improvement plans, meeting agendas, and websites into daily life to help the community value the district’s work, manage change, and build a positive perception about the district for staff, parents, and other interested stakeholders.

Realizing that the district needed a plan for more effective communication with its staff, parents, and the community, then-superintendent Anthony Orr and his leadership team developed a strategic approach that focused on:

- Communicating regularly and frequently, helping staff with details needed for short-term task completion while connecting those tasks to a larger view of the organization’s primary function;
- Regularly and frequently revisiting the details and value of transformational work, leading stakeholders

from unawareness to adoption and internalization of change; and

- Implementing and monitoring communication plans that turn parents and staff into ambassadors who amplify the good news and gain the backing of the entire community.

To support these three key principles, the district implemented five strategies:

1. Take every opportunity to connect communications about the district’s work to its core values using a common language.
2. Tailor communication devices for specific audiences and purposes by repeating value-based vocabulary to connect task completion to purpose.
3. Communicate strategically to lighten the load for the staff.
4. Build commitment for the work by using multiple communication contacts to move stakeholders from initial contact to internalization of new and ongoing initiatives.
5. Use web-based shared documents to distribute the responsibility of developing district communication tools and messages.

The district developed and field-tested these three key principles and five strategies through an action research project, and this resulted in an improved communication process in Nelson County.

Consistently using a common language streamlined communication channels and individual messages. The leadership team developed stronger communication habits that led to more information being communicated less frequently. The primary messaging format further reduced time spent on new communications and reduced search time for staff members attempting to recall information transmitted previously.

To learn more, visit [www.integratecomlegacy.com](http://www.integratecomlegacy.com).

◆ *James Neihof:*

**From imagination and aspiration to celebrating the accomplishment of successes in a strategic plan, the impact on student growth and achievement in this district is beginning to increase.**

◆ *Anthony Orr:*

**Consistently using a common language streamlined communication channels and individual messages.**

◆ *J. Robin Cochran:*

**The desire to develop a continuous growth mindset that transforms one’s practices provides a legacy for the future.**

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## CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

A FOCUS ON THE LIFE CYCLE OF THE CAREER EDUCATOR

**J. ROBIN COCHRAN,**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
WASHINGTON COUNTY, KENTUCKY

**E**ffective leaders must create opportunities for ongoing professional learning that provide possibilities for individual and collaborative professional study,



J. Robin Cochran

analysis, application, and reflection that will continually improve professional practice and student learning outcomes. The desire to develop a continuous growth mindset that transforms one's practices

provides a legacy for the future.

J. Robin Cochran, superintendent in Washington County, Kentucky, developed powerful strategies from her research that supported her belief that continuous professional learning can positively impact the lifelong journey of the career teacher-educator. To create a culture that supports continuous professional learning, Cochran

believes that a district's leadership team must:

- Encourage reflective thought and action (planning, implementation, and refinement);
- Exemplify the relevance of new learning for all shareholders;
- Be focused and intentional;
- Facilitate shared learning and a growth mindset;
- Make connections to prior learning and experiences;
- Provide sufficient opportunities for deep learning that is supported and modeled;
- Provide opportunities for practice and feedback; and
- Involve inquiry into the teaching-learning process, relationships, and the individualization of our craft.

Her district now supports teachers who use strategies that include a two-day continuous self-guided learning plan, lesson study, peer observations, coaching, book studies, virtual learning communities, and professional learning communities. Cochran created a website that lists these designs for professional learning along with resources, tools, and videos that model the practices.

To learn more, visit  
[www.professionallearninglegacy.com](http://www.professionallearninglegacy.com).

## A GENERATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

These six superintendents believe that the pursuit of creating a legacy empowers leaders to understand leadership from a generational perspective — continually asking self-reflective questions:

- ◆ What lasting difference will my life's work make?
- ◆ Can my leadership decisions impact future generations?
- ◆ Am I here to do something that will last beyond my lifetime and that really matters?
- ◆ Can this learning legacy serve other district superintendents?

These six Kentucky superintendents — all under pressure to get results, all responding daily to state and federal expectations — knew that their hearts instinctively told them there is more to leadership than numbers.

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◆ *Buddy Berry:*

**Using the (Disney) Celebration School as a lesson on what to do and not do, the district's design team is focused on redesigning the American school.**

◆ *Ron Livingood:*

**This work provides a meaningful, problem-based, authentic curriculum for aspiring principals to know, understand, and apply as they move into formal leadership positions at the school level.**

◆ *Robert Stafford:*

**Long before high school, especially during middle school, students form ideas about attending college.**

## INNOVATIVE INSTRUCTION

REIMAGINING THE DISNEY DREAM

**BUDDY BERRY,**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
EMINENCE INDEPENDENT  
SCHOOLS, KENTUCKY

Innovative instruction stems from passion, purpose, and a willingness to color outside the lines. Students must be risk-takers who will invent, create, and design as they make their pathways

to the future. They must apply and use their knowledge every day.

Buddy Berry, superintendent of the Eminence Independent Schools in Kentucky, developed real-world examples of innovative practices along with strategies and resources for leaders who want to leave a legacy as frontrunners of innovation.

In reimagining instruction, the lead designers in this district reached back to the early 1990s to research the Disney Development Company's establishment of the Celebration Community. They examined the development of Disney's

first prototype community as originally designed by Walt Disney with his creation of EPCOT (The Experimental



**Buddy Berry**

Prototype Community of Tomorrow). The design of this ideal town took over eight years to create and several years to construct.

Disney planned the town around the K-12 Celebration School, which was to be the prototype of future schools.

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

AN INTENTIONAL PLAN

**RON LIVINGOOD,**  
FORMER SUPERINTENDENT,  
GRANT COUNTY, KENTUCKY

Creating and sustaining a pipeline for both new and aspiring school leaders demands that superintendents provide meaningful



**Ron Livingood**

professional learning opportunities for not only their principals and teachers, but also those aspiring to lead at the school level.

Ron Livingood, former superintendent of Grant County in Kentucky, noticed that existing professional development for young, aspiring leaders placed an emphasis on the theoretical components

of leadership but lacked the practical application of these components. It appeared that young leaders were becoming more data-driven than student-centered.

Livingood set out to develop a program designed to combine the theoretical constructs of quality educational leadership with a human approach to implementation that works. The desired outcome for all participants is to put all the pieces of educational leadership together to design a meaningful leadership vision, mission, and goals that will impact all students.

With this legacy in mind, he designed an intentional plan to provide aspiring school leaders opportunities to know how to develop and sustain a student-centered culture. Livingood's work provides a meaningful, problem-based, authentic curriculum for aspiring principals to know, understand, and apply as they move into formal

leadership positions at the school level.

This comment from one participant about the aspiring principals program reinforces the value of providing opportunities for teacher leaders to prepare for leadership roles: "Every time I speak and think about it, whether into a video camera, to administrators, with my colleagues, or in my own reflections, I realize more and more how much it inspired me. I think it's so great that you invested in your staff members and believed in us to acquire the skills, knowledge, information, and passion that you wanted to share as a legacy of leadership."

As a result of this program, two participants are now elementary curriculum coaches and one is the assistant special education director.

To learn more, visit <http://ronlivingood.wix.com/inspiring-culture>.

Disney conceived Celebration School to be an international model site for educators and teacher preparation. Eventually, Celebration School reverted to a more traditional model. Planners acknowledged that the experiment they undertook so enthusiastically and optimistically was too ambitious. No single school district had ever tried to use all the proposed principles simultaneously. It did not work.

Using the Celebration School as a lesson on what to do and not do, the district's design team is focused on redesigning the American school. Four

beliefs permeate this ongoing challenge: world-class knowledge and skills; student agency; anytime, anywhere, performance-based, personalized learning; and a comprehensive system of support.

Since applying these four beliefs to Eminence, teachers and students have taken on everything from coding and computer-aided design to international action research projects. Eminence became the first school district in Kentucky to achieve 100% college and/or career readiness by Kentucky state standards for two consecutive years,

meaning that all graduating students met the benchmarks for being college- or career-ready or both.

As a result, the schools are researching the impact of their personalized high school pathways, a process directly related to the district's innovative approaches to teaching and learning.

To learn more, visit [www.buddyberry.com](http://www.buddyberry.com).

## SUCCESSFUL POST-SECONDARY EDUCATION

PROMOTING RELATIONSHIPS, RESILIENCY, AND PARENTAL ENGAGEMENT

**ROBERT STAFFORD,**  
SUPERINTENDENT,  
OWEN COUNTY, KENTUCKY

**R**obert Stafford, superintendent of Owen County in Kentucky, believes that his responsibility is to create schools where every student can



Robert Stafford

succeed. School leaders in Owen County believed that former students who engage in retrospection of their high school education while attending a college

or university can offer insights that may be absent by the traditional method of surveying current students and parents.

To gather data, Stafford used videotaped interviews to explore perceptions about why these students

were successful in high school and eventually in post-secondary education. The video interviews provided qualitative data and uncovered three major themes that accounted for the former students' successes in post-secondary education: relationships, resiliency, and parental engagement.

As a result of this research, Stafford discovered that, long before high school, especially during middle school, students form ideas about attending college. Teacher-student relationships help establish those expectations and influence students' decisions about the career options they will pursue.

Resiliency is essential for students to persist through adversity and stay focused on achieving success. Intentional planning is essential to help students obtain the skills, habits, and attitudes needed for successful transition to post-secondary education. It is a trait that can be fostered throughout high school. The district uses student data to identify high-risk students who are then offered services to meet their individual needs.

