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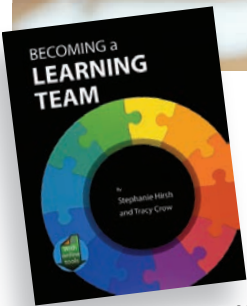**Use computer simulations to practice making tough decisions** p. 34

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WHAT WILL YOU LEARN THIS SUMMER?

EXPAND YOUR HORIZONS WITH THESE HOT TOPICS

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

Are your PLCs truly learning-focused?

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

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

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Becoming a Learning Team: A Guide to a Teacher-Led Cycle of Continuous Improvement, 2nd Edition

By Stephanie Hirsh & Tracy Crow

The second edition of *Becoming a Learning Team* offers teachers step-by-step guidance in using collaborative learning time to solve specific student learning challenges. This book outlines a process for using student data to craft student and educator learning goals leading to learning plans, implementation steps, and progress monitoring.

The second edition focuses more explicitly on the role of learning teams in implementing high-quality instructional materials and what that means for student and educator learning goals and agendas.

Teacher teams can use the tools and strategies to:

- Understand the value and importance of collaborative learning to improve teaching and learning;
- Launch a learning team cycle with five key stages;
- Support the meaningful implementation of high-quality instructional materials;
- Implement each of the five stages with specific strategies and supporting protocols;
- Adapt the cycle to fit specific school and district calendars and initiatives; and
- Engage external support in sustaining learning teams.

B602 | 160 pp. | members **$36.00** | nonmembers **$45.00**
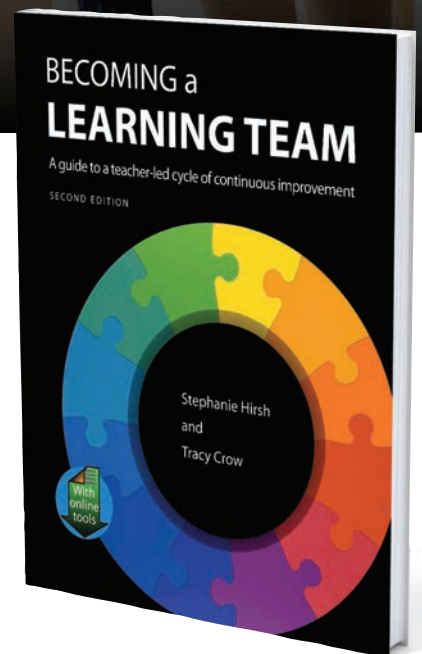
Tracy Crow

Give your brain a summer stretch

Ideally you're in a learning system with opportunities to learn collaboratively throughout the workweek and school year. The summer, however, can open other kinds of learning doors. Perhaps you're on your own more than usual or freed from a standard schedule. Below are several strategies for giving your brain a summer stretch.

Take your mentor out for ice cream. The release from the confines of the school year offers an opportunity to reflect on your accomplishments in a more relaxed environment. Buy your mentor a scoop of mocha chip and ask for insights on what went well and what you might try next year.

Craft a Pecha Kucha on your biggest mistake this year. Creating a short presentation for others on a mistake — and, most importantly, what you learned from it — offers an opportunity not only for you to reflect but also to demonstrate your openness to insights from others and willingness to take risks.

Examine your assumptions. What are your most deeply held assumptions about yourself as an educator? About the work you do with other educators? About the students in your school or district? Take a step back and look at the ways your fundamental assumptions inform the way you approach your work. Are you happy with what you see and what changes might you consider?

Read a book. Maybe you've set aside a biography of one of your heroes or you have a stack of leadership texts to explore. Or perhaps a dystopian novel will shake you up in new ways. See several suggestions on p. 72.

Join a neighborhood association. Your community needs the communication and decision-making skills you've developed at the school or district level — and you might find new strategies when you practice those skills in a different environment.

Immerse yourself in genealogy. Following the branches of your family tree takes you through history at so many levels, from the personal to national and international developments.

Watch a video. Educators have a window into other classrooms through teaching videos. Or maybe you're ready for something completely different. YouTube can offer all kinds of lessons from experts, whether on playing the ukulele or installing a dishwasher.

Make yourself uncomfortable. Put yourself in an environment you wouldn't typically choose and see what you notice about yourself and others, whether through a new cuisine, a different religious service, or a new way

to travel to do your errands — on the bus or on your bicycle instead of your car, perhaps.

Revise a favorite lesson. If you've had success with a particular lesson for years, maybe it's time to consider taking it up a notch next year. It isn't just your difficult lessons that need your close attention.

Go to work with your best friend, spouse, child, or neighbor. Maybe your friend has a job in an industry your students need to know more about. Or maybe you can learn leadership lessons from a neighbor who manages a local restaurant. See who might let you tag along for a day of wearing a hard hat or visiting a local courtroom.

Introduce yourself to someone in your community. Have you admired someone in your community from afar? Take an opportunity to touch base and find common ground.

Which will you try? Do you have other ideas you'd like to share? Tell us on Twitter — be sure to tag @LearningForward.

•

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

THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL

THE LEARNING FORWARD JOURNAL

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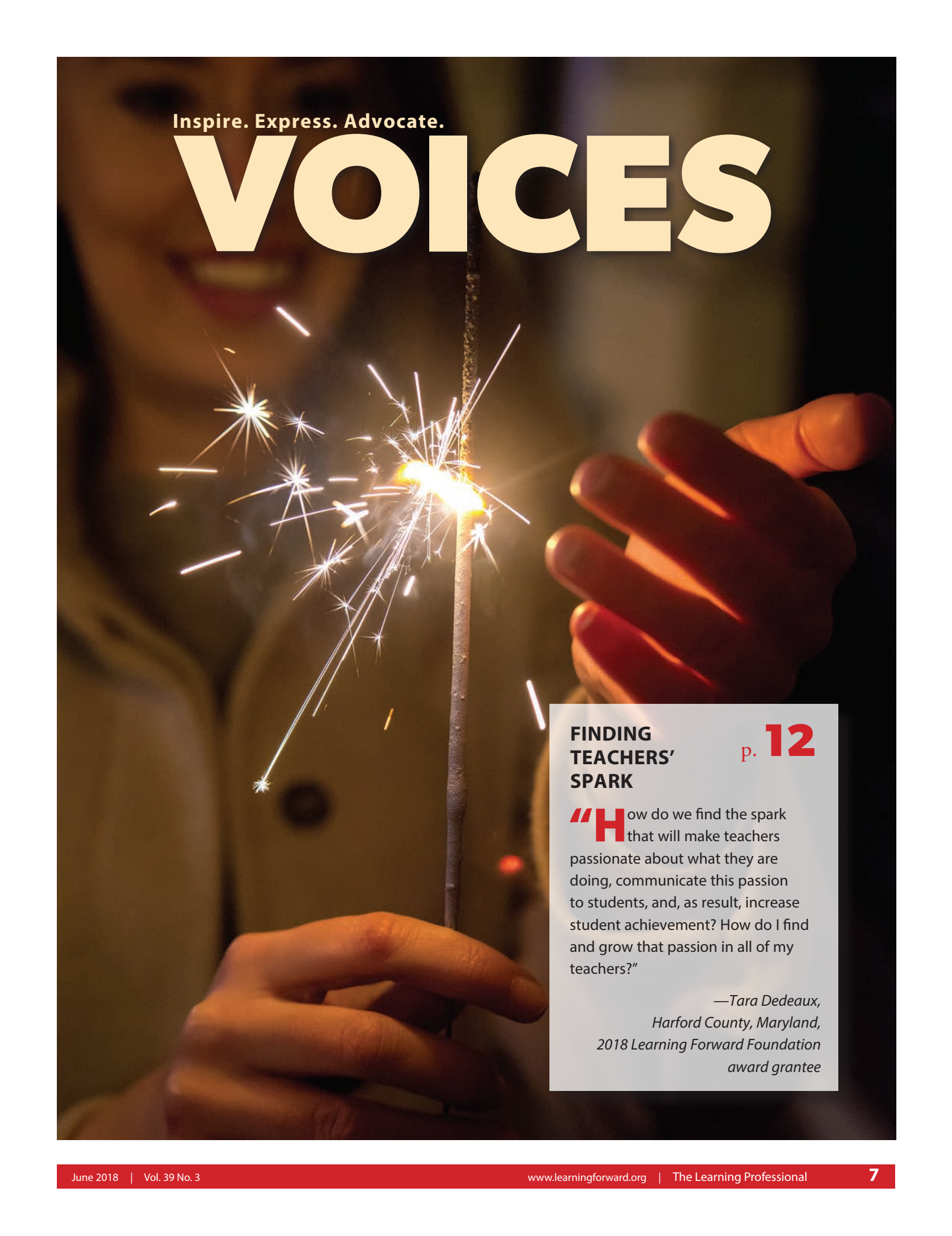
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VOICES

FINDING TEACHERS' SPARK

"How do we find the spark that will make teachers passionate about what they are doing, communicate this passion to students, and, as result, increase student achievement? How do I find and grow that passion in all of my teachers?"

—Tara Dedeaux,
Harford County, Maryland,
2018 Learning Forward Foundation
award grantee

Stephanie Hirsh

Let's embrace what high-quality curriculum can do for all students

I remember how excited I was to begin my teaching career. My principal handed me my keys, my textbook teacher's edition, and the district curriculum guide. I spent hours imagining how I would transform my classroom into an amazing learning space.

I assumed there would be guidance to ensure my success, but that wasn't the case. Instead, curriculum meetings focused on how to ensure the chapters were sufficiently covered by the end of the year. I turned to my department chair for guidance. She offered to observe and give me feedback. After one observation, she confided that I was the first teacher to ask for feedback and she wasn't prepared to help me. I was on my own.

Today, I imagine all the critical skills for life I never taught my students: missed opportunities to reinforce reading and evaluating texts, discerning points of view, making a persuasive argument, and more. But how was I to know without the colleagues and materials to guide me in developing my lessons?

PIVOT TO CURRICULUM

Learning Forward's pivot to high-quality curriculum and team-based professional learning, as outlined in our recent report, *High-Quality Curriculum and Team-Based Professional Learning: A Perfect Partnership for Equity,* is a direct effort to address that need for guidance.

Why focus on curriculum? Because we have never before been deliberate in identifying instructional materials that clearly align with standards we expect students to master. Nor have we been intentional in aligning our PLC cycles to deep study and discussion of what is in the materials before we start building lessons and assessments for students.

Also because we have never before had such compelling evidence of the power of these kinds of materials in the hands of teachers. If we are truly committed to equity, we must embrace those things that make the biggest difference for students who need the most support.

And because we have long heard that the biggest mistake associated with adoption of new standards was lack of support for teachers and coaches — and, as a result, the misconception that this is just a slight change in what you already do.

TEACHERS WHO GET IT

What does it mean when we say that teachers recognize the importance of a curriculum and planning quality lessons with colleagues? These teachers:

- Know deeply the standards and prerequisite skills students are required to master.
- Are skilled at the pedagogical content strategies essential to ensuring all students can access the curriculum.
- Are confident in their ability to plan and sequence lessons that lead to student mastery of standards.
- Share responsibility for student success.
- Use a PLC process that focuses them where their students struggle with standards and how their instructional materials are designed to address it.
- Evaluate instructional materials through a personalized learning lens that considers Universal Design for Learning, student culture, and specific learning needs.
- Know how to select instructional materials that align to standards and translate them into powerful lessons and assessments that facilitate high levels of learning.

What would you add to this list? Does this match what you see in your school or district? Read our report at **www.learningforward.org/ perfectpartnership** as a starting point for further conversation.

•

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

Tom Manning

Louisiana is taking the lead in mentoring new teachers

Many of us have been lucky enough in our lives that we can identify someone we'd call a mentor, someone who taught us how things work and helped us navigate through the difficulties we face trying to establish ourselves. For some of us, our mentor may very well have been a teacher, but what about for teachers themselves?

Mentoring is the process by which a trusted and experienced person takes a personal and direct interest in the development and education of a less experienced individual. And new teachers facing new challenges absolutely need that type of support.

Research tells us that strong teacher preparation, which includes extensive practice under an expert mentor, has a positive impact on student learning. With many new educators reporting that they feel ill-equipped to lead their students to success from day one, there is a critical need for effective mentoring for new teachers across the country.

One state has a plan to address this issue. The Louisiana Department of Education is changing the way it prepares teachers by identifying and supporting mentor teachers in every parish in the state to work with new and aspiring teachers participating in a yearlong residency.

Learning Forward is providing that mentor teacher support and helping the Department of Education achieve its vision of creating a cadre of talented educators who have the knowledge

Learn more about the Louisiana mentor teacher work at **www.louisianabelieves.com/teaching/louisiana-mentor-teachers.**

and skills to mentor and support other teachers within their schools and districts.

Last year, more than 350 mentors went through Learning Forward's nine-day program to prepare them for mentoring new and resident teachers. We'll work with more than 600 mentors this year.

