

Tools *for* LEARNING SCHOOLS

LEARNING FORWARD'S VISION: EXCELLENT TEACHING AND LEARNING EVERY DAY

Inside

- Unpacking the Implementation standard, pp. 4–5
- Identifying next actions, pp. 6–7

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GREAT PLAN, DISAPPOINTING RESULTS

Managing implementation is critical

By Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord

As educators look ahead to what they hope to accomplish next year in schools and school systems across the world, they may benefit from focusing as much attention on implementation as they do on planning. Educators understand that initiatives start strong but can fizzle by the finish line. The Standards for Professional Learning provide guidance for carrying initiatives to their potential results.



Studying with and from peers has been shown to be a powerful learning design. Case studies or scenarios offer one way to learn from others and promote analysis and examination of situations that may have varying implications depending on the learners' context. The book *A Playbook for Professional Learning* includes scenarios to launch deeper examination and analysis of each of the Standards for Professional Learning. Chapter 6 of the book, "The emperor has no clothes," focuses on the unique challenges associated with implementation. The scenario is adapted here and tools are included to encourage discussion about implementation actions.

The story here puts a spotlight on the Implementation standard from the Standards for Professional Learning: Professional learning that increases educator effectiveness and results for all students applies research on change and sustains support for implementation of professional learning for long-term change. While the standards are designed to be used in concert with one another, educators also need opportunities to understand each standard in depth.

A week before Douglass Middle School was scheduled to receive the state report of student achievement scores, the principal and assistant principal were nervous. The last state report had not been good. Mathematics, science, and social studies scores across 6th through 8th grades had been barely satisfactory.

The two had dissected the data with the school's 40 teachers and had asked the staff to meet in their learning teams to consider explanations for the low scores. Teams then took their hypotheses and evidence to the whole staff.

Both the principal and assistant principal had been working on their doctoral programs for two years at the nearby university. They had shared an online course the prior spring and had extensive conversations — and debate — about some of the course topics. One topic on which they wholeheartedly agreed was the need for this middle school's mostly African-American student population to gain expertise in critical thinking, problem solving, and creativity. In light of the student achievement results, the two felt even more pressure to address the issues, but where should they start?

Principal Franklin Lee said he wished the school could offer science courses with an inquiry approach, in which students would be responsible for initiating and designing their learning by defining the problems they would set out to resolve. Almost simultaneously, Assistant Principal

Continued on p. 2

Continued from p. 1

Alyshandra Borton wondered whether a learner-centered approach in math would provide students with more opportunities to experience deeper learning.

Although their district operated with a districtwide curriculum, the area superintendent and curriculum staff had trusted and supported these school leaders in the past when they had presented good ideas. The two agreed to consult the math coordinator, science supervisor, and area superintendent for ideas about what they might do.

Their central office colleagues enthusiastically helped them think about how to address academic goals in math, science, and social studies — and process goals of critical thinking, problem solving, and increasing creativity. The director of curriculum and instruction assured the two principals that they would have additional support for their pilot efforts: The district’s math and science coordinators would meet with them every two weeks to support their efforts; a leadership coach would be available to discuss issues and concerns about the experience and to guide the school leaders in their work with staff; and instructional coaches could be assigned to support teachers’ efforts to learn to implement the new practices. The central administrators also reminded the principals that the district was supporting problem solving in math and inquiry in science to promote deeper learning. Borton and Lee were pleased to learn that their efforts were aligned with the district’s priorities.

The school’s staff spent an intense year focused on improving teaching to promote student critical thinking and problem solving. Every two weeks, the district math coordinator worked with the math teachers about ways to adapt their curriculum to reach each student and achieve deeper learning. The district’s science supervisor worked with science teachers on the inquiry approach. These two curriculum specialists also met with the whole faculty every other month to share what the math and science departments

were doing and to help teachers coordinate critical thinking and problem solving skills across subjects. The entire staff attended the meetings, and all were enthusiastic. Each hoped for significant improvement in student achievement.

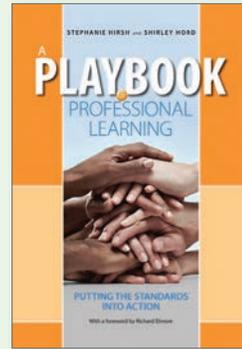
DISAPPOINTING RESULTS

When the teachers gathered and unrolled the latest test scores, their disappointment was obvious. “We all worked hard,” Lee consoled them, “but we know it takes more than one year for good results to develop. Maybe we’re missing something, though. Could each department meet to examine possible reasons, then have a conversation with us to share your findings?”