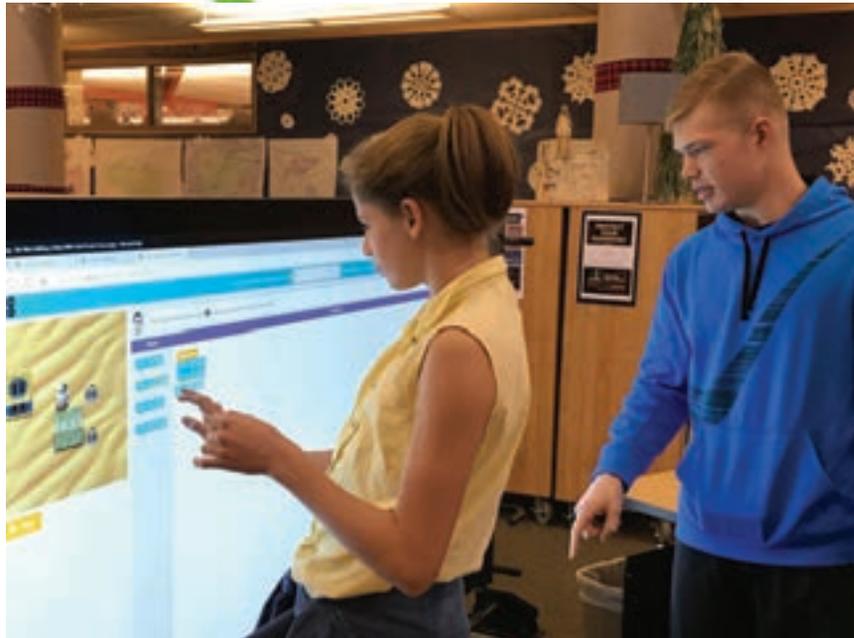
Additionally, students and their families need support to better

understand their post-secondary options. Teachers and administrators conduct student-parent conferences that focus on academic and social needs. The conferences have improved communication between home and school and reinforce positive student-centered relationships with the staff.

The district created teams that focus on the essential elements for individual student success. These teams engage in activities that build culture, and their guidance provides insight into what they consider important attributes that impact their learning.

During the interviews, a former Owen County student reflected, "The school system was really supportive. I think, if you ask pretty much any teacher, they are there for the kids. I can say that now that I am a teacher. They are not necessarily there for the education system or their paycheck. They are willing to help kids."

To learn more, visit <http://robertstafford3.wix.com/legacy-leader-d-in-p>.



Students at Oregon's Wilsonville High School collaborate during a computer science lesson. The West Linn-Wilsonville School District created a theory of action to improve student achievement in math.

# POWER UP YOUR PLANNING

A WELL-DEFINED THEORY OF ACTION LEADS TO SYSTEMWIDE CHANGE

BY SHARON WILLIAMS AND KAREN CLONINGER

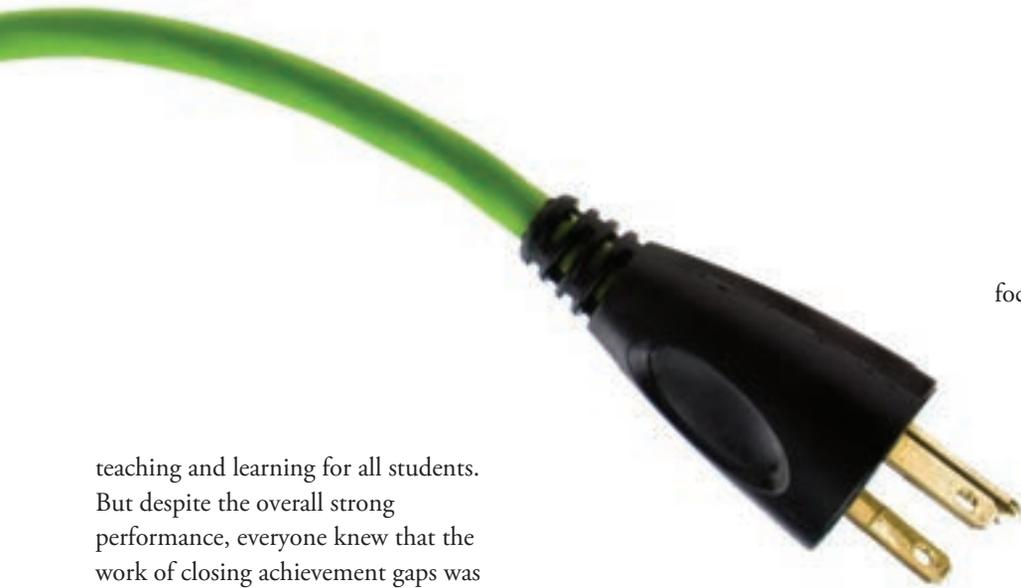
**W**hen Bill Rhoades became superintendent of Oregon's West Linn-Wilsonville School District in 2011, he inherited a school system with good results

according to typical measures.

Students at all levels were posting overall gains in their academic growth in reading and mathematics. The district had some of the highest graduation rates, lowest dropout rates, and highest college entrance rates

in the state. For a district of 9,500 students located in the greater Portland metropolitan area, these results were a source of pride.

A deeply engrained culture of learning pushed everyone to pursue ambitious goals of excellence in



teaching and learning for all students. But despite the overall strong performance, everyone knew that the work of closing achievement gaps was not complete. “It’s one thing to have the same goals, but do these goals get us to our ultimate goal of graduates who are ready to take on the world?” asked Rhoades.

Rhoades and his leadership team wondered how the district could move from alignment around goals to a coherent system of professional development that would lead everyone to feel confident and competent in their work to reach all students, especially the neediest.

The leadership team at West Linn-Wilsonville School District had learned about central office transformation through the Oregon Leadership Network and through study of the principal support framework offered by the University of Washington’s Center for Educational Leadership. For the team, the path forward began with a theory of action.

### WHAT IS A THEORY OF ACTION?

Through our work with school systems at the Center for Educational Leadership, we know that few districts succeed at balancing the learning and development needs of all participants — the neediest of students, teachers, and principals alike — without a clearly articulated theory of action. In simple terms, a theory of action is a story that describes the steps a district will take

at all levels of the system to reach the outcome of improved student learning.

The entire concept of a theory of action can be expressed in a deceptively simple sentence: *If the central office does X, then principals will be able to do Y, which will help teachers do Z, so that all students can [fill in with your students’ problem of learning].*

Although the theory of action sentence seems straightforward at first glance, it’s not quick to develop. A theory of action should articulate the specific problems of student learning and the contributing problems of teaching, school leadership, and central office support.

Its development should be based on evidence. It should explain the specific changes that participants across the system should make to address the identified problems of practice. In short, developing a theory of action requires a disciplined approach that involves four key principles.

#### 1 Start with students.

For Rhoades and the leaders of West Linn-Wilsonville, the work began with a simple question: How do we want students to experience mathematics in our high school classrooms?

The team chose mathematics as a

focus after considering three factors:

1. The general decline in mathematics achievement as students progressed through school.
2. The presence of opportunity gaps. Large numbers of students were not being recommended for advanced mathematics coursework as they transitioned between middle school and high school.
3. The role mathematics plays in developing higher-level thinking. Advanced mathematics coursework helps students reason, develop logic models, and support their answers with multiple representations.

Although it may be tempting to jump directly to perceived problems with teaching, leadership, or the central office, it’s only by developing a theory of action backward that creates a chain of causality that will produce solutions for student learning problems.

Through classroom walk-through data, the leadership team noticed a trend in high school mathematics classes. Although students had some opportunities to talk and express their learning with teachers and peers, the team noticed that student discourse was typically focused on providing the “right” answer and describing the process or path used to solve the problem.

Typically, teachers did most of the talking, followed closely by talk from boys. Students gained status in classrooms because they were “good” at solving a particular type of problem.

The leadership team knew that,

to see greater achievement for all students, students would need to increase the amount and quality of talk occurring in their mathematics classrooms. The team started by building on the strengths they saw in the classrooms, but the ultimate goal was for students to become aware of their own reasoning and logic — and this required ensuring that all students had an opportunity to participate fully in class.

For West Linn-Wilsonville, this meant moving toward discourse that focused on students providing justifications for their answers, discussing multiple ways of solving problems, and sharing their thinking about how they solved problems.

## 2 Focus on contributing problems.

School and system leaders need to consider not only problems in general, but also problems of practice that contribute to results for students. What are teachers doing (or not doing) in their teaching that is helping or hampering student learning? What are principals doing (or not doing) in their instructional leadership that is helping or hampering teacher performance?

The walk-through data revealed that teachers were giving students opportunities to talk and work in groups. Typical teacher strategies focused on step-by-step problem solving, whole-class questioning, and asking students to provide answers. Students who could provide the “right” answers were the primary talkers. Other students could opt out of talking in class.

As Superintendent Rhoades often said, “Whoever is doing the talking is doing the learning.” Equitable talk for all students was important. It wasn’t just a matter of reducing teacher talk, but, rather, of providing the opportunity and holding the expectation for all students



**A Trillium Creek Primary 3rd grader completes a computer programming activity. Walk-through data helped the leadership team focus on specific problems of student learning.**

strategy requires a deep scrutiny of evidence and a clearly articulated evidence-based rationale for all parts of the theory of action.

Ways to collect evidence include looking at student data, conducting learning walk-throughs, and having conversations with key personnel. As you build your theory of action, you should continually note areas where you need to collect more evidence.

Using learning walk protocols from the Center for Educational Leadership, members of the leadership team developed specific “look-fors” to focus their data collection. They gathered most of the data through observations of studio classrooms and lesson study.

Specifically, the team was looking for evidence of students justifying answers and claims, teachers conferring with students when students got stuck on problems, and teacher questioning strategies. Team members then analyzed the evidence and discussed strategies for improvement. This included scrutinizing current professional learning opportunities and consulting external experts.

The team also consulted with Teachers Development Group, an organization dedicated to increasing student achievement in math through effective professional development. On the basis of its observations, walk-throughs, and consultation with Teachers Development Group, the leadership team developed a key strategy for improvement: Central office leaders, principals, and teachers needed to experience the math themselves.

The leadership team wanted all parties to understand where students would likely struggle and how to

### A TOOL THAT CAN HELP

The Center for Educational Leadership at the University of Washington has developed a tool — Creating a Theory of Action — that guides district and school leaders in this complex process. The tool provides a step-by-step framework for creating a theory of action, using guiding questions about current learning and practice and about what needs to change. Districts have used this tool to examine entire systems and focus on specific challenges.