The mentor work focuses on four key goals for mentor participants:

- Build strong relationships with mentees.
- Diagnose and prioritize mentee's strengths and areas for growth based on quantitative and qualitative data.
- Design and implement a coaching support plan to develop mentee knowledge and skills in content, content-specific pedagogy, and classroom management and facilitate self-reflection skills. This includes:
  - Setting short- and long-term professional growth goals based on competencies and student results.
  - Creating a logical sequence of coaching supports to develop mentee skills over time to reach goals.
  - Identifying high-quality,

evidence-based resources to support mentee-specific needs.
  - Facilitating effective coaching interactions grounded in student evidence.
  - Tracking mentee progress.
- Assess and deepen mentor content knowledge and content-specific pedagogy to support continued development of mentor and mentee competencies in their respective content areas.

Mentors' learning is grounded in the Standards for Professional Learning and a mentoring cycle with three core components: diagnosing mentee needs, coaching mentees to improve their practice, and measuring their progress. Mentors work in cohorts throughout the year, and those who complete the program and successfully complete an assessment series receive a Mentor Teacher distinction from the Department of Education.

As we deploy members of our consulting team across Louisiana to facilitate these mentoring sessions, I'm always struck by the scope and potential impact of this work, and the role we're playing in developing a new generation of learning leaders in Louisiana schools.

•

Tom Manning (tom.manning@learningforward.org) is associate director of consulting and networks at Learning Forward. ■

Craig Randall

Trust-based observations fuel teacher growth

When I became a principal, one of my primary goals was to provide teachers the kind of feedback and support I craved but didn't experience as a teacher. I believe a principal's top priority has to be doing everything possible to optimize teaching and learning, just as a teacher's job is to do everything possible to maximize student learning.

The most powerful tool to improve teaching and learning is the observation process — that is, when it is done with a focus on growing the individual capacity of each teacher instead of making evaluative, graded judgements. Studies show that such summative judgments decrease teachers' creativity, innovation, and risk-taking (O'Leary, 2017).

If you ask teachers about their experiences with the observation process, you are likely to hear comments like these: "It's just a dog-and-pony show." "They only saw me one time, then told me to get better at something that is a strength for me. They just didn't see it that day." "They observed me but never gave me feedback."

When I observe teachers, I aim to change this pattern using a process I call trust-based observation — a focused, manageable, and nonevaluative process that emphasizes teacher reflection and growth. At the heart of this approach is building trusting relationships with teachers so they feel safe taking risks in their practice. I want them to know that if I come into class when they are trying something new and it doesn't

work, the next day they are going to get a high-five for being a risk-taker.

Frequent visits and reflective conversations focused on deep listening and teacher strengths help make this environment possible. But for the process to work well, school leaders must be thoughtful and well-prepared about all of its stages: planning, observation, and the reflective conversation.

PLANNING

The first step to an effective observation cycle is careful and intentional planning, bearing in mind the following:

- Frequent short visits are key to success. I recommend 20 minutes as just the right amount of time. Conduct observations for all teachers and cycle continuously, meaning that as soon as one observation-reflection cycle concludes, the next cycle begins.
- Maintaining the regularity of visits is important. Developing a specific routine helps to ensure you reach all teachers. I recommend three observations per day each Monday through Thursday and three reflective conversations each Tuesday through Friday. Getting in the habit is like working out. Some days are easy, and some days you have to force yourself.
- Unannounced visits help you see what really happens in classrooms, rather than potentially seeing a teacher's "performance." Because

of the positive nature of the reflective conversations, teachers quickly become comfortable with unannounced visits.

- Plan to view each teacher's classes at the beginning, middle, and end of the period over the course of the year.
- Get organized and stay organized. Create a daily observation schedule, and plan visits for first thing in the day before things get hectic. Have a backup observation planned in case something comes up and the original teacher is unavailable. Use a Google doc or other spreadsheet to keep notes organized for each teacher.
- Record observations and reflective conversations using a structured document for consistency.

OBSERVATION

Teaching is art and craft. Keep your observation methods as consistent as possible, but remember that some of the things that help teachers to positively impact student learning or make a teacher special don't fit into a quantifiable box to check, like a teacher's passion.

Here are some other tips to keep in mind:

- When you record your observations, use a tool that is research-based, aligned with your school's teaching and learning principles, and manageable in size. Researchers have found that when there are too many

indicators, observers have too much trouble keeping the competencies and indicators distinct and become overloaded (TNTP, 2013). I recommend using no more than 10 indicators.

- Concentrate on writing down evidence of the teaching strengths you notice. Focusing on these strengths helps you develop a strengths-based mindset and build trust during the reflective conversation.

- Include a student interview as part of the observation. Asking students about what they are learning is a valuable check to ensure alignment between teaching and learning.

- Write down teacher quotes as much as possible. Teachers are often unaware of what they say, and hearing their own words can be a powerful tool in growth or in building confidence. For example, I observed a teacher who was masterful at building student confidence and grit with the encouragement she gave to students. When I read the quotes to her, she was unaware she had made these types of comments. Because this was shared, her confidence bloomed and other teachers who struggled with giving encouragement now had the opportunity to observe and learn from her.

- You don't have to feel obligated to observe or record every indicator every time. The cumulative nature of the observations tells us what is working well and what is a potential area for growth.

THE REFLECTIVE CONVERSATION

The reflective conversation is the most important element of the observation process. These conversations are where trust is built and growth happens. But with vulnerability inherent in the process of observation and reflection, how do we make these conversations as effective as possible? Start by asking questions and being an active listener.

My first two questions are always:

1. What were you doing to help students learn?
2. If you had the opportunity to reteach the entire lesson, what, if anything, would you do differently?

These questions encourage reflection and give you an opportunity to get to know your teacher while building trust.

Next, focus on observed strengths. When teachers appreciate that

administrators notice what they do well, the sense that an administrator is "out to get" the teachers disappears. I recommend focusing the first three reflective conversations exclusively on observed teacher strengths to help build that trust.

It's better to take the time to really get to know teacher strengths and areas for growth before offering suggestions. I have found that waiting to talk about areas for growth is worth it. In fact, teachers often end up asking me for suggestions on how to improve even before I bring it up.

Additional tips to build trust and buy-in during the reflective conversation:

- The more comfortable you can help the teacher feel, the more trusting and able to learn he or she is likely to be. For example, conducting the reflective conversation in the

Audrey Hobbs-Johnson

Circles of gratitude create time and space for learning

Practicing a spirit of gratitude is one of the most profound ways that any of us can enrich our lives. It is an attitude of appreciation and thankfulness for the good that we receive in life. As we honor the past, present, and future, gratitude propels us forward with purpose.

The Learning Forward Foundation board of directors creates gratitude circles by giving back to the community through scholarships and grants. We listen carefully to educators and their current research to guide and co-construct our collective practice.

In May, the foundation awarded grants to seven professional learning individuals and teams. Among the awardees are teachers, instructional coaches, principals, and central office administrators, representing six U.S. states, Bogota, Colombia, and the Learning Forward affiliate leaders from Illinois and Oklahoma.

FROM RESEARCH TO PRACTICE

The awardees' focused work is embedded in their local contexts and problems of practice. At the same time, each project is intentionally aligned to the key elements of Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011).

In *The State of Educators' Professional Learning in Canada* (Campbell et al., 2017), researchers found that "a focus on student outcomes was considered important in the content and intended benefits of professional learning. Professional learning focused on improving student achievement can benefit improved achievement results. … Generally, professional learning content needed to develop teachers' efficacy, knowledge, and practices in order to support students' efficacy, engagement, learning, and equity of outcomes" (p. 69).

ABOUT THE LEARNING FORWARD FOUNDATION

The Learning Forward Foundation is dedicated to impacting the future of leadership in schools that act on the belief that continuous learning by educators is essential to improving the achievement of all students. Learn more at **https://foundation. learningforward.org**

What we know can change what we do. With their collective focus on student and educator outcomes, this year's awardees provide powerful examples of professional learning practices that reflect a strong research foundation and will take us from research to practice with models that can provide authentic impact stories. These stories can spark additional research possibilities.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

The following overview of the 2018 awardees' problems of practice illustrates that not only will their learning enrich the school or system where they work, but it will also provide new stories and examples to move our collective learning forward within broader communities. This work

Christina Miller **Tara Dedeaux** **Katoria Gaston** **Susan Cole** **Katherine Cottrell** **Kevin Seymour**

is grounded in professional learning that reflects continuous improvement across the spectrum.

In **Charles County Public Schools, Maryland,** Christina Miller, working alongside Heather Sauers of the Maryland State Department of Education, asks, "What are the clearly defined steps to support the necessary change in teacher practice of formative assessment?"

In **Harford County, Maryland,** Tara Dedeaux wonders, "How do we find the spark that will make teachers passionate about what they are doing, communicate this passion to students, and, as result, increase student achievement? How do I find and grow that passion in all of my teachers?"

In **Gwinnett County, Georgia,** Katoria Gaston considers, "What impact does a teacher and mentoring framework have on teacher retention?"

In **Leander Independent School District, Texas,** Susan Cole asks, "Is it time to stop tweaking a system we have grown out of and start building one we can grow into? How do we begin to redesign and create a professional learning system that empowers our staff and, in turn, our students?"

Katherine Cottrell at the **Gimnasio La Montaña in Bogota, Colombia,** knows that to be successful she must develop a shared vision among all school leaders and teachers. She is

grappling with what must come next to put this vision in practice, one that will include strategies that will have impact on teacher and student learning as well as the school culture.

Kevin Seymour and Mary Suzanne Smith, **Learning Forward affiliate leaders in Illinois and Oklahoma,** are thinking about how they can create an informed and networked organizational structure that will support educators through the delivery of quality, sustained professional learning.

SHARED PERSPECTIVES

These leaders have identified and articulated their unique focus of exploration into quality professional learning for their own learning communities. While they use different words to express their perspectives, they are all striving toward more aligned professional learning that meets both the individual and collective needs of students and, at the same time, provides learning to individuals and teams of educators to support system coherence and sustainability.

To accomplish these tasks, awardees want to work on these areas:
- Setting goals that include achieving clarity and common understanding on what professional learning can and should be;
- Creating space, structures,

strategies, and tools to attain student success;
- Generating strong connections to work climate and culture;
- Strengthening communication that enables educators and communities to be part of creating student success; and
- Achieving student outcomes that meet the needs of tomorrow, not yesterday.

RESPONSIVE SUPPORT

The Learning Forward Foundation is committed to making a difference for all educators and students in our system. We believe that supporting professional learning to improve practice with a focus on student learning is essential to student success.

We have significant evidence and data to show that the key to increasing student success is for educators to become learners themselves. This happens when educator learning is intentional, focused on student needs, and where teacher voice is heard, valued, and supported.

It takes focused collaboration between the foundation and awardees to achieve this vision. After awardees receive a grant or scholarship, the foundation supports their ongoing learning and implementation of their change projects through a networked system.

A unique feature of this support

system is the Touchpoint, a one-hour conversation that includes the awardee and foundation team members. During the Touchpoint, the awardee reflects on project outcomes to date, activities designed to reach the intended outcomes, and evidence of impact.

This safe, nonevaluative approach creates a powerful community learning space that supports awardees' intentional decision-making toward changes and improvements in their problem of practice.

CELEBRATION AND THANKS

The foundation celebrates the newest awardees and thanks the donors who have made contributions to this work. Learning Forward Foundation awardees, past and present, make the lives of students and educators brighter with their gifts of passion, creativity,

DONORS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

A broad donor base has enabled the Learning Forward Foundation to advance critical learning projects and achieve success for students and educators.

Donors include educators, researchers, partners, and sponsors in the education community who believe in the work of Learning Forward and the foundation. Their support helps make a difference for awardees and the educators and students they reach.

expertise, and empathy. When teachers, teacher leaders, and other educators carry an attitude of gratitude, the benefits are boundless.

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WHAT I'VE LEARNED / Craig Randall

teacher's classroom can be less intimidating than in your office.

- Only offer a suggestion as the last part of the reflective conversation. Offering it earlier can cause teachers to feel anxious or judged, and, as a result, they sometimes don't hear the compliments of strengths that you share.
- Avoid the words "need" and "should." People get defensive with the use of these words.
- Only work on one growth area at a time. When people spread their growth focus on more than one area, efforts are diluted and the growth is minimal. When the focus is on one area, the growth is more substantial.

When done well, the reflective conversation can lead not only to teacher growth, but also whole-school improvement. When you spend a lot of time in classes, you learn about

teachers' expertise and can then empower them by finding ways to have teachers lead professional learning sessions and PLC groups, or pair them up to build on each other's strengths.

In addition, I have found that the thoughts teachers share during reflective conversations often lead to new initiatives that propel the whole school forward. For example, when I praised a teacher for her skill in differentiating instruction for her students, she made helpful suggestions for enhancing differentiation schoolwide.

These ideas led directly to revamping English courses to provide multiple novel choices in each genre studied and to that teacher leading numerous schoolwide professional development sessions. Without the frequent and positive nature of classrooms visits and conversations, these ideas would not have manifested themselves.

Teachers work hard and are proud of the work they do to help students

grow. As school leaders, we support and celebrate teachers' growth. Trust-based observations are the best way I know to understand and build teachers' capacity, and therefore to help all students succeed.

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Craig Randall (craig@trustbased. com), president of Trust Based Enterprises, has used lessons learned from his experiences as a school counselor, college basketball coach, teacher, and principal to create trust-based observations. ■

RESEARCH

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REVIEW
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DO YOU KNOW WHAT YOUR STUDENTS KNOW?