Learning Forward BELIEF

Professional learning that improves educator effectiveness is fundamental to student learning.

Adapted from *A Playbook for Professional Learning: Putting the Standards into Action*, by Stephanie Hirsh and Shirley Hord, published by Learning Forward (2012). Available at <https://learningforward.org/bookstore>.



A Playbook for Professional Learning offers pragmatic entry points to help educators understand how leveraging the Standards for Professional Learning can lead to better outcomes from professional learning. The book includes scenarios grounded in real-life situations, discussion activities and protocols, as well as

helpful insights and analysis to advance professional learning practices.

Members will find the full chapter included with the online version of this newsletter!

On Friday afternoon, Lee and Borton spent hours analyzing what they had learned from the departments. Finally, Lee summarized: “What we hoped would happen for students regarding math, science, critical thinking, and problem solving simply hasn’t occurred.” Borton added, “As the little boy in the fairy tale said, ‘The emperor has no clothes!’”

“We need some help examining our findings and understanding why our change effort is not succeeding,” Lee said. The administrators decided to reach out to their area superintendent, Jim Nelson. Lee called the area superintendent, who he knew had experience facilitating successful improvement efforts. Nelson wasn’t surprised to hear from Lee. He had studied the student data before the schools received their reports and was aware of the school’s efforts and the student test scores. He agreed to meet them the following week to discuss next steps.

THE SUPERINTENDENT STEPS IN

When they met, Nelson reminded the school administrators that substantive changes in curriculum or instruction require three or more years to learn and translate into practice (Fullan, 2001).

“You had solid research to support the adaptations to our curriculum,” he said. “I wonder how effective your teachers are in using the new practices.”

Nelson introduced them to a metaphor of an

Continued on p. 3

Continued from p. 2

“implementation bridge” to explain how a school gets from adopting new practices to seeing increased student gains (Hall & Hord, 2011).

“Getting from point A to point B doesn’t happen just because we wish it or because we have devoted time to it,” he said. “The distance between adopting a new way and having that change benefit students is a trek. Maybe we need to review the plans for getting teachers and students across the implementation bridge.”

He outlined several strategies he had gleaned from research and previous experience:

- Articulate a shared vision of the new way — what it will look like when it has been installed in the classroom with a high degree of fidelity.
- Create a plan and identify resources that enable us to attain the vision.
- Invest in professional learning about what the new way is and how to use it.
- Assess the degree to which staff are moving across the bridge and attaining the vision.
- Provide assistance one-to-one or to small groups to support movement.
- Create a context that supports and encourages the change.

(Tobia & Hord, 2002)

“So, we should address the issue of shared vision first,” Borton said. “From the conversations we had with the school teams, I don’t think they really know what the new ways look like in the classroom. And our follow-up has been weak. Teachers admitted they went back to the ways they knew because they weren’t clear about the expectations.”

Nelson encouraged Lee and Borton to continue to work with the central office math and science curriculum staff to remain in alignment with the district’s scope and sequence, as well as to secure additional support for their teachers.

Nelson also reminded his colleagues about the implementation tools that can help educators understand not only the new initiatives they are using but also focus on how different educators come to a new project with different levels of readiness or understanding. Tools like Innovation Configurations maps and frameworks such as Stages of Concern and Levels of Use are quite valuable for finding common ground and ways to reach every educator involved.

“It seems all our principals could benefit from knowing more about effective professional learning,” Nelson said. “I’m going to suggest we include these topics in the principals’ professional development.”

When the area superintendent left, Borton said to Lee, “Now I have a better idea about why our plan did not produce our desired results. We certainly have a lot of work to do this coming year.”

The Implementation standard, like each of the Standards for Professional Learning, encompasses three critical concepts:

Apply change research

Effective professional learning integrates research about individual, organization, technical, and adaptive change through supporting and sustaining implementation for long-term change. Those responsible for professional learning, whether leaders, facilitators, or participants, commit to long-term change by setting clear goals and maintaining high expectations for implementation with fidelity.

Sustain implementation

Professional learning produces changes in educator practice and student learning when it sustains implementation support over time. Episodic, periodic, or occasional professional learning has little effect on educator practice or student learning because it rarely includes ongoing support or opportunities for extended learning to support implementation.

Provide constructive feedback

Constructive feedback accelerates implementation by providing formative assessment through the learning and implementation process. It provides specific information to assess practice in relationship to established expectations and to adjust practice so that it more closely aligns with those expectations.

Excerpted from *Standards for Professional Learning, Learning Forward, 2011.*

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