To download the 10-page tool, go to <http://info.k-12leadership.org/creating-a-theory-of-action>.

to engage in rich discourse around mathematical tasks.

The team concluded that paying attention to the tasks and prompts that teachers were giving could contribute to the quantity and quality of student participation — and that teachers could benefit from added support and professional development in this area.

## 3 Scrutinize strategies and evidence.

There are myriad improvement strategies in schools. But which contributing problems are the highest priority? Which problems are actually problems? To chart an improvement

All learners,  
many perspectives,  
one community.

SAVE  
THE  
DATE

*Make plans to attend the*  
**2018 LEARNING FORWARD  
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respond to encourage student thinking and problem solving. In studio sessions, teachers, principals, coaches, and central office leaders watched students doing the math and saw teachers practice their newly learned structures and strategies to improve the quantity and quality of student talk. In addition, with support from the Center for Educational Leadership, principals started to practice giving targeted feedback to teachers.

**4 Identify supports.**

Once team members decided on specific improvement strategies, they identified the internal and external professional development supports staff needed. Teachers needed greater expertise in coaching students to provide better feedback to their peers, in conferring with students in ways that continued the conversation and kept students thinking at a high level, and in promoting productive struggle to solve problems.

Instead of focusing on the process to get to the one “right” answer, various engagement strategies would promote multiple ways of solving problems and aid teachers in better selecting and sequencing concepts for student discussion.

Principals, instructional coaches, and teacher leaders needed to sharpen their lens for classroom observation and analysis, as well as their ability to provide targeted feedback to teachers in the areas of promoting student discourse, higher-level thinking and talking, protocols for student talk, and strategies for neutralizing status in the classroom.

The leadership team determined that, to effect the change it desired in high school mathematics classes, principals were the key levers for support. It was up to the principals as instructional leaders to research and provide the kinds of professional development that teachers needed and

**West Linn-Wilsonville School District**  
Tualatin, Oregon  
**Number of schools:** 14 (9 primary, 4 middle, 3 high schools)  
**Enrollment:** 9,873  
**Racial/ethnic mix:**  
**White:** 76%  
**Hispanic:** 11%  
**Multietnic:** 7%  
**Asian/Pacific Islander:** 5%  
**Black:** 1%  
**American Indian/Alaskan Native:** <1%  
**Limited English proficient:** 6%  
**Free/reduced lunch:** 18%  
**Special education:** 11%

to offer teachers those targeted learning opportunities. To support teachers, the principals themselves became the lead learners.

The district leadership team set up systems of support by focusing on principal learning networks — what West Linn-Wilsonville calls principal learning triads — to implement and sustain the new practices.

**THE RESULTS**

West Linn-Wilsonville’s theory of action can be expressed as follows:

*If the central office provides high-quality professional development in leading for mathematics improvement and facilitates principal learning triads, then principals will be able to provide targeted feedback and support to teachers as they implement new strategies to improve student discourse in mathematics classrooms so that students will increase the quality and quantity of their talk in mathematics.*

The theory of action anchors the leadership team’s three-pronged approach to professional learning: Align work by nesting teacher, school, and district goals; ensure fidelity of implementation by organizing learning

in authentic, job-embedded contexts; and motivate staff with professional learning that inspires and provides meaning.

West Linn-Wilsonville’s commitment to learning for all pushed the district to ensure that adults have the time to be learners and leaders and become confident and competent in their work around ambitious goals.

Explained Superintendent Rhoades, “We can’t mandate what matters, so we started by creating an awareness for a need.” Then the leadership team created professional development opportunities that no one wanted to miss. The biggest hope that Rhoades had when the leadership team began this work in 2011 was that everyone in the district “believe deeply in our children in a way that causes children to believe in themselves.” This belief drives every action of the district to provide broad and rich learning opportunities for students.

Through a clearly articulated theory of action, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District has done what few other districts succeed at doing: Balancing the learning needs of everyone in the system to produce impressive results.

The district has now seen its four-year graduation rate rise from 89.1% in 2011-12 to 93% in 2015-16. For Rhoades and his leadership team, closing achievement and opportunity gaps for the neediest of students meant using a theory of action to take the district from good to great.

**Sharon Williams (swill7@uw.edu) is a project director at the University of Washington Center for Educational Leadership in Seattle, Washington. Karen Cloninger (cloningerk@evsd.org), formerly a project director at Center for Educational Leadership, is an assistant superintendent in East Valley School District in Spokane, Washington. ■**

Reach. Investigate. Discover.

# IDEAS

*The  
perfect  
mix*  
p. **50**

## **WITHOUT A MAP, YOU MAY GET LOST**

**"O**ne of the challenges of implementing any initiative, especially at multiple school sites, is implementation drift or failure. Our design team realized that we must create tools for school leaders that would paint a clear picture of blended learning instructional models and support the implementation of blended learning in their buildings.

"We also knew that, for deep implementation, we needed to be mindful of the change process. We used our working definitions of blended learning to craft an Innovation Configuration map that would help clarify what the practices looked like in use."



Middle-level teacher leaders and administrators discuss implementation of the blended learning initiative using the Innovation Configuration after attending a blended learning conference in Denver, Colorado. Participants include (clockwise from left): Bill Fearn (in striped shirt), Ryan Fitzpatrick, Coleen Lowance, Teresa Santos, Katie Guilbert, Bill Alexander, Traci Underwood, Laura Williams, and Jon Cooney.

# THE PERFECT MIX

WITH BLENDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING, LEARNERS CHOOSE TIME, PLACE, PATH, AND PACE

BY AMIE CIEMINSKI AND DEAGAN ANDREWS

**C**athy Nelson is a pioneer. She says she likes leading change and will try new methods to get improved results for the students and staff at the elementary school where she

is principal.

Three years ago, Nelson heard about blended learning as a way to integrate technology and teacher-led instruction in the classroom and was hopeful that blended learning might

produce better learning outcomes for students at Meeker Elementary in Greeley, Colorado.

She participated in individual and collective learning with her staff as they participated in book studies, online

courses, school visits, and collaborative discussions. She attended our principal leadership in blended learning program and collaborated with other principals and district leaders.

Meanwhile, her assistant principal worked on getting more computers for their school. They made space for minilabs, added wireless routers, and minimized barriers to implementation.

Some staff members embraced technology and were eager to begin, while others were hesitant, but they all showed a collective will to try something different. Nelson and her staff created a shared vision and plan for blended learning, chose digital content, and began the implementation process.

They used collaborative planning and weekly released time to learn together and work on improved instruction. Nelson listened to teachers' voices and examined student results as they continued to refine their implementation. She used observation tools to provide focused feedback to her teachers and was open to improving schoolwide implementation through feedback from others.

In fall 2016, Nelson's school welcomed visitors as part of the school district's first blended learning summit. The visitors expressed amazement at the strides the school had made in just a few years. The school's rating on the Colorado School Performance Framework provides evidence of the

### **Greeley-Evans School District** Greeley, Colorado

**Number of schools:** 33 (12 elementary, 5 K-8, 4 middle schools, 6 high schools, and 6 charter schools)

**Enrollment** (2017-18): 22,301

#### **Racial/ethnic mix:**

**Hispanic:** 60%

**White:** 33%

**Black, Asian, or two or more races:** 7%

**Limited English proficient:** 24%

**Free/reduced lunch:** 63%

**Funding:** Currently ranked 145 out of 178 for per-pupil funding with the passage of a mill levy override in November 2017. Before that, the district was the 10th-lowest funded school district in Colorado.

growth in student learning. The school moved from Priority Improvement Plan in 2013, defined as not meeting state expectations for student performance indicators, to Performance Plan in 2016, defined as meeting expectations.

### **THE STARTING POINT**

The Greeley-Evans School District in Colorado began moving toward innovation several years ago as district leaders searched for ways to improve student achievement, leverage technology, and stay within a very limited budget.

The district, which is north of Denver, serves a diverse student community of over 21,000 K-12

students, including a large population of English language learners. The district has a history of providing quality professional learning, usually in a face-to-face setting with a cadre of instructional coaches and leaders during the workday or at released time sessions.

Principals and other leaders support ongoing professional learning using observation tools, job-embedded opportunities, and data-dialogue meetings with teams of teachers.

In 2014, district leaders created a five-year blended learning implementation plan to increase student achievement that included actions related to devices, budget, infrastructure, connecting stakeholders, and investing in people.

To maximize human and material resources, we identified a few schools that would serve as pilot sites and provide information that would support the implementation of blended learning at other schools by assessing the readiness of teachers and leaders, technology, and school culture.

Blended learning is an instructional model that facilitates personalized learning by leveraging technology tools and digital content as well as teachers' content and pedagogical expertise. It takes place in a traditional school building and adds the effective use of education technology to transform the learning experience for students.