Hill and Chin focus on two areas of teacher knowledge that have been understudied: how attuned teachers are to students' mastery levels in the subject they teach, and how well they recognize and understand students' misconceptions about the content they are learning. Knowing where students are in mastering the content can inform teachers' decisions about pacing, assessment, and other teaching elements. Understanding why students make frequent mistakes can inform how teachers plan their lessons and tailor their feedback to support students' shift in thinking.

— *"The importance of understanding student misconceptions"*

Elizabeth Foster

The importance of understanding student misconceptions

▶ THE STUDY

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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. ■

Professional learning strategies often rely on the belief that teaching and learning outcomes are best when teachers have a clear understanding of students' thinking. This may seem like common sense — after all, students are active participants in the learning process, so their thinking impacts the outcome. But does research support the assumption that teachers' knowledge of students' thinking matters? Researchers Heather C. Hill and Mark Chin address this issue in a study recently published in the *American Educational Research Journal.*

Hill and Chin consider what they call "incomplete evidence" in the research literature on teachers' understanding of student thinking, including whether it can be measured reliably and how it stacks up with other areas of teacher knowledge such as subject matter content.

They acknowledge that some studies find a positive link between teachers' understanding of students and outcomes, but they worry about what they call "weak and inconsistent" evidence that this knowledge is really related to teacher practices and student learning.

To make the evidence base more robust, their study asked these specific research questions:

- Can we measure reliably what teachers know about students' thinking?
- Is instructional quality higher when teachers judge students' mastery accurately and when

they understand the nature of students' misconceptions?
- Are student learning outcomes better when teachers understand students' thinking in these ways?

The study's findings have important implications for professional learning directors, coaches, and school leaders as these professionals consider how to incorporate students' development and learning needs into strategies to make the most of curriculum and materials. As Learning Forward has codified in the **Implementation standard** of the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), effective professional learning takes into account the process of change over time, and understanding how teachers' and students' thinking interact could lead to richer conversations among leaders and staff about how learning can change and grow.

WHAT DO WE KNOW?

Research has long suggested that teachers' understanding of students and their learning experiences has an impact on student outcomes. Understanding students is also often emphasized as a way to support students' social and emotional learning, increasingly understood as a critical component of overall success. Of course, there are many ways that teachers develop an overall understanding of their students and the most relevant and useful teaching strategies.

Decades-old research, such as that of Lee Shulman, highlights the complex nature of teacher knowledge that includes content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and knowledge of students and their characteristics. Deborah Ball has found that the kinds of teacher knowledge that matter include students' conceptions and misconceptions about academic content and students' expected reactions to content and tasks as well as knowledge of the subject itself.

Hill and Chin focus on two areas of teacher knowledge that have been understudied: how attuned teachers are to students' mastery levels in the subject they teach, and how well they recognize and understand students' misconceptions about the content they are learning. Knowing where students are in mastering the content can inform teachers' decisions about pacing, assessment, and other teaching elements. Understanding why students make frequent mistakes can inform how teachers plan their lessons and tailor their feedback to support students' shift in thinking.

For example, the teacher might recognize that many students erroneously believe that when dividing fractions, they should divide the denominator by the numerator. Anticipating this can help teachers tailor their approaches to help students head off such errors.

In practice, this means that it could be very helpful to infuse

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professional learning discussions with an examination of common student misconceptions as revealed by the research as well as by teachers' own student artifacts.

HOW WELL CAN TEACHERS UNDERSTAND STUDENTS' THINKING?

The researchers' first question was whether it is possible to measure how well teachers understand students' thinking. The first step in their measurement process was developing a multiple-choice math test for students that included not only a correct answer but also incorrect response choices that reflect common student mistakes about math concepts.

The researchers then used this test to generate two measures of teachers' understanding about students:

1. **Accuracy in judging student knowledge:** Teachers were asked to estimate the percentage of their students who would get the correct answers on the math items. This served as a measure of how attuned teachers were to their students' understanding of math content. Teachers whose estimates closely matched the real percentage were considered to have higher levels of accuracy.

2. **Knowledge of student misconceptions:** Teachers were asked to rate which of the incorrect responses students were most likely to choose. This was a measure of teachers' general knowledge of why students tend to make certain kinds of mistakes. Teachers who correctly identified the most popular incorrect responses were considered to have higher levels of knowledge of student misconceptions.

Hill and Chin validated and examined these measures, including

The researchers found that teachers with higher-achieving students tended to be more accurate in judging student knowledge.

whether the measures effectively differentiated among teachers and whether teachers' scores remained stable over time. The researchers used data from 284 4th- and 5th-grade math teachers included in a study by the National Center for Teacher Effectiveness conducted from 2010 to 2013. The teachers had an average of 10 years of teaching experience and worked in schools with students who were 40% black and 23% Hispanic; 63% of students qualified for free or reduced price meal plans.

Accuracy appeared to be reliable and stable over time. Knowledge of student misconceptions was less stable, but the researchers continued to study its potential relationship with teaching strategies and student outcomes. Interestingly, the researchers found that teachers with higher-achieving students tended to be more accurate in judging student knowledge.

In addition, the authors noted that teachers' predictions of student performance are impacted by many variables, including students' language proficiency and classroom management issues. Teachers with more black and English language learner students tended to be less accurate.

These findings and ideas could inform a rich professional learning discussion at the team, school, or district level about how teachers adjust their expectations for students (positively or negatively) and whether and how those expectations impact student engagement, motivation, and, ultimately, achievement.

IS TEACHERS' KNOWLEDGE OF STUDENTS RELATED TO QUALITY TEACHING AND LEARNING?

Perhaps most importantly, the researchers assessed whether teachers' accuracy about student mastery and knowledge of student misconceptions related to the quality of their math instruction and students' performance on both the study-developed test and a state standardized achievement test.

Quality of instruction was measured, in part, by an observation component of the study that consisted of data from multiple raters viewing and coding seven-minute videos of an average of six lessons per teacher. These observations focused on how teachers remediated students' mistakes and the degree to which the teachers incorporated student thinking into the lessons.

In their analyses, the researchers took into account factors that might impact the analysis of the data, such as the way student achievement levels affect teachers' predictions of future outcomes, and adjusted teacher scores accordingly.

In general, teachers' knowledge of student misconceptions and judgments about student performance were surprisingly low. However, the study's results indicated that there was a positive relationship between accuracy and some measures of instructional quality, including teachers' effectiveness in correcting student mistakes and misunderstandings. Accuracy also predicted student outcomes as measured by scores on the two math tests.

Knowledge of student misconceptions, on the other hand, was not clearly related to instructional quality, and predicted scores on the state math test but not the other student test. Interestingly, there was no correlation with students' reports of how well teachers provided monitoring, evaluation, and feedback.

These findings suggest that

professional learning that supports teachers to develop understanding of student perspectives could lead to better instruction and more tailored supports for students. It appears that teachers can benefit from learning about both general student tendencies as well as the needs and performance of their specific group of students.

Ideally, this kind of learning, including about predicting students' performance levels, would occur regularly throughout the year in coaching and feedback conversations. This strategy is what undergirds Learning Forward's **Learning Designs standard,** which emphasizes how developing a better understanding of learning strategies through professional learning can lead to improved teacher and student outcomes.

A FEW CAVEATS TO CONSIDER

It should be noted that the researchers weren't able to look at the directionality of these relationships. It is possible that effective, high-quality instruction enables teachers to have more accurate knowledge of students' thinking and understanding rather than the reverse.

In addition, the researchers note that teachers do not develop their understanding of student learning and misconceptions as a whole body of knowledge at one time. Rather, they build this understanding incrementally as they teach different levels of students or as they work with a group of students with particular misconceptions and gradually develop their own "bank" of common misconceptions.

This kind of knowledge, Hill and Chin acknowledge, can be difficult to measure. In other words, the study supports the need for both the Learning Forward **Data standard** (using multiple sources of student and teacher data to inform professional learning opportunities) and the incorporation

> **It appears that teachers can benefit from learning about both general student tendencies as well as the needs and performance of their specific group of students.**

of professional experience and wisdom, which cannot always be easily quantified.

To help bridge these types of information, the researchers suggest additional qualitative studies such as observation-based case studies, which constitute an area rich for exploration for researchers and especially for research-practice partnerships in which teachers share in the development and analysis of the research study.

PUTTING THE FINDINGS INTO PRACTICE

In short, the study found that teachers' understanding of students' thinking does matter. Importantly, such understanding has a direct relationship to student outcomes independent of teachers' expertise in the subject matter they are teaching. As Learning Forward's **Outcomes standard** underscores, there is value in teachers being aware of students' thinking and mastery levels and reason to include these factors in professional learning so that the focus is always on improving student learning.

The Hill and Chin study can serve as a helpful resource for leaders and instructional coaches to examine the content of their conversations with teachers — for example, to consider whether they look at how teachers reteach content or seed class discussions. The study also provides an interesting perspective on examining student data in professional learning conversations, which we recommend in

Learning Forward's **Data standard.**

The study found that teachers with an understanding of student thinking were more likely to adjust teaching strategies (such as remediating misconceptions or weaving student thinking into instruction), whereas teachers who focused more on data were more likely to employ classroom management strategies (such as grouping).

Of course, a mix of strategies is important, but this provides support for the idea that professional learning that addresses content, data, student thinking processes, and misconceptions could meet a broader range of teacher learning needs. In addition, the findings about teachers' predictive accuracy varying based on student characteristics and classroom management issues provides a good starting point for discussions about ensuring supportive conditions for all students to learn.

Lastly, the researchers also point out an additional implication for teacher educators as well as professional learning facilitators in terms of overarching expectations for educators: "These results suggest that a construct roughly titled 'knowing where your class is in terms of mastery of content' belongs in contemporary delineations of teacher knowledge." Spending time on understanding not only how to determine where students are but also how to determine where to expect them to go next seems to be a worthwhile endeavor.

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Do you have thoughts about this study or have recommendations of other research you'd like to see us cover? Email me at elizabeth.foster@ learningforward.org. ■

ESSENTIALS

■ LEARNING CYCLES

Learning Cycles: A Powerful Tools for Teacher-to-Teacher Professional Learning
WestEd, 2018

   In Teacher Practice Networks, an initiative of the Center for the Future of Teaching & Learning at WestEd, teacher leaders lead sustained professional learning to advance K-12 instructional practices aligned to college- and career-readiness standards.

   Multiyear data indicate how a learning cycle helps teacher leaders intentionally plan effective professional learning with activities that engage other teachers in learning new content, applying it in practice, reflecting on implementation, reiterating lessons, and refining instruction.

   This report features vignettes of teacher-led learning cycles in action and discusses:
   • How a learning cycle framework provides structure to teacher-to-teacher professional learning;
   • How teacher reflective habits can be fostered throughout all phases of a learning cycle; and
   • Tips for teacher leaders and school administrators to establishing a healthy climate that supports teacher reflection and growth.

   www.wested.org/resources/cftl-centerview-learning-cycles

■ PERSONALIZED INSTRUCTION

Innovative Staffing to Personalize Learning: How New Teaching Roles and Blended Learning Help Students Succeed
The Clayton Christensen Institute & Public Impact, May 2018

   Public Impact and the Clayton Christensen Institute examined how eight district, charter, and private schools and school networks with notable student success adopted blended learning and new staffing arrangements to better enable personalized instruction.

   Blended learning gave teachers more real-time student learning data so that schools could frequently regroup students, quickly respond to struggling students, and help teachers improve by pinpointing instructional planning and professional development issues.

   At the same time, innovative staffing arrangements helped the schools personalize learning by providing more students with great teaching.

   http://publicimpact.com/ innovative-staffing-to- personalize-learning

■ PRINCIPAL PREP

Principal Preparation Program Self-Study Toolkit
Education Development Center, 2018

   This tool kit is designed to help those who run principal preparation programs, along with school district representatives and others, take stock and assess the quality of the training that programs provide to aspiring principals. The heart of the kit is a detailed assessment form, with ratings on a scale of 1 to 4, that users fill in to help them identify the strengths and weaknesses of the programming.

   The format calls for users to provide evidence of a program's effectiveness in six domains — candidate admissions, course content, pedagogy, clinical practice, performance assessment and graduates' success in areas ranging from state certification to job performance.

   www.wallacefoundation.org/ knowledge-center/Documents/ Principal-Preparation-Program- Quality-Self-Assessment- Rubrics.pdf

■ TEACHER COLLABORATION

The Prevalence of Collaboration Among American Teachers: National Findings From the American Teacher Panel
RAND Corporation, 2018

   Based on data from a survey of a nationally representative sample of K-12 teachers in the United States conducted in fall 2016, this report explores the prevalence of teacher collaboration in U.S. schools and assesses the extent to which teacher collaboration varies in schools with different levels of students in poverty.

   Analysis focuses on teachers' reports of three particular aspects of teacher collaboration: the prevalence of opportunities, the frequency of collaboration activities, and the usefulness of collaboration experiences. The findings could inform policy and practice related to teacher collaboration opportunities at the school, district, state, and national levels.

   www.rand.org/pubs/research_ reports/RR2217.html

Inform. Engage. Immerse.

FOCUS

WHAT WILL YOU LEARN THIS SUMMER?

VIRTUAL ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

Computer simulations can provide essential practice at making a wide range of decisions facing education leaders, filling gaps in experience with focused, relevant, virtual on-the-job training. Good simulations engage the power of storytelling and provide an experience that takes place in a recognizable context — for administrators, that might be a school building, classroom, or town hall meeting.

Simulations can help administrators prepare for difficult conversations about students in crisis, racial tensions, teacher evaluations, and other sensitive topics. In each scenario, simulations help educators understand what other information is needed and who else might be affected by the decisions.

Learn from (simulated) experience p. **34**

A NEW MODEL
FOR SCHOOL
CHANGE
FOCUSES ON
ADULT
LEARNING

THE DNA OF
DEVELOPMENT
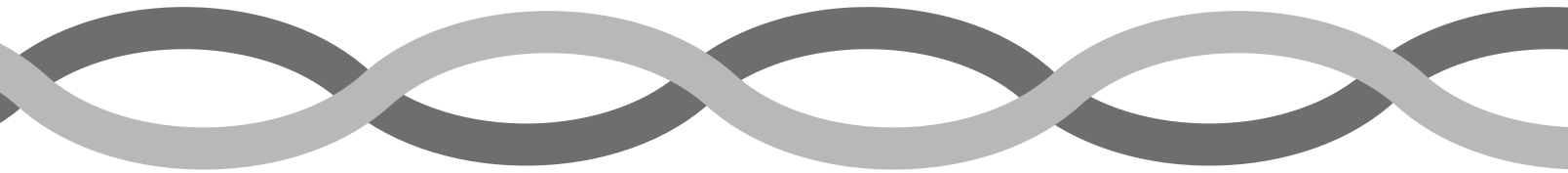
BY ELEANOR DRAGO-SEVERSON AND JESSICA BLUM-DESTEFANO

Reflecting on what she felt was the most vital leadership work happening in her large urban district, an experienced superintendent recently announced at a professional learning event: "If we can get adult development right, we can change the world."

Likewise, when the principal of a once-struggling school was asked about the secret behind her school's dramatically improved test scores and teacher retention rates, her answer was simple: "Adult development. We're doing adult development."

So why all this talk about adult development? Aren't schools — and development, for that matter — for students? The fact is, caring for adults' internal development is one of the most powerful drivers of educational change. When the adults in schools have the personal and organizational support to grow, they

can bring their best selves to their students, families, and peers. This has important implications for cultivating school communities that are growth-enhancing, and it has also been linked to improved student achievement and outcomes (Donaldson, 2008; Leithwood & Louis, 2012).

Nevertheless, it's all too easy to

CAPACITY BUILDING

THEORY

CULTURE

SUSTAINABILITY

FEEDBACK

PILLAR PRACTICES

overlook adults' learning and growth when we're focused so urgently on that of students. This unintentional oversight is compounded by the influx of demands, initiatives, and opportunities that educators navigate daily. "I've been in education for nearly 30 years … and have seen all kinds of big ideas come and go in my schools," one veteran principal told us. "But adult development was never on my radar until recently. I wish I could have learned more about how to support adults earlier in my career. It's the missing link."

So how can you support adults as they grow and learn, especially when educators already have so much on their overly full plates? And how might an understanding of what we call *developmental diversity* help education leaders do this even better?

In this article, we highlight key elements of our new model for developing educators' capacities, as well as key
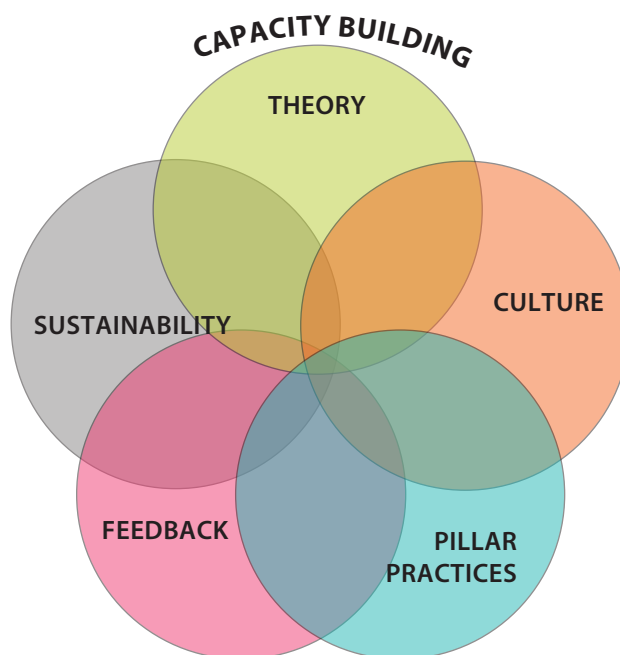
takeaways about the potential of supporting adult development (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016, 2018).

FIVE ELEMENTS OF CAPACITY BUILDING

When we think about vibrant schools, districts, and classrooms, we think of people working to generate new ideas, deepen practice, collaborate more effectively, build bridges, and challenge assumptions — together. Of course, this isn't something we can do easily. Research suggests that it takes complex internal capacities to lead, teach, and collaborate in such rich ways (Drago-Severson, 2009; Kegan & Lahey, 2016).

In response to these pressing needs, our model highlights five elements of capacity building for school improvement: theory, culture, pillar practices, feedback, and sustainability (see the figure on p. 23). As suggested by the overlapping circles in the model, these elements, which we see as the building blocks or DNA of development, are powerful drivers of capacity building that enhance how we understand, feel about, talk to, and collaborate with one another.

1. Theory

Although a number of theories explore the patterns of development in adulthood, we have found constructive-developmental theory (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012; Kegan, 2000) particularly useful for understanding more about the different ways adults make sense of learning, teaching, and leading, as well as how to support their growth in schools.

In a nutshell, constructive-developmental theory emphasizes that each of us constructs our understandings of the world and our unique places in it. With the appropriate supports and challenges, these constructions can

WAYS OF KNOWING AS TREE RINGS

INSTRUMENTAL (CONCRETE)

SOCIALIZING (OTHER FOCUSED)

SELF-AUTHORING (REFLECTIVE)

SELF-TRANSFORMING (INTERCONNECTING)
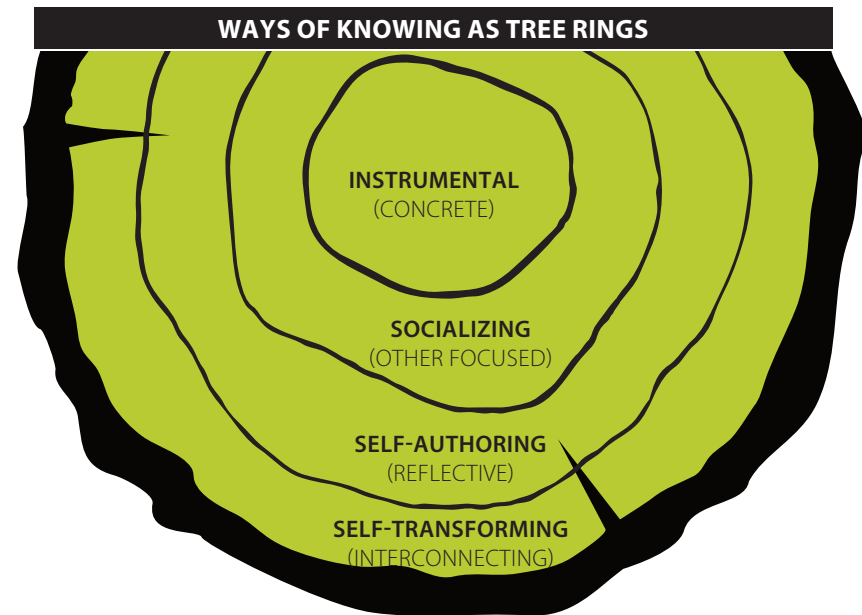
develop, or grow more complex, over time. For example, educators at all levels — teachers, principals, assistant principals, and district leaders — can be committed to advancing social justice. However, they will orient to this differently and will need different developmental supports to see more deeply into themselves, others, and the systemic injustices in education and society.

Constructive-developmental theory sheds more light on these qualitative differences by highlighting four meaning-making systems in adulthood, which we call *ways of knowing.* These different ways of knowing — instrumental, socializing, self-authoring, and self-transforming — have their own strengths and limitations.

Instrumental adults understand things in concrete ways. They tend to meet their own needs or do what they see as the right thing.

Socializing knowers more fully understand others' feelings and perspectives but are often run by the opinions of valued others and authorities.

Self-authoring adults have

developed the capacity to reflect on their relationships and the world more broadly and author their own values and standards in response.

Like self-authoring adults, *self-transforming knowers* have their own internally generated beliefs, but they actively seek to explore and grow through continued interconnection with others.

Although one way of knowing isn't necessarily better than another or correlated with greater happiness or intelligence, these four ways of knowing represent a cumulative, developmental progression. Similar to the layered rings within a tree (see the figure above), each new way of knowing includes and builds on the capacities present in those before.

This is important because research suggests that leaders today need at least some degree of self-authorship to succeed in their work (Kegan & Lahey, 2016). An understanding of development can help leaders understand their own needs for growth as well as differentiate the supports and challenges they offer to the adults in their care.

Although there isn't a quick way to assess a colleague's (or one's own) way of knowing, understanding that adults in nearly any group, team, or school will demonstrate developmental diversity can help build and sustain a culture of support and care.

2. Culture

Feeling is tied to thinking and behavior. When something feels off in a school's culture, it's hard to move forward. Still, it can be difficult to pinpoint just what makes an organizational culture work. It's like trying to wrap your arms around the bubbles in a bubble bath.

That said, constructive-developmental theory can help us better understand the three preconditions of positive school culture: safety, trust, and respect (Drago-Severson, Blum-DeStefano, & Asghar, 2013).

A developmental lens reminds us that adults, like students, will need different things to feel safe, trusted, and respected. An *instrumental knower* might appreciate clear expectations and consistent rules for all, whereas a *self-authoring knower* might feel more comfortable with professional autonomy and discretion.

Of course, many factors influence our preferences in these domains (such as personality, experience, cultural norms, and so on). Still, a developmental lens helps remind us that school culture can never be a one-size-fits-all phenomenon. As Deborah Meier (2002) once wrote, "Good schools, like good societies and good families, celebrate and cherish diversity" (p. 38).

While educators around the United States and the world are rightly working to honor the overlapping dimensions of diversity in their schools and classrooms — such as race, sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, immigration status, home language,

socioeconomic status, learning style, and more — a constructive-developmental lens can help school leaders see developmental diversity as another vital, if underrecognized, aspect of our identities, organizational culture, and collaboration.

3. Pillar practices

Because culture is, in many ways, a direct outcome of how we work together, and because how we work together, in turn, influences the larger culture, we emphasize four pillar practices for effective collaboration in our model: teaming, mentoring, providing adults with leadership roles, and collegial inquiry (Drago-Severson, 2009, 2012).

Educators in our research often confide that, without this kind of purposefulness, collaboration can feel forced or too focused on superficial aspects of task completion or decision-making.

However, when educators are encouraged to approach collaboration as an opportunity to explore beliefs and assumptions, learn from diverse perspectives, and help one another grow, collaboration can be transformative. In fact, our research suggests that there are few things more powerful and predictive of change than genuine collaboration among colleagues who have one another's back — and who have the courage to share their honest thinking and feeling.

So how do we get there? For one, being upfront about our expectations as collaborators can circumvent many common challenges and create space for reciprocal growth. What, for instance, are we hoping to get from a collaborative experience? What strengths (and hopes for growth) do we bring to the group?

Likewise, sharing developmental theory with colleagues can help establish a common language for

discussing collaborative hopes and needs and can provide a road map for differentiating supports and challenges.

Thinking differently about *why* we collaborate is also key. When we approach teams, mentoring relationships, and leadership roles as ongoing opportunities for colleagues to grow with support (instead of just independently demonstrating competency or expertise), we can grow the capacity of the larger community over time.

The fourth pillar practice, collegial inquiry, is a form of reflective practice that can take place within each of the pillars. Although we can reflect privately on practice at any time, collegial inquiry involves at least one other adult.

Engaging in inquiry with others enables us to see our thoughts, actions, and selves from new perspectives, especially when we invest time upfront in setting norms that go beyond the basic agreements about timeliness and cellphone usage to tackle such issues as how the group will navigate and grow through conflict or what team members will do when things don't go well.

In sum, each pillar practice can serve as a developmental structure for growth and can improve collaboration and enhance organizational culture. (See p. 26 for some suggestions on how to implement the pillar practices.) As one veteran principal explained, "Putting the pillars in place in my school is the reason we've been able to accomplish what we once thought was impossible. These structures make the magic happen."

4. Feedback

The fourth element of our model for building capacity is feedback. Like collaboration, feedback is all around us — in our words, silences, actions, reactions, and inactions. Educators in our research refer to feedback as a "pain point" because they'd like to get even

better at this important dimension of communication and leadership.

Toward this end, we've outlined a research-based, developmental approach to feedback, which we call *feedback for growth* (Drago-Severson & Blum-DeStefano, 2016). This approach emphasizes the importance of understanding and honoring all participants' ways of knowing during feedback conversations so new ideas can most effectively be offered, heard, and acted on.