Blended learning allows technology

SAMPLE ELEMENT OF GREELEY-EVANS' SCHOOLWIDE BLENDED LEARNING INNOVATION CONFIGURATION			
<p><b>KEY ELEMENT: Tight feedback loops (Data-driven decisions):</b> Data from digital tools and other sources are used to make decisions about student learning related to standards and provide students specific and timely feedback on their performance and academic growth in relation to standards.</p>			
1 Beginning	2 Emerging	3 Stabilizing	4 Systematizing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Infrequent use of digital tools leads to not enough data to inform instruction.</li> <li>• Infrequent use of assessment data from digital tools to make differentiated student decisions.</li> <li>• Primary reliance on classroom data.</li> <li>• Individual teacher-determined data kept by teacher.</li> <li>• Students receive infrequent feedback.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital content beginning to be used with some frequency, providing students additional feedback and more meaningful data to inform differentiated instruction.</li> <li>• Beginning use of assessment data from digital tools but inconsistent use inhibits decisions for differentiation.</li> <li>• Intermittent use of external, digital, and classroom data.</li> <li>• Data are analyzed primarily on an individual basis.</li> <li>• Students receive infrequent feedback that is timely or specific.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Digital content is being used for the recommended time.</li> <li>• Assessment data used to make decisions about students — primarily differentiated student groupings.</li> <li>• Frequent triangulation of external, digital, and classroom data.</li> <li>• Data teams meet on a regular basis along with individual teachers to make instructional decisions.</li> <li>• Data are stored and used from online systems to provide general trends.</li> <li>• Students receive timely and specific feedback through a variety of sources.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is a clear link between data from digital content and differentiated instruction.</li> <li>• Assessment data are used consistently to make decisions about individual student paths.</li> <li>• Consistent and well-designed blending of external, digital, and classroom data.</li> <li>• Consistent use of data by teams and individual teachers.</li> <li>• Data stored and used from online systems to provide deep analytics.</li> <li>• Students receive immediate feedback regarding performance and growth through a combination of digital tools and directly from their teacher on a daily basis.</li> </ul>
COACHING QUESTIONS			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What assessment data are readily apparent? How can they be used?</li> <li>• Who has an awareness of the data? How are they used or shared?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• How are digital tool data used?</li> <li>• What is the frequency of the use?</li> <li>• How are classroom and digital data compared?</li> <li>• What are data used for? [grades vs. differentiation]</li> <li>• Who has an awareness of the data? How are they used or shared?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For what purposes are data used?</li> <li>• What is the frequency of usage?</li> <li>• How are various data compared and contrasted?</li> <li>• How can data be used to differentiate groups?</li> <li>• What is the impact of the decisions?</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What are the differentiation decisions being made? Are there others?</li> <li>• What analytics is used to provide feedback? Are there others to use?</li> <li>• What is the impact of the decisions?</li> </ul>

and teachers to do what they do best by integrating teacher-led instruction with high-quality digital educational content customized to each student's needs and abilities.

Professional learning for blended learning started with book studies and online courses to help teachers and leaders understand blended learning

models and how to implement these models in the classrooms.

For any initiative to be successful, it needs administrator support. We needed to help principals and assistant principals become leaders of blended learning in their buildings. To make this possible, a team of principals and school district leaders participated in

professional learning for facilitators at the Friday Institute at North Carolina State University in winter 2015.

They developed a five-module series to support leadership in blended learning centered on five core concepts: defining blended learning; creating a culture that supports blended learning; shifting teaching and learning;

supporting teachers; and planning, implementing, and sustaining blended learning.

By participating in mostly face-to-face learning sessions, site-based leaders would learn about leading change in and implementing blended learning and create a road map for their school. The district's leadership in blended learning team was excited about the content of these learning modules.

However, we immediately began thinking of ways to design the professional learning that aligned with blended learning principles. This would allow leaders to experience the kinds of learning they were expected to support for students in their buildings.

### **MOVING FROM TRADITIONAL TO BLENDED PROFESSIONAL LEARNING**

When designing professional learning that would support school district leaders and teachers in blended learning, our leadership in blended learning design team decided that we should move beyond traditional formats.

The leadership in blended learning team identified the group's needs, set goals for learning, created learning experiences using blended instructional models, and made adjustments along the way. We intentionally built collaboration into each learning session so principals could share their experiences, build on each other's expertise, and solve issues together.

We began by integrating technology tools within the sessions. Principals brought their laptops and tablets, and we created new norms that encouraged the use of technology during professional learning sessions.

Instead of sticky notes and markers, we used apps such as Padlet to brainstorm and Plickers and AnswerGarden to check for understanding. We also explained to

participants that blended learning was vastly different than simply substituting technology for paper-and-pencil tools. We needed to redesign other aspects of the professional learning experience and incorporate blended learning instructional models into our professional learning design.

We looked back at our working definition of blended learning, which involved learner choice of time, place, path, and pace. Incorporating choice of pace and path into our training designs, we created online modules using Schoology, a learning management system. Learners self-assessed their prior knowledge and took the beginner or intermediate path to learn more about a topic. Participants also had a choice of readings, videos, and discussion topics within the learning module.

Because we did not want to create gaps in learning for some learners depending on the path they choose, we created learning menus, which are helpful tools for differentiated instruction. The menus contained "must-dos" so that we could make sure that all learners were mastering essential content and "can-dos," which allowed learners to choose topics that were of interest or need to them.

Although there are several models of blended learning such as flipped learning, flex models, or lab rotation, station rotation was the most popular instructional design for blended learning in our pilot schools. In a station rotation, learners generally rotate through two or three stations that each focus on a different mode of delivery.

One station may be small-group instruction with the teacher for targeted learning, another station may be independent work with digital content and technology, and a third station may involve collaborative, face-to-face tasks with other learners.

Station rotation allows for collective learning as well as personalized learning

as collaborative groups are flexible and needs-based, instruction with the facilitators offers just-in-time training, and learners are able to choose different paths within the digital content.

The leadership in blended learning design team wanted adults to experience station rotation as learners and then have time to reflect on the experience. At the teacher station, we modeled using flexible groups based on different learner needs because the principals attending had a wide range of experience. Some had been implementing blended learning, some were going to begin implementation in the next few months, and the rest were at the awareness and initial stages of learning about blended learning.

At the technology station, participants worked independently using digital content and discussion boards to take different learning paths.

At the collaboration station, participants shared personal experiences, resources, tips, struggles, and solutions with fellow learners. We structured the activities, and principals served as facilitators.

By putting the learners in the seat of a student in a blended learning environment, leaders experienced firsthand the joys and frustrations that students would experience in the classroom.

### **WITHOUT A MAP, YOU MAY GET LOST**

One of the challenges of implementing any initiative, especially at multiple school sites, is implementation drift or failure. Our design team realized that we must create tools for school leaders that would paint a clear picture of blended learning instructional models and support the implementation of blended learning in their buildings.

We also knew that, for deep implementation, we needed to be

## For more information on blended learning, check out these resources:

- What is blended learning?: [www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning](http://www.christenseninstitute.org/blended-learning)
- Blended learning resource library: <http://learningaccelerator.org/recommendations-and-resources-for-school-districts>
- Personalized learning resources: [www.edelements.com/personalized-learning-resources](http://www.edelements.com/personalized-learning-resources)
- Leadership in blended learning at the Friday Institute for Educational Innovation: <http://pll.cfi.ncsu.edu/lbl>
- Greeley-Evans School District blended learning information: [www.greeleyschools.org/Page/13456](http://www.greeleyschools.org/Page/13456)

mindful of the change process. We used our working definitions of blended learning to craft an Innovation Configuration map that would help clarify what the practices looked like in use. An Innovation Configuration (IC) map is a concrete tool that describes the expectations for implementation of a new program or practice (Richardson, 2004).

The design team created the initial draft borrowing ideas from similar tools created by blended learning consultants and leaders in the Uinta School District in Wyoming. The design team then took the IC map to groups of principals, assistant principals, and early teacher implementers for feedback and refinement.

We wanted to make sure that the tool reflected common understandings of best instructional practice, blended learning, and stages of implementation. Additionally, the review of the tool provided another opportunity for collaborative conversations and the co-construction of knowledge.

The map has four components: targeted small-group instruction, tight feedback loops (data-driven decisions), student ownership, and quality student-to-student interactions (see sample IC map on p. 52). Because we wanted to keep the focus on instruction, we did not create components about specific technology tools, devices, or digital content. We intended to be tight about the blended learning principles in the components and loose about the specific blended learning model teachers employ.

Some people may not initially view quality interactions as part of a blended learning implementation, but for our school district, it was a necessity. With almost 25% of our students learning English, we wanted to integrate the models of blended learning with previous professional learning efforts concerning quality teaching for English learners. Furthermore, since the IC focuses on instructional practices, there was more alignment with the instructional practices contained in the Colorado State Model Evaluation System for teachers.

Since its inception, the IC map has proven to be a valuable tool for quality implementation and is used for self-assessment, implementation monitoring, constructive feedback, and planning next steps for individuals and staffs.

At many of our site-based learning sessions and community of practice meetings, participants use one or more of the components of the IC as a preassessment and set personal learning goals. During one-on-one sessions, instructional coaches use a cognitive coaching model in which a teacher reflects on current practice, chooses a domain to focus attention, sets goals for using the descriptors, and creates a plan to move forward.

Principals report that they use the IC to focus professional learning at their sites, set individual goals with teachers, coach individuals, and measure schoolwide implementation of blended learning practices.

Often principals or leadership

teams invite other principals, assistant principals, district leaders, instructional coaches, teachers, or outside visitors to observe classrooms to look for evidence of implementation using the IC as an observation tool. The data is collected through an online survey and then compiled into a report complete with pictures of implementation, commendations, links to other resources, and possible next steps for the staff to consider.

As we have continued using the IC, we have learned that introducing all four components of the map can be daunting. For schools or teachers that are just beginning to explore blended learning, we focus on the targeted small-group instruction component because it emphasizes differentiated instruction.

Next, we focus on quality student-to-student interactions because the collaborative tasks are often overshadowed by technology or small-group instruction. Even though they are distinct components, one principal said, “The great thing about the IC is that if they (the teachers) are doing well in one domain, it positively impacts others.”

## TAKING RISKS

Because we are asking other educators to take risks in their teaching and leading, we want to make sure that we model risk-taking through our professional learning designs. We created community of practice groups that meet face-to-face and virtually using our learning management system

with other practitioners to solve problems of practice, share successes, and network.

We used social media to encourage people to build their own personal learning networks and connect with others outside the school district. We experimented with webinars, back-channel tools, and virtual meetings. We discussed microcredentialing and tried badges.

There have been bumps in the road, such as when the Internet connection is lost, we forget to share documents, or our strategy is not effective. We have used these experiences as additional learning opportunities and ways to further the implementation of blended learning by asking, “What can you do when the technology fails?” or “How do you know that what you are doing is working?”

In the last few years, we have seen principals take more risks in the professional learning design at their sites, allowing more teacher leadership and choices for learning, and incorporating more technology tools and blended models. For example, one school combined the efforts of its professional learning and technology committees to offer three different learning options for teachers during site-based professional learning times.