A developmental approach to feedback involves recognizing that feedback receivers and givers will come to conversations with (sometimes unconscious) preferences and expectations. For example, *instrumental knowers* tend to prefer giving and receiving concrete feedback and directives, *socializing knowers* often favor positive feedback that doesn't threaten relationships, *self-authoring knowers* may appreciate feedback conversations that enable them to demonstrate competency and share best thinking, and *self-transforming knowers* often orient to feedback conversations as mutual exchanges of ideas.

Understanding these preferences can help leaders recognize their own strengths and areas for growth and enrich their feedback conversations with colleagues.

5. Sustainability

The final element of our model — sustainability — emphasizes the importance of renewal for individuals and organizations because the two are intertwined. As signaled by the high attrition rates for teachers and principals (see Ingersoll, Merrill, & Stuckey, 2014; School Leaders Network, 2014), many educators are making the difficult decision to leave the field early. As one first-year teacher explained: "I'm treading water and gasping for air all the time, but I'm still

DEVELOPMENTAL TIPS FOR IMPLEMENTING THE PILLAR PRACTICES	
Pillar practice	**Developmental tips**
TEAMING	• Create time and space for team meetings. • Share hopes and expectations for collaboration. • Differentiate opportunities for participation.
MENTORING	• Consider the developmental match between mentor and mentee. • Discuss hopes, expectations, and feedback preferences (from both sides). • Establish confidentiality.
PROVIDING LEADERSHIP ROLES	• Consider the developmental match between the person and the role. • Offer private and open invitations. • Ask how you can help. • Remain available over time to offer support.
COLLEGIAL INQUIRY	• Establish norms and confidentiality agreements. • Start with small, safe topics. • Practice with the less personal first. • Model vulnerability and openness.

sinking. I'm not sure how much more I have to give."

For school leaders, the task becomes looking beyond teachers' performance to their well-being and modeling a commitment to self-care. This often means clearly understanding how much teachers are taking on and prioritizing opportunities for meaningful professional learning.

This brings us back to where we began: the fact that we need to think developmentally about adults' thriving and growth, just as we do that of students. We need to embrace renewal as essential to individual sustainability. This will, in turn, make a big difference in the health and productivity of our schools and organizations.

COMING FULL CIRCLE

Focusing on these five elements of our developmental model for building capacity can foster growth in each of us

and in our most complex organizations. How we care for, understand, and relate to one another, whether we're talking about students or adults, is all connected. It all matters — and it all depends on the internal capacities we bring to the work. Adult development isn't just a great tool for school development. It *is* school development.

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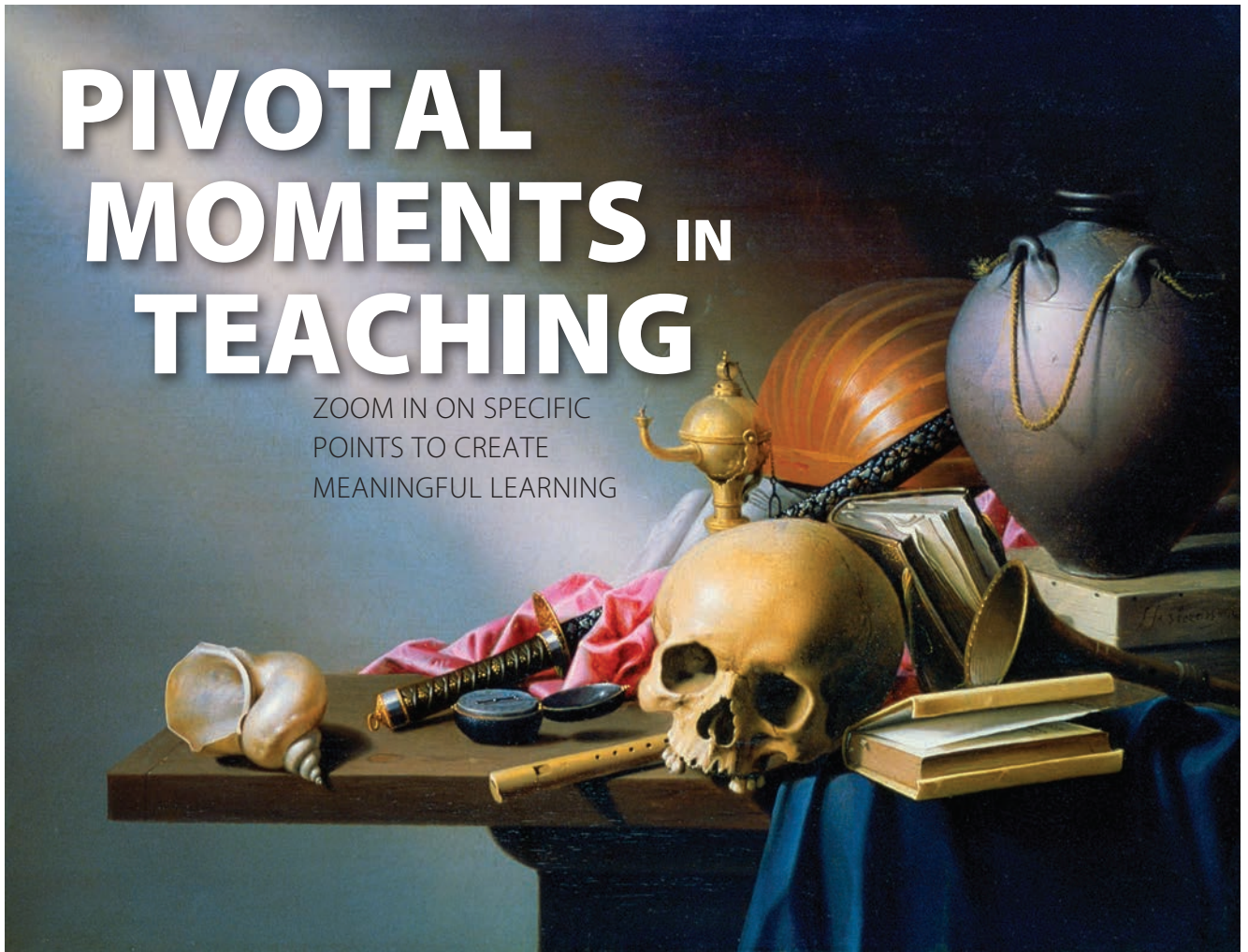
High school English teachers in Nevada used this painting as part of a lesson to deepen students' ability to analyze symbolism in literature.

BY BRADLEY A. ERMELING

Many teachers have experienced the rewards of collaborative lesson planning: the thrill of observing a breakthrough in student learning, the satisfaction that comes from a shared moment of insight, the renewed energy that comes from a fresh perspective on a specific instructional challenge.

We know from previous studies that these benefits are most common when teachers are grouped in job-alike teams, paired with thoughtful colleagues, guided by strong facilitation, provided with stable settings, and engaged in well-structured protocols (Gallimore, Ermeling, Saunders, & Goldenberg, 2009). In practice, however, collaborative planning is not as simple as it appears. Even with the right conditions and support, collaborative planning can be complicated, time-consuming, and difficult to facilitate.

One of the biggest challenges with collaborative planning is balancing the level of detail and scope of content that can be discussed meaningfully in a limited amount of time. Some groups tackle too much and run out of time to teach the scheduled content. Other groups, facing time constraints, choose to share general instructional ideas or map out a basic outline but never dive into the critical details that often define effective teaching and yield positive results for students.

Since collaborative meeting time is so limited for most schools, it's imperative that teams be judicious with

KEY MATERIALS AND ARTIFACTS

- **Painting:** *The Vanities of Human Life* by Harmen Steenwyck (on previous page). A classic example of a Dutch vanitas painting, where symbols are used to caution a viewer about placing too much emphasis on wealth and pleasures of life.

- **Contrasting movie posters** from the 2009 production of *The Road*, a film based on a novel by Cormac McCarthy that students previously studied in the course.

  Poster 1: Ominous picture of a boy and man walking away from an image of destruction and bright light.

  Poster 2: Comparatively calming and peaceful image of a man and boy walking toward a city in the horizon with light coming through the clouds.

- Student-generated artistic posters for *Heart of Darkness*.

how they manage these decisions and what they choose to focus on during collaborative work. One underused practice for maximizing collaborative planning is to focus a team's discourse and work on one or two *pivotal teaching segments* for a specific research lesson within a given quarter or semester of instruction.

Pivotal segments are those anticipated moments or specific episodes within a lesson where teachers expect students to experience a key learning opportunity central to the lesson goal. Teacher research groups in China sometimes refer to these as *crucial incidents* (Yang & Ricks, 2012). In other words, the rationale or working hypothesis for the lesson hinges on these segments. Previous and subsequent steps of the lesson are aimed at preparing for or building on these pivotal moments.

In my work as an instructional leadership consultant, I have assisted principals and leadership teams with adopting a focus on pivotal segments as they engage teachers in collaborative inquiry or lesson study projects. For example, a team of high school English teachers in Las Vegas, Nevada, recently began using pivotal segments to focus their collaborative planning meetings and improve student learning.

Although this team has been meeting weekly for the past five years to investigate particular teaching and learning challenges, one obstacle they frequently faced was running out of time or attempting to overload one lesson with too many ideas or strategies.

On these occasions, despite hard work and best intentions, they implemented an unfinished lesson or one that lacked sufficient preparation, particularly for the most critical lesson segments.

In this article, I explain how they used pivotal segments to overcome this problem and create more meaningful teaching and learning opportunities.

GETTING THE STORY STRAIGHT

To leverage the power of pivotal segments, teams begin by establishing clear goals for student learning and the sequence or progression of elements the lesson will use to achieve those goals. We call this establishing a *lesson story line* (Ermeling & Graff-Ermeling, 2016; Roth & Garnier, 2006). Throughout this process, team members should be constructing a *design rationale* for the lesson, including a working hypothesis of how the lesson elements will lead students to a deeper understanding and achievement of the learning goals (Ermeling & Graff-Ermeling, 2016).

For example, for a lesson on Joseph Conrad's book, *Heart of Darkness,* the

Las Vegas team's primary goal was to deepen students' ability to analyze symbolism in literature. They designed the lesson based on the hypothesis that carefully scaffolding students' analysis and understanding of symbolism in visual forms would help students identify the more subtle and discreet literary symbol devices woven into *Heart of Darkness* and other literary works.

THE LESSON HAD THREE PARTS:

1. Discuss and analyze symbolism in the painting *The Vanities of Human Life* by Harmen Steenwyck;
2. Discuss and analyze symbolism in two contrasting promotional posters from the 2009 film *The Road*, based on a novel by Cormac McCarthy that students had studied previously in the course; and
3. Create original artistic posters for *Heart of Darkness* (beginning with a teacher and example, followed by students making their own posters).

FINDING THE LIGHT BULB MOMENTS

Once the storyline and design rationale are in place, teachers identify one or two pivotal lesson segments — key learning opportunities that can make a lightbulb go on for students and help them understand the rest of the lesson. Often there are multiple options for pivotal segments. Specific project objectives and planning needs should drive the team's choice of those on which to focus. Two teams approaching the same lesson might choose different pivotal segments.

Teachers should then devote the majority of their collaborative meeting time discussing and planning the nuances of these pivotal lesson segments. Key discussion items include: What will the teacher say and not say during the pivotal segments? What probing questions will be used? What are some anticipated student responses to these moments? What possible misconceptions might students have during these pivotal moments, and how should teachers address them? What are some key points to look for as we observe students in action?

The Las Vegas team decided to focus its limited weekly planning time on the first lesson segment, which team members believed was most critical for fostering students' understanding and analysis skills, based on their hypothesis that analyzing visual art would build students' capacity to interpret and explain literary symbols.

The team used one full meeting to conduct a trial run of this class discussion about the Harmen Steenwyck painting and generated an example dialogue with hypothetical student responses to guide its collaborative planning (see box above).

After the trial run, teachers spent one additional meeting analyzing the hypothetical dialogue and revising their follow-up responses to better facilitate

EXCERPT FROM ANTICIPATED TEACHER AND STUDENT INTERACTIONS

Teacher: Let's talk about this painting for a few minutes. Raise your hand and share with the class ONE thing that you noticed in this painting.

Student: I see a **SKULL**.
Teacher: Why is there a skull? What might the skull represent?
Elicit responses and discuss: death, mortality, the frailty of human life.

Student: I see a **SEASHELL** thing.
Teacher: What might the seashell symbolize?
Student: The ocean? Baptism? Travel?
Teacher: Who in the 17th century might be able to travel across the ocean?
Student: Rich people? Explorers?
Teacher: Who would get the shell from the explorer? Probably the person who financed his voyage. So what does the shell symbolize?
Student: Wealth.
Teacher: Oftentimes shells once housed a sea creature, so what might the empty shell symbolize?
Elicit comments and discuss: It is a temporary home. We can't lay claim to the shell any more than a crab could lay claim to it.

Teacher: What else did you notice?
Student: There's a **SWORD**.
Teacher: Can anyone tell what kind of sword it is? (It's a Japanese sword.) What does a sword symbolize?
Student: Violence? Death? Killing?
Teacher: Absolutely! So what is the relationship between the sword and the title of the painting?
Elicit responses and discuss: The might of arms cannot defeat death.

student insights around the key symbols and themes. They considered other symbols they might discuss with students using the same pattern of questioning (for example, the book representing knowledge and the extinguished lamp as a symbol of passing time and the frailty of human existence).

While they spent the majority of their time focused on this one pivotal segment, they also used the second half of this final meeting to clarify plans for parts two and three of the lesson — analyzing example movie posters and generating original posters for *Heart of Darkness.*

LISTENING UP

Before implementing, the teachers identified several case study students to follow during the lesson to focus their observations of classroom interactions and strategically collect student work samples for subsequent debrief meetings. The team facilitator, principal, and instructional coach from the school site joined available team members to assist with observations.

During the English lesson, each observer followed one or two of the assigned case study students and documented specific reactions, comments, and discourse exchanges

from the pivotal lesson segment as well as other segments of the lesson.

During the discussion of the painting, observers noted several prominent patterns across the various observations. Students were stimulated with the visual displays, readily verbalized thoughts, and drew important connections between objects in the painting and overall symbolism of the work. Some examples:

- "Everything represents something within the human experience, it's something that gives life meaning like music, war, knowledge."
- "I like that it's really cluttered, it's not organized. It's not necessarily one person's life, it's everyone's life."

Similarly, observers noted that students were able to draw clear connections between specific objects in the painting and the title of the work. One student said, "The clock shows that all the things on the table we only have for a limited amount of time." Another student said that "these are the things that everyone left behind. It's just things. Once we are gone, it's worthless."

Students were even more engaged in the poster discussions, possibly because they already knew the story represented in the images. Here are some examples:

- "The arm across the boy is like when a mom is in a car with her kid. The dad is holding the boy with one arm and the gun with the other and those two things are the most valuable to him."
- "The hole in the sky reminded me of how he is supposed to carry the torch. If there's a little bit of good left in people, maybe he will find it."
- "The dark side is the dad, but the boy is on the left side in the light, and he's the one who survives."

Analysis of student writing samples from the pair work showed that nearly all student pairs wrote a thoughtful paragraph that explained the meaning of their symbol. In addition, about two-thirds of the class successfully chose textual evidence to support their interpretation of the symbols.

At the same time, the student work samples revealed several areas of continuing need. Only about one-third of the class was able to explain the symbol's significance to the novel and just over half were able to analyze the symbol in relationship to the overall story and themes of the book.

DEBRIEFING AND REFLECTING ON PIVOTAL SEGMENTS

Focusing on pivotal episodes is useful for facilitating teachers' post-lesson reflective discussions as well as for lesson planning. Just like the planning elements, these debrief sessions require well-structured agendas and guiding questions that help teams focus their analysis on the pivotal lesson segments and design rationale. Some of the questions used by the English team included:

- What does the evidence from observations and student work suggest about students' strengths and continuing needs? How did our pivotal instructional segment(s) contribute to this, and what teaching is required to address continuing needs?
- What did we learn about our design rationale? How would we revise the rationale on the basis of our latest evidence and insights?
- What key insights about teaching and learning did we gain from this lesson that might apply to our general teaching practice?

Using these prompts for discussion and reviewing the evidence they

STUDENTS' WRITINGS AND DRAWINGS ABOUT *HEART OF DARKNESS* BY JOSEPH CONRAD

FOG

"Fog is used to symbolize the unknown since it both literally and metaphorically obscures the characters' vision."

THE RIVER

"The River in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* represents that the uncivilized and the civilized humans are all the same, as we all have darkness within."

SHOES

"Joseph Conrad utilizes shoes as a symbol of the pathways that Marlow could have taken throughout his journey through the African wilderness."

THE STEAMBOAT

"The steamboat serves as a point of refuge and as a point of transport. It is what leads everyone closer to their goal, but ultimately closer to their corruption."

collected, the team concluded that the visual scaffolding activities helped stimulate student thinking and foster deeper connections around the use of symbols. Specifically, they noted the value of creating opportunities for students to verbalize their ideas about symbols and articulate their analysis and for teachers and peers to then probe for additional details or explanation.

The team also concluded that students needed further instruction to help students take the next step of constructing written paragraphs that capture the same level of thinking and analysis, including effective use of textual elements and drawing connections to the overall message of the work. These ideas could serve as pivotal lesson segments for future cycles of collaborative planning.

PLANNING FOR DISCOVERY

Few things are more rewarding in a teacher's career than the pivotal moments of discovery that occur when a skillfully executed instructional practice leads to a successful student outcome. Teams that focus both their planning and reflection on pivotal segments create opportunities for these moments and for yielding important insights about future teaching and learning needs.

Over a six-year period, research at this school site suggests that teachers who use pivotal segments report increased satisfaction with team planning, increased clarity about what they are teaching, better understanding of how their instructional choices affect student outcomes, and renewed commitment to the ongoing refinement of teaching and learning.

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LEARN FROM (SIMULATED) EXPERIENCE

COMPUTER SIMULATIONS ARE A SAFE WAY
TO PRACTICE MAKING TOUGH DECISIONS

BY KEN SPERO

Imagine you're a newly promoted principal, replacing a principal who left the job after only one year. Right before your first staff meeting, you're confronted with a challenge with which you have no experience: A teacher comes to you in great distress because she's being bullied by a fellow teacher. If you're uncertain how to proceed, you're not alone.

Finding a more efficient way to help current and aspiring K-12 leaders is crucial because there's a silent crisis undermining school reform. Low-achieving, high-poverty schools face twice the annual leadership turnover rates of other schools — and they generally fill positions with the least experienced leaders (Beteille, Kalogrides, & Loeb, 2011).

More than 60% of urban superintendents cannot recruit or retain qualified principals (Darling-Hammond, LaPointe, Meyerson, Orr, & Cohen, 2007), and more than 45% of superintendents themselves turn over every three years (Grissom & Andersen, 2012). The job is simply too complex, too poorly constructed, and too isolating. School leaders lack the ongoing support and development required to maintain and foster sustained commitment.

What makes the job so challenging is that it's rife with painful tradeoffs that make decisions difficult under the best of circumstances. What's more, leaders are faced with a group of stakeholders — students, teachers, parents, unions, communities, districts, local and state government — whose competing demands can make it impossible to satisfy the needs of one group without dramatically upsetting another. Therefore, leaders must be prepared for inevitable negative fallout from even the most thoughtfully made decisions.

WHY SIMULATIONS?

Computer simulations can provide essential practice at making a wide range of decisions facing education leaders, filling gaps in experience with focused, relevant, virtual on-the-job training.

Research has shown that computer-based simulation is one of the best vehicles for delivering consistent experience (Jeffries, 2015). It has been used for decades by the military, as well as in medicine, where doctors gain life-saving practice in emergency medicine techniques (Lateef, 2010).

Good simulations engage the power of storytelling and provide an experience that takes place in a recognizable context — for administrators, that might be a school building, classroom, or town hall meeting.

SAMPLE SIMULATIONS TO WATCH AND PLAY
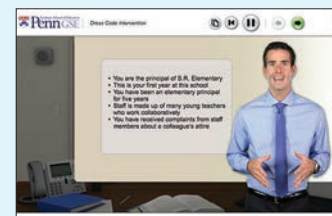
DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS:
DRESS CODE

http://edsimspd.com/ SIMDEMO/dresscode/Start. html

COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIP:
DIGITAL READINESS

http://edsimspd.com/ SIMDEMO/FR_CP_1/

GIRLS' BASKETBALL COACH:
ANGRY PARENT

www.youtube.com/embed/OL ARyKuHtjM/&rel=0&showsear ch=0&ap=%2526fmt%3D18& ap=%2526fmt%3D22

Simulations can help administrators prepare for difficult conversations about students in crisis, racial tensions, teacher evaluations, and other sensitive topics. In each scenario, simulations help educators understand what other information is needed and who else might be affected by the decisions.

The simulation itself is similar to an immersive video game. The educator goes through a series of story-driven scenarios in which each decision leads to a set of consequences and more decisions to make.

A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Here's how the decision-making practice in a simulation might go. You've been an elementary school principal for five years, but this is your first year as principal in this school. You've just received emails from four staff members complaining about another teacher's inappropriate dress. From what you gather from the emails, the complaints seem justified. The person in question is a 10-year tenured female teacher.

In the simulation, you must choose to do one of the following: Meet with the teacher, arrange for her to meet with the school counselor, or do nothing. But then an additional complication arises, as so often happens in real life.

The math supervisor, who has recently observed a lesson on equivalent fractions in that same teacher's classroom, has just contacted you to say that he questions her content knowledge, noting several errors she made in the course of the lesson — and that this isn't the first time he's called this matter to your attention.

Which issue should take precedence — the dress code or instruction? Should you ask the school counselor to meet with the teacher about the dress code and leave the instructional issue for a different discussion? Or should you meet with the teacher yourself and

address both issues at the same time?

If you're playing the simulation with a group of peers, this initial choice prompts conversation about the different actions you could take. In this way, participants confront challenges, make decisions, and experience consequences as they might in real life.

ADDING TO THE EXPERIENCE PORTFOLIO

When we confront challenging situations, we sift through our past experiences, searching for instances where we've seen this kind of thing before. From that, we pull together insights into the situation we're facing and take action. But what happens when our experience portfolio is empty? Schools and districts have neither the time nor the budget to enable their people to learn everything they need to know through the school of hard knocks.

For example, if you've recently been promoted from teacher to an administrative role, you may not have many leadership experiences in your portfolio. In fact, what made for a good decision as a teacher could work against you in a leadership position.

In our dress code example, a newly promoted administrator may be inclined to deal with the more familiar instructional issue than with a possibly confrontational behavioral issue. He or she might decide to not act on the staff members' complaints at all, in hopes that the issue will resolve itself on its own — and then learn that the failure to act on communications from the staff may well have escalated the complaints among a wider group of staff members or the parent community.

This is where a simulation experience is most effective. Educators can play through typical and often difficult leadership experiences ahead of time, whether it's dealing with a parent

complaint about the girls' basketball coach or tackling a broader issue, while keeping all stakeholders, from teachers to students to parents to community partners, informed and happy in the process. (See a list of sample simulations available on p. 35.) Simulations like these enable educators to make relevant deposits into their experience portfolios, ones they can draw on in real life.

THE TEAM EXPERIENCE

The efficacy of a simulation approach is more apparent when simulations are played in groups or teams. When the participants face a decision, the group will need to come to some form of consensus. Invariably, there will be different opinions among the group that need to be worked through. Participants can share perspectives and even biases in a nonconfrontational way to determine which decision they will make.

For instance, in our dress code simulation, no mention is made of the simulated principal's gender. When playing in teams, especially mixed-gender teams, a gender-based discussion may ensue and biases may surface.

A male participant may feel that, although the best course of action might be to meet with the teacher directly, he may also have the valid concern that the conversation could go badly and might be perceived as harassment. He may decide to avoid confronting the teacher altogether.

In the group discussion that follows, participants explore possible alternatives to addressing this challenge because avoidance has consequences. Female participants may have a different perspective, and they may be more comfortable addressing this issue with the teacher.

By surfacing the issue and provoking participants to think about the situation and share their experiences, the simulation enables

participants to discuss the issue of gender in a meaningful way and in a specific context, establishing the potential for deeper engagement and learning.

In addition, many of the team members' perspectives are based on past experiences, which they may share with the team. The fact is that we are habit-forming creatures with a tendency to seek the most comfortable way to get things done and may stick with that one way even when it's not the best approach. Sharing experiences gives students the opportunity to see the benefits of other approaches and learn about the potential consequences of various choices in different contexts.

Human beings are also social creatures who crave contact with others. A study on principal churn (School Leaders Network, 2014) identified the feeling of isolation that administrators feel in the job as a key contributor to burnout. A recent study at the University of California, Irvine found that "feelings of social connection can strengthen our immune system, lengthen our life, and lower rates of anxiety and depression," helping to both reduce burnout-related turnover and make for better decision-making (Seppala & King, 2017).

WHAT USERS HAVE TO SAY

Recently, ALMA Advisory Group, a research and assessment organization, conducted an independent assessment with administrators from a variety of K-12 schools using this form of educational leadership simulation training. Five institutions were surveyed and about 120 people participated. The study found that simulations:

- Foster rich discussions and provide a "sandbox" for aspiring leaders to experiment with making decisions in a safe environment.
- Can improve school leaders'

ability to handle similar situations successfully.
- Help school leaders make better decisions by increasing their awareness of the potential negative results of certain decisions and modeling reflective decision-making.
- Can be readily aligned to various standards.
- Engage participants in the material and enable them to learn as much or more compared to other professional development approaches.

In speaking with a large school district in Florida that is using this form of simulation, a school administrator noted, "Every assistant principal in our district (and we have 140) has found these simulations invaluable for their growth as administrators, especially those who aspire to become principals. We now have directors and assistant superintendents attending our meetings as they want to see how the simulations work and the learning that's taking place as a result. By using these simulations, our assistant principals are able to see the cause and effect of their decisions in a risk-free, fail-forward environment."

A BETTER WAY TO PREPARE

Given the high rate of administrator turnover nationwide, finding ways to quickly provide administrators with the experience they need is paramount. Simulations give K-12 schools an approach that can offer almost-real-life experience to those who need it, helping leaders feel prepared for first-time challenges.

Simulations combine the strength of experience with the power of storytelling to achieve engaging professional development that leaders want to participate in. By using simulations, districts and schools can help leaders improve their decision-making in times of crisis, benefitting

both the school culture and, ultimately, student outcomes.