One K-8 principal offered teachers a personalized professional learning menu that allowed each teacher to choose an area of focus from the IC and the preferred method for professional learning. He also leveraged the learning management system to house resources and online discussions so that teachers could learn at their own pace and at times convenient to them.

An elementary principal said, “I am learning that teams can learn, have deep conversations, and high levels of implementation without sitting and hearing the same information from me. In fact, better ideas come from teams

when I’m not leading.”

One middle school principal said she sees students and staff more willing to try new things and know that failing is part of the learning process. “There has been support from students when they see their teachers trying something new, just as there is support from teachers when students are working on new learning,” she said.

However, blended design is not always the best mechanism, and forcing a certain model into professional learning does not always work well. One principal explained his approach to personalized professional learning for his staff this way: “Sometimes we use a traditional model, sometimes individual flex. Sometimes we break out into targeted groups, and sometimes we use a hybrid of these.”

## CONTINUING THE LEARNING

Upon reflection, our team has identified several keys to our success, including the importance of establishing communities of fellow learners that were implementing blended learning, allowing participants to personalize learning for themselves and their schools, and continual reflection and refinement.

By creating a diverse team of lead learners, we tapped the strengths of each person, built credibility with other leaders, and developed stronger norms of collaboration. By leveraging partnerships within our community and with outside organizations, we accelerated our learning of best practice and tailored practices to meet the needs of our school district.

Evaluations from our sessions indicated that teachers and leaders appreciated moving away from one-size-fits-all professional learning, having choices, and meeting with other learners in communities of practice.

We intentionally seek opportunities to learn from others, reflect on that

learning, adapt to the needs of students and adults, and share learning with others in and outside of the district. To that end, we have taken high school teams of teachers and principals on excursions to other high schools implementing blended learning models.

In fall 2016, the school district hosted a blended learning summit in which we showcased what we have learned from our attempts to leverage technology for the sake of our students through speakers, breakout sessions, and site visits.

We demonstrated the use of the IC as a tool for growth and several blended learning practices at the district’s 2016 and 2017 blended learning summits, which attracted participants from other school districts. By incorporating blended learning models in our professional development, we differentiated and met the needs of all of our adults better than before.

We have seen our best teachers change the blended learning model to match the intended learning targets and students’ needs daily. We want to demonstrate that same openness to new learning and responsiveness to meeting the needs of our principals and teachers through all of our professional learning.

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## HOW CURRICULUM AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING INTERSECT

**R**esearch has found that high-quality curricula have a significant impact on student achievement (Steiner, 2017; Chingos & Whitehurst, 2012). But a curriculum is not effective on its own. It requires teachers who understand it and use it with intentionality and professional judgment.

This means teachers who know the curriculum and their students well. It also means teachers who have the time and support to hone their practice collaboratively in a way that brings the curriculum alive and advances student learning (Wiener & Pimentel, 2017).

Learning Forward will explore this critical topic deeply throughout our publications and at our institutes and Annual Conference. The two articles that follow are a key starting point.

In the first, p. 57, Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh takes a close look at the work school-based learning teams do in studying their

curriculum materials to improve capacity and refine teaching. The second, p. 58, by Learning Forward Deputy Executive Director Frederick Brown, examines the role of leadership in implementing high-quality curriculum in Wake County Public School System in North Carolina.

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# Focus professional learning communities on curriculum

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH

Grade-level, subject-specific professional learning communities are the vehicle for achieving the promise of high-quality curriculum. Surveys have found that teachers regularly supplement and modify district curricula or use materials that they or their colleagues developed (Kane, Owens, Marinell, Thal, & Staiger, 2016; Opfer, Kaufman, & Thompson, 2016). Professional learning communities have the potential to ensure that those decisions are made carefully and in ways that increase coherence and learning across classrooms within a school.

At the same time, they also have the potential to ensure that the best ideas are shared across community members' classrooms rather than confined to a single classroom. In this way, well-structured professional learning communities can help advance equity for all students in a school and, when implemented consistently across all schools, within a school district.

## GREEN DOT PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Instruction Partners, a nonprofit that works with teachers and leaders to strengthen instruction and unlock student potential, recently published a white paper examining the experiences of schools implementing rigorous curricula.

One of the sites it works with is Green Dot Public Schools in Memphis, Tennessee. At Green Dot, teachers use an alternating structure for their work.

One week a month, teachers work in grade-level teams using a protocol to unpack an upcoming lesson together. During this time, teachers focus on preparing a lesson, such as solving the math problems they will present to students, anticipating where students might get stuck and how to support them without watering down rigor, and how to guide text-based discussions.

In the other weeks, teachers review student work from the lesson they had planned together and analyze the work to refine their instructional practice. They might look at exit ticket data, examine common assessment data for trends, and pinpoint opportunities for reteaching or things to keep in mind as they move forward to the next unit.

Green Dot is doing this in grade-specific learning teams across its network of five schools, and it has selected curriculum leads — expert teachers from each grade — to facilitate.

Teachers work closely with the curriculum lead to determine which lessons are must-do versus may-do, pacing, and which questions to make anchor questions across classrooms. Green Dot continues to make adjustments to its approach in response to teacher feedback, such as shifting



from virtual to in-person meetings.

“I think teachers definitely learn best when they learn from one another,” says Chrystie Edwards, director of academics for Green Dot in Memphis. “One of the best outcomes that we didn’t anticipate was the productive struggle for adults ... for one teacher to see another teacher struggle and persist, and to see the corresponding increase in achievement data is a motivator beyond no other. We’re starting to see pockets of that.”

Instead of spending their time writing lessons from scratch or searching for materials online, teachers can now go deeper into content and understanding how to meet each student’s needs. They then are positioned to modify and supplement the lessons in ways that increase coherence and learning. And by reviewing student work and assessing what is working together, they can advance equity.

*Continued on p. 58, Hirsh*

# How systems can support high-quality curricula

BY FREDERICK BROWN

Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh argues that the impact of high-quality curricula will be fully realized when grade-level, subject-specific professional learning communities place deep study and planning for how to use these instructional materials at the core of their work. (See article on p. 57.)

But, as Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning make clear, those teams should be part of a more comprehensive, multifaceted approach to educator learning. System leaders and the system itself play a critical role in providing support and context for this important work.

One example of that is how the Wake County Public School System in North Carolina has approached the first



adoption of new curricula in a decade. The district, which serves 160,000 students, was part of the Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017. The Academy experience helped inform the district’s approach: To ensure equitable

access to powerful learning every day, school systems must ensure that teachers engage in ongoing professional learning grounded in the materials they use daily with students.

## THE CURRICULUM GAP

“We had a really slow and strategic curriculum strategy process,” says Brian Kingsley, assistant superintendent for academics. It began in the 2015-16 school year, when the district worked with TNTP to use a walk-through tool in 250 classrooms to see how instruction was shifting to align with the state’s new learning standards. The district also held focus groups with teachers and students about the instructional materials they were using.

“It was pretty glaring how big of a

*Continued from p. 57, Hirsh*

## BECOMING A LEARNING TEAM

I’ve written about this (with Tracy Crow) in the book *Becoming a Learning Team* (2017), which outlines a learning cycle for teachers in teams.

In our five-stage cycle, teachers examine data to identify areas for their learning focus, set student and educator learning goals, create a learning agenda for themselves, implement their learning with support from colleagues, and assess outcomes and modify their actions to improve results.

Teachers’ collaboration throughout the cycle is focused on what students are learning — or not — in the classroom. And that is grounded in the curriculum in place in the school.

These types of structured learning teams are at the heart of Learning Forward’s Standards for Professional Learning. And they are the connective tissue between having curriculum as a resource and using a curriculum well.

Strong learning communities must be part of a coherent instructional improvement infrastructure that must also include:

- **Skillful leaders**, who develop capacity and advocate for and create support systems for professional learning;
- **Resources** that are prioritized, monitored, and coordinated for educator learning;
- A variety of sources and types of **student, educator, and system data** to plan, assess, and evaluate professional learning;
- Effective **learning designs** that integrate theories, research, and models of human learning to achieve its desired outcomes;

gap there was between what teachers were using, what they had access to, and what was truly standards-aligned and rigorous,” says Kingsley. “Our standards across the country really elevated with the Common Core, but, at the same time, we had a recession. So, unfortunately, curriculum budgets bottomed out just as we were raising expectations for teachers and kids.”

As a result, many Wake County teachers were developing their own units independently, with a heavy reliance on Pinterest, Teachers Pay Teachers, and other open educational resources that were not necessarily standards-aligned or comprehensive in nature.

Wake County sent out a request for proposals to identify standards-aligned curricula that also met several other district criteria: cultural responsiveness, compatibility with its existing learning management and student information systems, cost, and alignment with the district’s strategic plan.

The district then rated all of the potential winners for standards alignment by using the Instructional Materials Evaluation Tool developed by Student Achievement Partners and by reviewing ratings on EdReports, an independent, third-party arbiter.

In the end, Wake County selected

two sets of comprehensive open educational resource materials that had received high ratings on EdReports: EL Education’s English language arts curriculum for grades 3-8 and the Mathematics Vision Project curriculum for grades 9-12.

One of the biggest values of using the two comprehensive sets of open educational resources, says Kingsley, was that it enabled the district to free up dollars that would have been spent on textbooks for professional learning. The district has invested more than \$1.5 million in professional learning this year tied to the new curriculum materials.

### GOING SLOW TO GO FAST

The district chose to go slow to go fast. In the 2017-18 school year, it implemented the EL Education curriculum with teachers in grades 3 and 6 and the Mathematics Vision Project curriculum in Math 1 only. All teachers in those grades are engaging in four days of in-person professional learning over the course of the year to unpack the curriculum, led by the curriculum developers. The district also created online Google communities for teachers by grade and subject to share ideas.

“That’s been instrumental to making them realize that they’re not

doing this in isolation,” says Kingsley. “It also helps with coherence because teachers across all of our schools are now using the same content. I’m excited about what that means from the lens of equity in our school system.”

But the district realized skillful curriculum use cannot rest solely with teachers. It also has implications for leadership throughout the system. So Wake County created instructional leadership teams at every school in the district that include the principal and eight to 10 other members of the school staff. The goal, says Kingsley, “was so we could all learn together what high-quality instruction looks like rather than doing it in silos.”

Those teams come together as cohorts across the district six times over the course of the year to also learn about the new curricula and about successful pedagogical practices, based on the district’s instructional blueprint.

Each instructional leadership team is responsible for developing the professional learning plan for its school site, based on its existing infrastructure, from professional learning teams, to faculty meetings, to daylong retreats.

The last piece of the district’s three-legged stool is a district instructional

*Continued on p. 60, Brown*

- **Implementation** that supports long-term change, based on understanding the change management process;
- **Outcomes** aligned with educator performance and state education standards.

Research demonstrates that two of the most powerful levers for improving student learning are effective teachers and high-quality curricula. Bringing them together in structured, professional learning communities has the potential to improve teaching to the benefit of all students.

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## TAKEAWAYS

Several lessons to take away from Wake County's experience:

- **Wake County's educators** recognize that an excellent curriculum provides a foundation to quality lessons in all classrooms. At the same time, they understand that implementing new curriculum is challenging. While professional development can support many initiatives, nothing was more important in this case than investing resources for professional learning for the successful implementation of the curriculum.

- **Leaders help to create** cultures where educators share the value that a teacher's time is best spent



contextualizing effective curriculum and lessons rather than searching for them. When teachers have confidence they are working with high-quality materials, they can apply their professional expertise to ensuring every student has a meaningful learning experience.

- **Leaders have the responsibility** to establish a vision and framework for identifying, selecting, and implementing the curricula, and then, through the course of implementation, apply change management principles when introducing new materials and pacing

gradual implementation. In fact, this responsibility is outlined in the *Professional Standards for Educational Leaders 2015*, which state, "Effective educational leaders develop and support intellectually rigorous and coherent systems of curriculum, instruction, and assessment to promote each student's academic success and well-being" (National Policy Board for Educational Administration, p. 12).

Teams at multiple levels share collective responsibility for supporting this complex work. Principals and central office administrators distribute leadership and spread learning through school and district instructional leadership teams that include educators from various levels.

The Standards for

Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) are embodied throughout this work: **Leadership** as leaders advocate for job-embedded professional learning; **Outcomes** as educators emphasize the importance of equity and rigorous student standards in materials selection; **Learning Communities** as teachers use a learning cycle to ensure effective implementation, to name just three.

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— Frederick Brown

*Continued from p. 59, Brown* leadership team, comprising all principal supervisors, academic senior directors, assistant superintendents, and the deputy superintendent. "Anybody who is a senior leader in our district who touches instruction is a part of this working group," says Kingsley, "as well as a cohort of five principals to ensure a school-based perspective is front and center."

The district leadership team stays six months ahead of what the school-based leadership teams are experiencing to ensure alignment.

## ENCOURAGING RESULTS

So far, the results have been encouraging. Baseline data from teachers show:

- Seven in 10 teachers believe the new curricula to be of high

quality.

- Eight in 10 understand how the new curriculum materials are aligned to the rigor of the standards.
- Eight in 10 believe the new curricula demonstrate opportunities for students to engage in the "4 Cs" of communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking.

At the same time, teachers have expressed a desire for more training around issues like pacing, questioning techniques, and how to continue scaffolding English language learners.

Based on the feedback, the district will implement the English language arts curriculum across grades 3-8 next school year, and the high school math curriculum across the three relevant

math courses. And it is conducting an internal evaluation to continue to monitor the impact of the new instructional materials and professional learning on teachers and students.

"I'm excited about where we're headed," says Kingsley. "We still have a lot of learning to do, but we've made some key decisions about what these processes look like in our schools. Our principals and teachers are reaping the benefits of having a consistent message, but they also realize we've raised the game in terms of expectations."

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



Discuss. Collaborate. Facilitate.

# TOOLS

## EFFECTIVE COLLABORATION BUILDS TRUST

**“W**ith effective collaboration, district leaders create trusting relationships. Employees know they can count on district leaders to be reliable, sincere, and competent. Trust and shared vision cannot come from a directive or mandate; they come from hours of conversation about what is important to the learning community, from goals that stakeholders set, and as the result of actions and learning undertaken to achieve those goals.”

**Source:** Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

## CREATE LEARNING SYSTEMS, NOT SILOS

BY STEPHANIE HIRSH, KAY PSENCIK,  
AND FREDERICK BROWN

In a learning system, central office personnel assume collective responsibility for schools and go about their work very differently.

They are responsible not only for departments and programs, but also for student learning. They demonstrate that responsibility by engaging in data-informed conversations about student achievement.

These conversations model a culture of collective responsibility for schools. When district administrators regularly and actively engage with site-based staff, they eliminate any mystery about how district leaders are facilitating, coaching, and supporting schools' work.

Effective central offices have transitioned from a commanding and controlling management style to one focused on support and solutions. As professional learning has moved from a centralized to a school-based function, central office staff members' work has changed from determining content and delivering the learning to assisting school staff.

In a learning system, leaders

Excerpted from: **Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014).** *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

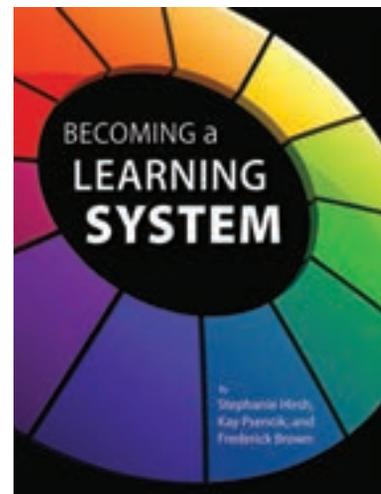
collaborate rather than compete, build systems rather than silos, and exchange rather than hoard information. As Margaret Wheatley notes (1992), control is not the connective tissue; dynamic interconnectedness matters.

Central office personnel in a learning system set expectations, build capacity, provide resources that help schools achieve goals, monitor results, hold educators accountable when outcomes are not met, and meet the challenge of complex work.

Use the following tools to describe the roles and responsibilities of district-level leaders in a learning system and assess district leadership support for professional learning, a distinguishing characteristic of learning systems.

### REFERENCE

**Wheatley, M. (1992).** *Leadership and the new science: Learning about organization from an orderly universe*. San Francisco, CA: Berrett-Koehler.



### BECOMING A LEARNING SYSTEM

By Stephanie Hirsh, Kay Psencik,  
and Frederick Brown

In a learning system, every educator in the district focuses intently on learning. Those educators share responsibility for student and adult learning, dedicate themselves to continuous improvement, use data to drive decisions, and monitor and adjust their practices based on feedback.

Based on Learning Forward's definition of professional learning and Standards for Professional Learning, the book outlines the knowledge, skills, attitudes, dispositions, and behaviors district leaders need to lead, facilitate, and coach school leaders and leadership teams to embed the definition and standards into schools' daily routines.

Online tools accompany each of the book's 24 chapters.

To order, call 800-727-7288 or visit [www.learningforward.org/store](http://www.learningforward.org/store). Price: \$80 nonmembers; \$64 members.

## TOOL 1: DECLARE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES USING KASAB

**PURPOSE:** Describe the roles and responsibilities of district-level leaders in a learning system.

**TIME:** Two 1½-hour sessions

**MATERIALS:** Chart paper, markers, sticky notes, pens or pencils, KASAB thinking chart (p. 64).

STEPS		
SESSION I		TIME
1	Clearly establish the purpose of a KASAB and the process the team will use to draft its KASAB.	5 minutes
2	Review with all the definition of professional learning and leadership that the district developed and ask team members to generate ideas about how they have begun to align with these definitions in their daily actions.	5 minutes
3	Explain each component of the KASAB.	10 minutes
4	Ask each participant to work alone at first and on one letter at a time.	10 minutes
5	Begin with the role of school leadership teams in implementing effective school-based professional learning aligned with the district's definition of professional learning and leadership.	20 minutes
6	Model working through the KASAB for school leaders with one descriptor under each letter.	5 minutes
7	Ask team members to work as a group to clarify their thinking and come to consensus.	15 minutes
8	Ask them to follow the same process to describe what district leaders must do well in order to ensure school teams meet their expectations. Use the KASAB thinking chart.	20 minutes
9	Remind everyone that what they produce is a rough draft. They will think about it and make notes of changes before the second session.	5 minutes
SESSION II		TIME
10	Remind everyone of the purpose of the work — to clearly articulate the roles and responsibilities for every leader in the organization to ensure that everyone is learning every day so that every student achieves significant results.	10 minutes
11	Walk through each letter of the KASAB until the team clearly articulates the expectation and everyone agrees.	50 minutes
12	Establish a theory of action of how to engage other district and school leaders in the conversation so that it becomes a shared expectation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What must we do first? Second?</li> <li>• What barriers will we face? What steps will we need to overcome them?</li> <li>• What will we need to do to give people the best opportunity to change practice?</li> <li>• How will we know?</li> </ul>	15 minutes

Source: Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

# TOOLS

TOOL 1, continued: KASAB THINKING CHART

	SCHOOL LEADERSHIP TEAMS	DISTRICT LEADERS
K <sub>nowledge</sub>		
A <sub>ttitudes</sub>		
S <sub>kills</sub>		
A <sub>spirations</sub>		
B <sub>ehaviors</sub>		

Source: Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

## TOOL 2: SUPPORT THE ELEMENTS OF LEARNING AND LEADERSHIP

**PURPOSE:** Assess district leadership support for professional learning, a distinguishing characteristic of learning systems.