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MOTIVATION IN MOTION

LEARNING WALKS BENEFIT TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN A DUAL-LANGUAGE PRIMARY SCHOOL

BY MARGERY GINSBERG, OLIMPIA BAHENA, JESSICA KERTZ, AND IYSHA JONES

This article describes an approach to learning walks that focuses on enhancing student intrinsic motivation and learning at a dual-language pre-K-8 urban public school. The descriptions and ideas in this case study are a composite based on the real-life experiences of the authors as well as ideas from literature and experiences at other schools.

Talcott Fine Arts and Museum Academy's commitment to the dreams and challenges of the Chicago, Illinois, school's diverse families is evident in its well-maintained historic facade, vibrant hallways, colorful displays of student work, and dual-language classrooms.

In these classrooms, students who are dominant in English learn Spanish, and students who are dominant in Spanish learn English. The goal of this two-way process is for students to become bilingual global citizens whose academic accomplishment is inseparable from a lifelong value for learning and concern for others.

Over the past decade, dual-language programs have grown tenfold, with

more than 2,000 now operating, including more than 300 in the state of New York alone, according to Jose Ruiz-Escalante, president of the National Association for Bilingual Education (Wilson, 2011). Large U.S. cities such as New York and Washington, D.C., are actively expanding their programs. Census Bureau data indicate that recent immigrants comprise 13.3% of the total U.S. population, reaching the highest national level in 105 years (Camarota, 2016).

Given the rise in students who speak a language other than English at home and dwindling resources for professional learning in urban public schools, the need for schools to develop in-house systems for teachers to learn continuously from one another is great. This is a particular priority for dual-language schools, given the limited number of fully certified dual-language teachers and the importance of teaching language goals along with content knowledge goals.

TEAMS AT WORK

At least once a week at Talcott Fine Arts and Museum Academy, the principal, assistant principal, or teacher leaders lead a learning walk with a different grade level of teachers. A primary purpose of the learning walks is to deprivatize teaching and learning in ways that encourage instructional improvement conversations focused on intrinsic motivation as the foundation for language learning and academic success.

On this first Tuesday of the month, school leaders join the 7th-grade team during its collaborative planning period to visit two 6th-grade classrooms and two 8th-grade classrooms for six to seven minutes each.

Using a rubric with a set of look-fors and a protocol that teachers have tested and revised, the principal quickly reviews the approach and schedule for the day's visits. She reminds teachers that there are two teams with three educators per team, and each team will visit four classrooms.

The two teams will each look for two of the four conditions of the motivational framework for culturally responsive teaching (Ginsberg, 2015). Talcott uses this meta-framework to guide instructional planning so that it consistently supports students' intrinsic motivation to learn.

In each of the four classrooms, one team will look for examples of an inclusive and emotionally safe learning environment by attending to observable norms and groupwork. The team will also interview a student to understand whether that student finds learning relevant and supportive of student choice.

The other team will look for challenge and engagement, noting how the quality of work supports language development and deep learning, and questions the teacher asks. This team will also pay attention to assessment practices that strengthen learning, such as student self-assessment and teacher feedback to students.

As teams begin their visits, they enter together and engage with students when it seems appropriate. Sometimes team members find a quiet place, such

GETTING STARTED

Our work typically begins with a set of considerations that have been informed by literature and experience.

- What should we name our approach?

- What are our purposes, and how will we communicate them?

- Who should participate in developing our process?

- Who would participate in the visits?

- What are the assumptions that will guide our work as adult learners?

- How will we ensure respect for teachers and students?

- What should educators look for or notice that aligns with our instructional and social-emotional priorities?

- What tools do we need, and how should they look?

- What kinds of feedback will teachers appreciate and apply?

- How will teachers use feedback?

- Who should participate, and in what roles?

- With attention to time constraints and other logistics, what routines align with our purposes?

- How will school leaders maintain learning walks as a priority?

- How will we assess and improve upon this work?

as along a wall, to stand or sit as they observe. After about five minutes, the leader signals the team to exit, and the team shares insights in the hallway as the leader tallies quantitative data on a single form for later deliberation. Quantitative data involve ranking specific look-fors on a scale of high, medium, low, or not seen this visit. Qualitative data are examples or questions.

When the visits are complete, the teams gather in a conference room to discuss what they noticed about the learning experiences of students they will have in their classes next year and those of former students who are now in the 8th grade. They also discuss insights and ideas that can strengthen their own teaching.

After the meeting, a school leader drafts a brief, nonevaluative instructional memo that describes exemplary practices, seeks additional information (such as, "We wondered if a student by the window often has difficulty engaging with lessons or if today was unusual for that student") or raises a question (such as, "How do students typically encourage one another to speak?").

The school leader reminds teachers that, while a brief visit can be misleading or incomplete, it can also reveal valuable insights that teachers may find useful. She then places the learning walk data in a folder so that it can be analyzed eventually for trends across the school.

Although the school initially wanted aggregated feedback that protected teachers' anonymity, the adult learning environment at Talcott has become more trusting over time. Teachers often request individual feedback. Nonetheless, the feedback teachers receive is entirely nonevaluative, and its use is a matter of teacher prerogative. It is never included in teacher evaluation records.

The feedback is designed to support adult motivation to learn. It begins by noting an accomplishment, then is followed by an inquiry question, an offer of a resource, and words of encouragement.

WHAT TEACHERS SAY

Teacher surveys about these learning walks parallel other schools that use a similar approach. Teachers are surprised at how much they learn from brief, collaborative classroom visits and that the process helps them think about their own teaching. They believe the experience contributes to ongoing instructional collaboration and helps shift conversations about student performance from "fixing kids" to strengthening teaching and learning.

Finally, colleagues appreciate the ways in which learning walk experiences and trend data from across the school enrich instructional improvement conversations at monthly staff meetings.

Ultimately, adult learners are similar to their students. Most human beings are motivated to learn when the conditions for doing so are inclusive and safe, relevant and responsive to learner input, engaging, substantive, and useful. At Talcott and elsewhere, administrative teams rarely hear teachers say, "We're already doing that" without following it up with a qualifying comment such as, "Now I can see what I'm leaving out when I plan learning experiences. I am going to work on improving that phase of my lesson plans."

AN ETHIC THAT GUIDES LEARNING WALK ROUTINES

As this scenario suggests, we advocate for professional learning that is inclusive, respects teacher agency, and provides feedback in ways teachers value and can apply.

Nonetheless, even when there is a clear set of look-fors, teachers will see

what leaders regularly notice: In some classrooms, a full range of students engage in deep learning and time seems to fly, while in other classrooms, students struggle to remain alert.

While trust is always a work in progress, it is important to plan ways to foster trust. One way to do this is through agreed-upon and occasionally reviewed norms such as mutual respect, an open and curious orientation to learning, and confidentiality with sensitive information.

Most educators understand that things may go more smoothly on some days than on others for reasons that are personal or even inexplicable. In addition, the broader policy environment is relentless in its expectations of schools. This can inadvertently encourage a classroom teacher to take the fastest (and most cursory) approach to achieve student learning goals.

This is exacerbated in under-resourced schools by budget constraints that make sustained professional learning appear to be an unaffordable luxury. Careful planning can keep the process focused on what teachers care about most — helping students thrive as human beings and learners.

CAVEATS

Sustainable learning walk routines take into account an adult learning precept: Although a new learning experience can be transformative, it sometimes begins with a somewhat disorienting event.

For teachers who have been socialized in their families and communities to be deferential to other professionals, participating in generating feedback for colleagues may seem uncomfortable initially. Further, too much ambiguity can be overwhelming and favor adults who are comfortable jumping in.

This unequal participation is

exacerbated when early adopters become so excited about their own learning that they inadvertently marginalize their peers. Transformation theory points toward clear and respectful norms of interaction and carefully planned structures for sense making (Mezirow, 2000). Without this, a process can stall.

Should your approach flounder, we suggest further consideration of the following questions:

- What do we need to do to remain respectful of others and open to learning?
- What do we need to do to ensure that feedback is productive for visitors and teachers being visited?
- How can we improve the logistics?
- What can we do if negative comments about teaching and learning or the process of learning walks arise?

Respectful, relevant, and substantive collaboration requires careful planning. It is always a work in progress.

WHAT WE ARE LEARNING

Experience has shown that across schools, teacher responses to collaborative, school-defined learning walks are similar. Comments from teachers and administrators include:

- In staff meetings, grade-level meetings, and causal conversations, we frequently hear teachers talking about instruction.
- Our relationships develop with each other because of the walks, and this deepens the schoolwide conversation about the learning environment.
- We are modeling what a learning community means, and the students benefit from this model.
- We are able to see how the

curriculum spirals as the age of the child increases, thereby reinforcing essential skills.
- We have an increased level of professional awareness regarding the complexity of instruction at all grade levels. A 1st-grade classroom can seem more complex to run than a middle school classroom.
- A classroom needs to be protected from distractions while still embracing the new tools and information we have at our fingertips. We find out who can help us with this challenge when we are on a walk.

Teachers also appreciate having a manageable set of motivational look-fors to guide their observations. In the past, when teachers visited other classrooms at Talcott, they tried to notice everything at once or only one thing. The approach seemed overwhelming, random, and could distract from opportunities to notice more consequential interactions.

Administrators frequently mention that participating in learning walks requires a firm commitment because of unpredictable competing priorities. This is especially the case in smaller schools because backup staff for crises is limited.

In addition, small schools may not have the luxury of art, physical

education, and resource teachers to free classrooms teachers who are scheduled to do a learning walk. Under-resourced schools may not have the funding for substitute teachers who can cover classes for learning walk participants.

Finally, while learning walk data are informative, other forms of professional learning help teachers effectively apply new insights. We agree with Bloom (2007): "No one model is sufficient to support a systemic school improvement process. ... Done well, classroom visitations tied to professional learning communities and continuous improvement processes have transformative power."

Because of this, we complement learning walks with lesson studies, through which teachers plan an intrinsically motivating and language-rich lesson together, watch a team member teach it in real-time, and deliberate opportunities for improvement afterwards (Stephens, 2011; Lewis, Perry, Friedkin, & Roth, 2012).

These practices provide feedback at its best. They identify "what is good and why, as well as what needs to be improved and how" (Brophy, 2004, p. 72). Given the track record of academic performance at the authors' school and other schools with similar practices, it is easy to understand the significance of rich instructional discourse routines to ongoing school improvement (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009; Portin et al., 2009; Coburn, 2003).

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GROWING OPPORTUNITIES

COLLABORATION NURTURES AND SUPPORTS
EARLY LEARNING EDUCATORS

BY KAYTIE BRISSENDEN-SMITH, ANA MORENO, LISA PELOQUIN,
JUDY RADILOFF, AND JENNA WACHTEL

How can teachers move from working in isolation within ineffective systems to building thriving, collaborative teaching environments in which they are supported and inspired to work with their colleagues in communities focused on mutual professional growth?

In our work as early learning instructional coaches, we have witnessed the ways professional learning cultures can be nurtured with intentional strategies to develop community, support reflective practices, and accelerate teachers' collective professional growth.

Here, we share the real-life experiences of three communities of early learning professionals who have achieved just that. Their stories demonstrate how educators can create and sustain a culture of continuous professional growth and collaboration that results in access to high-quality education for every student.

At some point in our careers as educators, most of us have worked in a school where we didn't feel safe and supported. Many of us have been expected to teach a one-dimensional, cookie-cutter curriculum that we knew didn't reflect the intrinsic interests or individual needs of our students.

And more than a few of us have worked in systems that have not provided protected time to reflect on and assess our students' work and progress, making it difficult to accurately adjust our instruction to meet the specific learning needs of our children.

Without the time, resources, and valued space to learn and grow professionally, it is no wonder that so many educators feel unsupported and sometimes uninspired.

That these challenges are particularly evident in the early learning context where some teaching staff are still striving to be seen as professional educators is especially concerning. Despite growing evidence of — and national attention to — the critical importance of early childhood education, the working conditions and professional learning structures in place for the teachers of 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds are years behind what is now often commonplace in the K-12 space.

Professional development available to most early learning teachers is extremely limited. What is offered is too often focused on issues of compliance instead of capacity building and integrates minimal, if any, opportunities for professional collaboration and planning. The implicit message is that early learning teachers need to figure

it out on their own and that they are expected to plan and collaborate on their own unpaid time after the workday has ended or on weekends.

Despite — or maybe in response to — this, many early learning teachers are finding ways to come together and ask: How do we transform our school systems into inspiring, collaborative teaching and learning environments for ourselves and our students?

● PRE-K CLASSROOM TEAM LEARNING COMMUNITY
KAYTIE BRISSENDEN-SMITH,
pre-K coach

When I first met the preschool teaching team at a child development center in East Palo Alto, California, they were not

working together or communicating regularly, despite their best intentions.

The team, which consisted of a lead teacher, two assistant teachers, and one paraeducator, had undergone many

Kaytie Brissenden-Smith

changes in a short amount of time, including a new site director, adoption

of a new curriculum, and the addition of a new member.

As their coach, I would walk in and see four people working independently of one another, sometimes even giving children opposing directions. While there was a lesson plan in place, no one seemed to understand his or her role in its delivery. As a result, the children were not engaged regularly, nor did they know what to expect of their teachers or the environment, and their uncertainty was reflected in their language and behavior.