**TIME:** 1½ hours

**MATERIALS:** A copy of the assessment chart for each participant (p. 66).

<b>PROCESS</b>		
<b>1</b>	Ask participants to think about each factor that contributes to a high-quality system of professional learning. Ask them to rate the degree of support district-level leaders give each factor and share specific examples to support the rating. Remind them that examples are important even if the rating is low in order to have meaningful conversations and set thoughtful goals.	15 minutes
<b>2</b>	Divide the team into six groups and assign each group one factor. Ask groups to come to consensus about their rating and to be specific about the rating and examples.	30 minutes
<b>3</b>	Have each group share out and work toward whole-group consensus.	30 minutes
<b>4</b>	Share one or two steps that district leaders should take to increase support around each factor.	15 minutes

**Source:** Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

# TOOLS

## TOOL 2, continued: ASSESSMENT CHART

Factor	Description	Degree of support in each area (1=low; 4=high)				Specific examples
		1	2	3	4	
<b>A compelling vision of professional learning</b>	High-achieving districts ensure a common shared vision of professional learning as a means of increasing student achievement.					
<b>Standards-driven professional learning</b>	District and school-level professional learning is designed to align with the Standards for Professional Learning.					
<b>A definition of professional learning</b>	District and school leaders work together to define and come to consensus on professional learning.					
<b>Declaring new roles and responsibilities</b>	District and school leaders work together to define leadership and identify new roles and responsibilities to ensure the vision of professional learning is fulfilled.					
<b>Evaluation</b>	District and school leaders establish clearly articulated evaluation systems for professional learning to ensure the designs and implementation achieve the intended results.					
<b>Resources</b>	District and school leaders ensure adequate resources are allocated to professional learning.					

Source: Hirsh, S., Psencik, K., & Brown, F. (2014). *Becoming a learning system*. Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

Connect. Belong. Support.

# UPDATES

## ADVOCATE FOR TITLE IIA

**L**earning Forward has joined education advocates around the country to advocate for ESSA Title IIA funds to remain in next federal budget. Join the movement and share your Title IIA story at [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/title-ii-advocacy](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/title-ii-advocacy).

### WHAT DO TITLE IIA FUNDS SUPPORT?

- Increased content knowledge
- Support for principal leadership
- Coaching and mentoring
- Educator recruitment
- Strategies for increasing graduation rates
- Implementing effective and innovative instruction and technology
- Personalized learning

p. **68**

## BECOME AN ADVOCATE FOR TITLE IIA

**A**s has been the case for much of the last year, ESSA's Title IIA funds for leadership and professional learning are in danger of being eliminated. Programs funded through Title IIA significantly impact teachers, school leaders, principals, and the students they serve. While the budget for fiscal year 2018 may be resolved by mid-March, the need to make the case for these federal funds will continue into the next round of federal budgeting, no matter what the outcome for 2018.

Learning Forward's members have been instrumental in raising awareness about Title IIA's importance among policymakers — particularly in the U.S. Senate — and building widespread support among stakeholders.

In addressing President Trump's proposed budget for fiscal year 2019, Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh said, "We are disappointed to see that, once again, President Trump chose to completely eliminate funding for Title IIA of the Every Student Succeeds Act in his proposed FY19 budget. ... We hope that Congress will ignore this proposed budget and, as they should, support educators, students, communities, and schools by fully funding Title IIA."

Here are ways you can get involved in advocating for Title IIA funding.

### JOIN THE LEARNING FORWARD A-TEAM

The Learning Forward Advocacy Team (A-Team) is a new opportunity for members to provide a critical service to the education community.

MEMBERS OF THE A-TEAM WILL RECEIVE:

- Invitations to monthly phone calls or webinars that will include updates on federal legislation, regulations, and advocacy opportunities;
- Regular communications about advocacy needs and opportunities; and
- News you can share within your state, district, or school to motivate action.

THE A-TEAM CONSISTS OF LEARNING FORWARD MEMBERS WHO:

- Advocate on behalf of effective professional learning systems at the state and federal level;
- Stay apprised of the latest policy actions at the federal level;
- Connect what is happening at the federal level to advocacy actions in the state; and
- Build their own capacity to be effective advocates.

LEARN MORE AND APPLY AT:

- ◆ [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/advocacy-sign-up](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/advocacy-sign-up)

### CALL YOUR SENATORS OR REPRESENTATIVES

Learning Forward periodically alerts members when the timing is right to contact your members of Congress and tell them that Title IIA funding is a priority. Use the step-by-step instructions and script we've created to assist you in making the call. To see a call in action, watch a video of Stephanie Hirsh as she contacts her representative.

Learn more at:

- ◆ [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/taking-action](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/taking-action)

### STUDY TITLE IIA TALKING POINTS

Use and share this one-page summary to help policymakers understand why Title IIA funding is so critical for students and educators:

- ◆ [www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/getinvolved/title-ii-one-pager-060817.pdf](http://www.learningforward.org/docs/default-source/getinvolved/title-ii-one-pager-060817.pdf)

### BUILD YOUR ADVOCACY SKILLS

Learning Forward's free webinars provide background information, the legislative status of Title IIA, and practical steps for how you can engage in this critical fight. Webinars are available at:

- ◆ [www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars/webinar-archive](http://www.learningforward.org/learning-opportunities/webinars/webinar-archive)

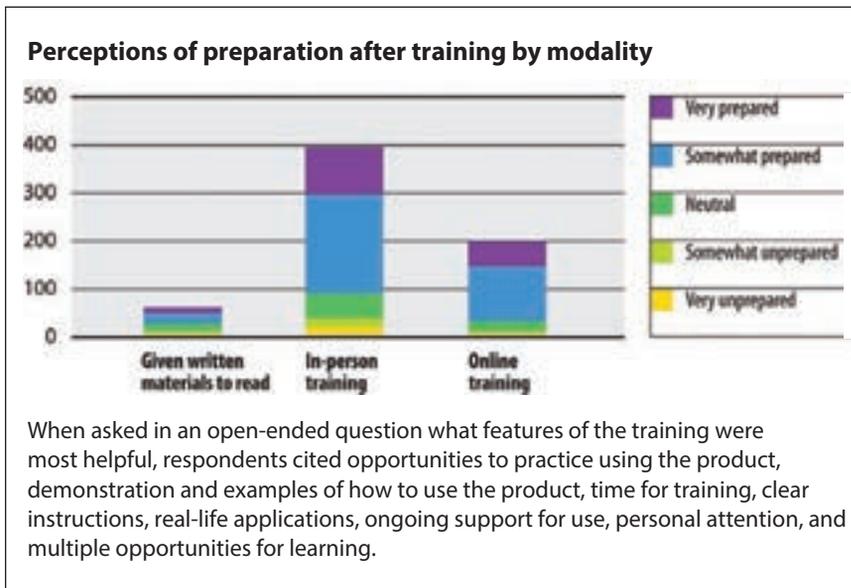
For more information and resources visit:

- ◆ [www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/title-ii-advocacy](http://www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/title-ii-advocacy)

## New report explores technology use for feedback

What leads teachers to use new technology products or services to improve their practice? Learning Forward recently concluded a study that investigated factors that drive teachers to embrace or challenge the use of products and services designed to support improvements in practice.

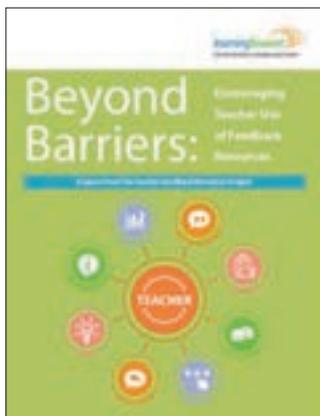
Findings from the study are addressed in a new report, *Beyond Barriers: Encouraging Teacher Use of Feedback Resources*, supported by the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. The report can assist education leaders and vendors to address issues of implementation and scale.



When asked in an open-ended question what features of the training were most helpful, respondents cited opportunities to practice using the product, demonstration and examples of how to use the product, time for training, clear instructions, real-life applications, ongoing support for use, personal attention, and multiple opportunities for learning.

### KEY ELEMENTS OF THE STUDY

- Technology-based resources studied include those designed for video observations, peer feedback and collaboration, online professional learning, and learning management platforms.
- Though such resources offer teachers access to real-time data to support improvement, the use of such resources falls below expectations.
- There were three phases to the study, from qualitative focus groups, to a survey, to case studies.
- Three case studies are included with the report to showcase district examples of resource implementation.



Visit [www.learningforward.org/beyond-barriers](http://www.learningforward.org/beyond-barriers) to read the full report.

### FINDINGS

**Perceived barriers have minimal effect on use.** Through the focus groups, researchers identified issues anticipated to affect implementation and use of technology-based resources: training and support, technical capacity issues, and motivation. The survey data indicated that those issues do not impede use for educators.

**Utility really does matter.** Educators indicated that when a resource is useful, they use it. If it isn't customizable, beneficial, or if it takes too much time, its use won't be sustained. While this finding may seem obvious, it is a reminder that the core value of the resource must remain the focus for both vendors and users.

**Change management and teacher engagement in decision-making**

**matter.** District leaders take several approaches to implementing an innovation, and their approach makes a difference. They may mandate use, provide choice to use, allow use to grow organically, or design an approach that combines these variations.

### IMPLICATIONS

Based on the results of this study, researchers make the following four recommendations for increasing the use, scale, and impact of these products and services:

1. **Create a clear vision and compelling purpose** for full-scale adoption, including a well-articulated theory of change.
2. **Approach adoption and use** of the new product and service through a robust change management process.
3. **Engage teachers** in the decision-making process in authentic ways.
4. **Allocate adequate resources** for capacity building, including time, training, ongoing support, and technical assistance.

## FOCUS LEARNING LEADERS FOR LEARNING SYSTEMS

### A symphony of skills:

Here's what it takes to learn in concert with others.

*By Lyn Sharratt and Beate Planche*

The success of schools as learning organizations hinges on how well people can work together as they seek to build collective capacity and problem solve to improve student outcomes. Collaborative learning has now emerged as the vital strategy for learning — both for staff and students. The authors focus on two questions: What kind of capabilities do collaborative leaders need to work together with others? And how do we nurture needed skills and dispositions so that all leaders can improve over time?

### Even superheroes need help:

Principals who share leadership have greater impact on student achievement.

*By Mel Sussman*

A difficult step for principals is acknowledging that they cannot do it alone and that shared leadership is key to increasing student achievement. When the school-level leader can accept relinquishing parts of his or her authority and comes to the realization

that there is far greater strength in numbers, then the shared leadership process — rooted in the formation of a collectively efficacious instructional leadership team — can begin. So how does a principal make shared leadership a reality? Eight crucial steps ensure the success of a leadership team.

### Lasting legacies:

Kentucky superintendents create success strategies that reach into the future.

*By Michael Chirichello*

A legacy of leadership is more than a bench, as demonstrated by six Kentucky school superintendents who share a common commitment to providing a resource for continuous professional learning for district superintendents. The six leaders met at the end of their doctorate of education program at Northern Kentucky University to contribute strategies for what they hoped would be an integral part of their leadership legacy in their districts.

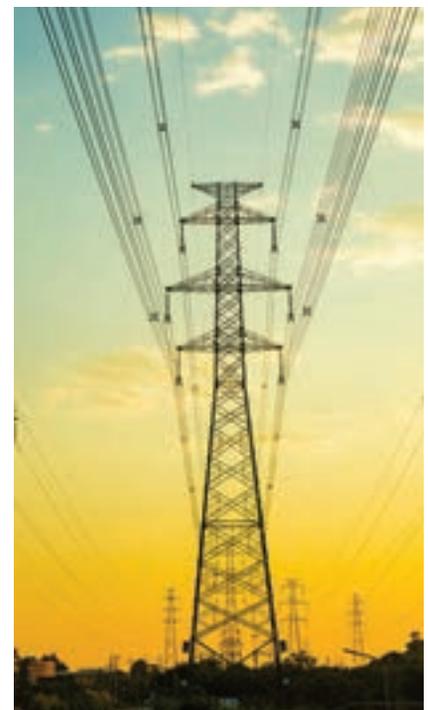
### Power up your planning:

A well-defined theory of action leads to systemwide change.

*By Sharon Williams and Karen Cloninger*

Through a clearly articulated theory of action, the West Linn-Wilsonville School District in Oregon has done

what few other districts succeed at doing: Balancing the learning needs of everyone in the system to produce impressive results. The theory of action anchors the leadership team's three-pronged approach to professional learning: Align work by nesting teacher, school, and district goals; ensure fidelity of implementation by organizing learning in authentic, job-embedded contexts; and motivate staff with professional learning that inspires and provides meaning.



### WRITE FOR THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

- Themes are posted at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/upcoming-themes).
- Please send manuscripts and questions to Christy Colclasure ([christy.colclasure@learningforward.org](mailto:christy.colclasure@learningforward.org)).
- Notes to assist authors in preparing a manuscript are at [www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines).

### SHARE YOUR STORY

Learning Forward is eager to read manuscripts from educators at every level in every position. If your work includes a focus on effective professional learning, we want to hear your story.

*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/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines](http://www.learningforward.org/publications/jsd/writers-guidelines).



**IDEAS**

**The perfect mix:**

With blended professional learning, learners choose time, place, path, and pace.

*By Amie Cieminski and Deagan Andrews*

The Greeley-Evans School District in Colorado began moving toward innovation several years ago as district leaders searched for ways to improve student achievement, leverage technology, and stay within a very limited budget. In 2014, district leaders created a five-year blended learning implementation plan. The district designed professional learning that aligned with blended learning principles, allowing leaders to experience the kinds of learning they were expected to support for students in their buildings.

**How curriculum and professional learning intersect.**

*By Stephanie Hirsh and Frederick Brown*

The intersection of curriculum and professional learning is a hot issue in the field right now. Two articles illuminate key points. In the first, Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh takes a close look at the work school-based learning teams do in studying their curriculum materials to improve capacity and refine teaching. The second, by Learning Forward Deputy Executive Director Frederick Brown, examines the role of leadership in implementing high-quality curriculum in Wake County Public School System in North Carolina.

**VOICES**

**CALL TO ACTION**

**Whatever name you give it, the PLC plays an important role.**

*By Stephanie Hirsh*

When a school district prioritizes a culture of collaborative professionalism, it invests in building the professional capital of all staff. Three core elements are essential to learning teams' success.

**OUR TAKE**

**Symposium explores ways to turn exemplars of excellence into learning systems.**

*By Melinda George*

At a symposium on the future of the learning profession, participants from more than 20 organizations explored what it takes to create and support educators in building an authentic learning profession and what the United States can learn from other high-performing countries. Themes that resonated were teacher efficacy, teacher voice, and the critical leadership that creates the conditions that allow the profession to grow and strengthen.

**MEMBER SPOTLIGHT**

*Kimberly Honnick*

**A champion for learning keeps students front and center.**

New Jersey principal Kimberly

Honnick, in her 26th year in public education, is facing more challenges than ever. Support and guidance from the Learning Forward Foundation has made a difference in her work.

**BEING FORWARD**

**Let's work together to keep moving forward.**

*By Alan Ingram*

The challenges ahead for all of us will require a total team effort, adaptive and innovative solutions, strategic partnerships, and a commitment to excellence in moving professional learning systems beyond the status quo.

**WHAT WE'VE LEARNED**

**Respectful disagreement closes the gap between points of view.**

*By Robert Garmston and Kendall Zoller*

Educators, more than in most professions, have an opportunity — actually, a responsibility — to practice and model constructive ways of disagreeing. Here are effective methods to make that happen.

**RESEARCH**

**RESEARCH REVIEW:**

**Design principles guide educators in choosing and using curriculum materials.**

*By Elizabeth Foster*

This study sheds light on which particular educative features teachers respond to while also underlining the idea that teachers do, in fact, respond to such features. How teachers choose and use educative features in instructional materials led the authors to develop six design principles.

**INDEX OF ADVERTISERS**

Regent University ..... inside front cover  
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# AT A GLANCE

## How leaders set the stage for learning

Educators at different levels of a district or system have different responsibilities for fostering a learning environment where adults learn continuously with the support they need to ensure every student experiences effective teaching and learning daily.

Here's what that means in a learning system, learning school, and learning team.



- Educators establish a vision for learning.
- Leaders follow standards for student and adult learning and provide high-quality aligned curricula.
- Leaders invest resources to prioritize learning for all.
- Systems ensure that leaders at all levels engage in continuous improvement.
- Educators base decisions on data and assess outcomes of their efforts.

- Collaborative, job-embedded professional learning is the norm.
- Skilled facilitation and protocols support collaboration.
- School leaders provide time in the school day for adult learning.
- Educators use a range of learning designs to achieve specific outcomes.
- Leaders provide support for meaningful implementation.

- Teachers use an inquiry-oriented learning cycle.
- Teachers analyze data, set learning goals, create and implement a learning agenda, apply learning with support, and monitor and assess their learning.
- Teachers align their learning with the curricula and instructional materials relevant to their students and with the standards and priorities set at the system and school levels.
- Teachers accept responsibility for all student and adult learning.
- School leaders protect and support teacher team learning time.

For more information, see *Becoming a Learning System*, *Becoming a Learning School*, and *Becoming a Learning Team*, all available at the Learning Forward Bookstore, [www.learningforward.org/store](http://www.learningforward.org/store) or **800-727-7288**.

# 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

##### LEADERSHIP

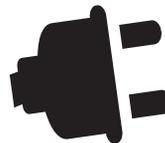
The author of "Even superheroes need help" explores the steps principals can take to share leadership with the other educators in the school, noting that "sharing leadership is more than just an interesting concept — it is a necessity for any school leader who wants to increase student achievement" (p. 32).



1. What skills or supports help principals share leadership in their contexts?
2. What happens when leaders don't encourage the continued development of other educators responsible for student learning?

##### IMPLEMENTATION

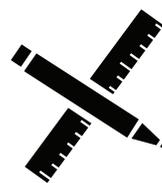
When educators outline a theory of action for how their learning will lead to improvements in student learning, according to "Power up your planning," they identify the specific challenges they'll tackle and a pathway to achieve their goals (p. 44).



1. How does a theory of action help educators develop and sustain a change initiative?
2. What information do educators need to have in hand to develop a viable theory of action?

##### OUTCOMES

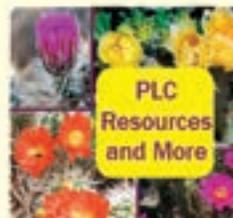
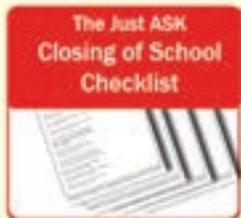
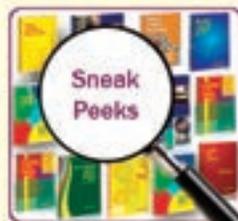
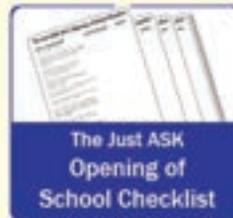
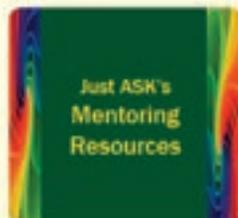
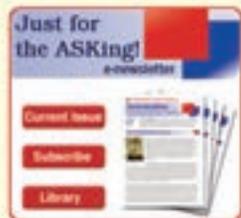
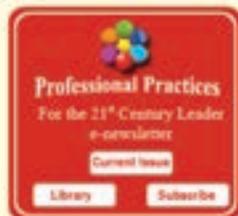
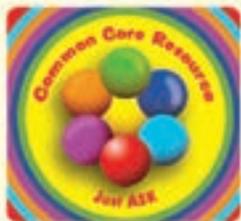
The article "How curriculum and professional learning intersect" showcases how team-based professional learning on the implementation of high-quality curricula has the potential to significantly impact teaching and learning in schools (p. 56).



1. Which comes first — strong connections between those educators responsible for curriculum and professional learning, or the adoption and use of curriculum as the basis for job-embedded professional learning?
2. How will a focus on curriculum in professional learning influence the learning designs educators experience to advance their knowledge, skills, and practices?

Learn more about Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning at [www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning](http://www.learningforward.org/standards-for-professional-learning).

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