To tackle these challenges, I felt it was important to connect not only to each team member's individual goals but also to determine overall team goals. I prompted group members to ask themselves what kind of learning experience they wanted to be able to provide their students and what was needed from each team member to achieve this.

While it was evident that each teacher wanted to provide the best possible learning experience for the children, it was also clear that they did not have a shared vision of how they could achieve this.

To create this vision, the team began having regular team meetings to plan lessons collaboratively. Next, they explored how to address the individual needs of each child and articulated roles for each team member in meeting these needs. The regular meeting structure helped team members hold each other accountable and encourage one other to follow through.

Meeting regularly and with purpose clarified team members' commitment to each other and their students, opening lines of communication, determining clear expectations, and providing consistency.

With individual coaching and professional development, the team now engages in common goal-setting, intentional planning, and regular

coaching cycles. As a result, formative assessment data including observations of children's actions and language show that children understand the rules and expectations of the classroom, demonstrate increased empathy to one another, and are engaged in all aspects of classroom learning.

Key takeaways:

A first step is bringing people together and opening up lines of communication.

The teachers first identified their needs, then set learning targets and outcomes based on those needs to launch and then guide ongoing collaborative meetings to pursue shared professional goals.

● PRE-K TEACHER LEADER COHORT

ANA MORENO,
pre-K coach and teacher leader facilitator

A s a prekindergarten instructional coach, I facilitate a group of preschool teachers in Oakland (California) Unified School District as they work together to build teacher leadership capacity.

For the past few years, these teacher leaders have been meeting once a month to reflect and collaborate.

Ana Moreno

They are supported by the Oakland Early Childhood Administration, which ensures this team has the necessary compensation, materials, and work time.

We began the collaboration process with teacher leaders reflecting on their needs, interests, and passions to drive the work of our professional learning community. This is aligned with adult

learning theory, which suggests that adults learn best when their learning closely connects with their needs.

Teacher leaders also surveyed all early childhood education teachers to identify needs districtwide. The data indicated two areas of focus: building support for new preschool teachers to help them navigate their first year in the district, and gathering videos and articles that showcase the importance of play-based learning and highlight ways to integrate play into everyday classroom activities. The team used this information to initiate two projects to support teacher onboarding and instructional practices that incorporate play.

The team also developed a structure for teacher leader meetings that includes discussion protocols to support team-building activities and sharing best practices. Teacher leaders reported they left meetings feeling inspired with new ideas and a renewed commitment to support their colleagues.

Discussion protocols helped team members actively listen and ask reflective questions as they explored and problem-solved around classroom challenges. The protocols also guided the exploration of possible next steps. Overall, teachers said, meeting protocols helped build a greater sense of a community.

Meetings also became a forum for presenting and sharing concrete instructional ideas. For example, at one meeting, one prekindergarten teacher gave a presentation that explored how using "loose parts" to facilitate play can help manage challenging behaviors in the classroom. "Loose parts" are simple materials that foster creativity and self-directed play as children manipulate the materials with minimal guidance.

As a result, several colleagues experimented with "loose parts," returning to the next meeting with their implementation stories and suggestions.

Similar to classroom instruction for students, professional learning that is relevant and responsive to the needs of teachers inspires meaningful learning and growth.

Key takeaways

District support was key, providing compensation, resources, and protected work time.

Teachers focused very thoughtfully on specific, articulated issues identified by teachers, providing resources directly aligned with those expressed needs and authentic problems of classroom teaching practice.

● TRANSITIONAL KINDERGARTEN PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITY

JENNA WACHTEL,
transitional kindergarten coach

Sophia Jimenez and Sal Germano teach transitional kindergarten, a newer grade in California that serves children who turn 5 between September 2 and December 2. Although experienced teachers, they were overwhelmed and unsure of what to do. As the only two transitional kindergarten teachers in their pre-K-8 school district, they turned to each other to help unpack what this new grade meant and how to best support their young students.

Jenna Wachtel

As their instructional coach, after hearing their concerns, I worked with them to create a professional learning community to support their learning needs and engage in continuous collective learning and development. We met in August before the year began for a week of planning and met twice a month thereafter for two hours

Sophia Jimenez and Sal Germano

each month, once during contract time and once outside of contract time.

We developed a regular agenda structure that would allow Jimenez and Germano to tackle what we identified as their three biggest needs: engaging in developmentally appropriate observation and assessment, planning thematic instruction, and nurturing quality family engagement.

Throughout the first year, I facilitated the collaborative meetings and Jimenez and Germano brought in artifacts of their practice, such as videos and student work samples, for analysis. They also identified and discussed articles to help answer their questions and created thematic unit plans together.

During one particular meeting, as Jimenez shared her assessment and observation process, Germano said, "I don't really get what you're explaining. I think I need to see it to understand." They requested released time to allow them to observe each other, which added a whole new layer to their system of support and collaboration.

At the end of the first year, Jimenez and Germano met during their break to reflect and plan for year two. Now that they had a better sense of some of the foundational pieces of transitional kindergarten, they determined that their highest need as teachers was to learn more about strategies to support the social and emotional development of their young students.

We researched various learning

ABOUT THE NEW TEACHER CENTER

New Teacher Center (NTC) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to improving student learning by accelerating the effectiveness of teachers and school leaders. Founded by teachers in 1998, NTC works in conjunction with school districts, state policymakers, and educators across the country to provide all educators with the support and resources necessary to succeed from their first day to their last. For more information: **www.newteachercenter.org.**

opportunities and proposed a learning plan for their second year of collaboration. They requested that the district pay for them to attend a professional development series aligned to their year two goals instead of district offerings focused on topics less relevant to transitional kindergarten. After some negotiating, the district accepted the teachers' proposal, and we began the next phase of collaboration, with the teachers moving into a more facilitative role in their own learning.

Key takeaways

During regular meetings that featured goal-setting, a targeted agenda, and facilitation, the teachers shared artifacts and analyzed student work, reviewed research in alignment with their learning needs and questions, and planned together. When they added another level of collaboration — observing each other's classrooms — they deepened their engagement, understanding, and support for each other. They were then able to, as a team, develop highly refined year two goals and a professional learning plan to go with it. Over time, they began to own the process, depending less and less on the coach for facilitation.

STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Each of these examples demonstrates potential starting points for the development of a culture of collaboration and curiosity that connects teachers within and across classrooms and school sites in any community. Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011) serve as the foundation.

First and foremost, each example highlights the power of a **learning community** of educators coming together to meet their own, authentic needs. The content of the collaboration evolves as the needs of the students and teachers — as identified by the participants in the group, using a range of **data** — evolve.

Each group began by assessing and determining its shared needs and created **learning designs** to focus time and resources to meet those learning needs. District and site **leadership** supported the culture of professional learning both logistically, by protecting time within contract hours or offering compensation for meeting outside of school time, and in practice, by allowing space for teacher leadership as responsibility for facilitation moved from the coach to the teachers themselves.

As a result of these intentional moves, the **outcomes** of professional collaboration were immediately applicable for **implementation** in classrooms with positive learning outcomes for students.

LEARNING TIED TO TEACHERS' NEEDS

We are learning that a culture of continuous professional learning grows from a shared vision and focus on teacher empowerment and agency to build teachers' own expertise in alignment with their real needs and goals. Just as students learn best when exploring topics tied to their interests, when early learning teachers engage in ongoing learning that is driven by their context, an inspiring culture of collaboration and commitment to more equitable student outcomes for our youngest learners emerges.

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IDEAS

MOVING TOWARD EQUITY

Trust flourishes in communities when people work together on authentic problems. As principals engage in their problems of practice, they learn from one another and develop collective responsibility for the success of all schools in the district.

A Clear Creek (Texas) ISD principal told us, "Being in a principal community of practice has connected me more deeply with elementary and intermediate principals. … I have a larger perspective of effective leadership as a result."

Such a sense of collective responsibility levels the playing field for students, regardless of the school they attend, and moves the district toward greater equity. *— p. 48*

Learning to lead: Districts collaborate to strengthen principal practice.

p. **48**

Process of discovery: Arizona district's principals experience professional and personal growth as a community of learners.

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LEARNING TO LEAD

DISTRICTS COLLABORATE TO STRENGTHEN PRINCIPAL PRACTICES

BY KAY PSENCIK AND FREDERICK BROWN

The role of the principal is a complex one. How well principals play that role matters to the success of the students and teachers they serve.

Since Roland Barth (1984) succinctly noted that "the quality of a school is related to the quality of its leadership" (p. 93), research has confirmed that principals have a positive impact on school improvement,

the quality of teaching, and student learning, especially in high-needs schools (Bryk, Sebring, Allensworth,

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Luppescu, & Easton, 2010; Hallinger & Heck, 1998; Leithwood, Louis, Anderson, & Wahlstrom, 2004).

In many districts focused on improving teaching and learning, the teacher professional learning community is an essential professional learning model to engage teachers in increasing their effectiveness. For members to focus on their own learning so they can improve student learning, they need the support of a strong

school leader who understands how collaborative professional learning can lead to improved teaching practice and student learning.

Teachers who learn and work collaboratively need school leaders who can model learning, share leadership for learning, and facilitate cycles of continuous improvement to strengthen teaching and learning. More than instructional leaders, they need learning leaders.

PARTNERS IN LEARNING

Across the country, district and county leaders are convening principals in professional learning communities to help them develop as learning leaders. For more than a decade — and recently with support from AMEX Principals Path to Leadership, Houston Endowment Galveston County Learning Leaders, The Wallace Foundation, and Twin Tiers Coalition for Learning — Learning Forward has engaged with some of these district-level leaders as learning partners. In initiatives from Avondale, Arizona, to Hillsborough, Florida, and Gwinnett County, Georgia; Fort Wayne Community Schools, Indiana, to Corning, New York; and down to Galveston County, Texas, our partners have taught us what learning leaders do.

We have facilitated and observed those district and county leaders with their external partners and participating school leaders.

We have seen them develop the

PRINCIPAL PROFESSIONAL LEARNING COMMUNITIES

DISTRICTWIDE   SCHOOLWIDE

Districtwide

DISTRICT LEADERS:
- Focus on moral purpose and equity.
- Clarify district expectations.
- Model learning leader attitudes, skills, and behaviors.
- Develop principal learning agendas.
- Convene principal PLCs.
- Provide time and resources.

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS:
- Establish learning partnerships.
- Incorporate college- and career-ready standards, leadership standards, and Standards for Professional Learning.
- Define common learning goals.
- Learn to learn collaboratively.
- Assess impact and celebrate learning.

Schoolwide

DISTRICT AND SCHOOL LEADERS:
- Sustain a learning cycle of continuous improvement to resolve school-based problems of practice.
- Support one another's learning.

SCHOOL LEADERS:
- Set expectations, conditions, and culture for collaborative learning.
- Facilitate and sustain learning cycles.
- May tap teacher leaders.
- Support collective responsibility and accountability.
- Monitor outcomes and celebrate learning.

skills, competence, and confidence to lead learning that positively affects teacher practices and student achievement.

This article describes a learning partnership between district or county leaders and school leaders to create a system of principal professional learning that came to life in principal learning communities across a district or multiple-district region.

WHAT IS THIS PARTNERSHIP FOR LEARNING?

Learning leaders partners' efforts focus not only on improving support for principals, but also on changing the role of district and county leaders. District and school leaders have shifted their relationship from compliance to collaborative learning.

As the graphic above depicts, the district-principal relationship almost

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becomes lateral when district and school leaders work together to set common goals, learn new skills, and coach one another. They move closer to sharing a vision of themselves as a learning community and developing collective responsibility for the success of all learners.

The learning cycle drives continuous interactions between district and school leaders as district leaders clarify expectations with school leaders, who then share feedback about the value of district support and supervision. While addressing schoolwide problems of practice, school leaders exchange information with their principal communities about their learning with others and how that learning impacts their school leadership. Over time, this partnership grows into a community of leaders.

The following assumptions undergird our observations of this partnership and framework of a system focused on principal professional learning communities, as portrayed in the graphic:

- District and school leaders share responsibility for principal professional learning.
- District leaders foster a culture of learning and create conditions that nurture principal professional learning communities.
- District leaders articulate expectations for which they hold themselves and all principals accountable.
- As principals focus their learning community efforts on a common problem of practice, they take responsibility for their own learning and that of their peers.
- As district leaders develop their skills in leading and facilitating principal professional learning, they model how to effectively

While working with our partners, we observed great diversity of ideas and varying degrees of successful implementation.

complete a cycle of continuous improvement.
- District leaders and principals use data to engage with intention and precision in a short cycle of continuous improvement, monitor the impact of their learning, and modify their learning agendas.
- These leaders value and engage in effective feedback and coaching processes.
- They regularly assess the impact of professional learning on leadership and teaching practices.
- Within principal learning communities, members continuously share information to modify plans and adjust professional learning.
- When external expertise is needed, district and school leaders form essential partnerships.

While working with our partners, we observed great diversity of ideas and varying degrees of successful implementation. We also documented common elements of support across dissimilar sites that were similarly focused on supporting and sustaining principals.

ELEMENTS OF SUPPORT

1. Create conditions for learning.

Effective district leaders create conditions in which schools can function as learning systems that encourage and retain educators who can achieve district learning goals. District leaders and principals share an obligation to learn every day and

a moral imperative to ensure that everyone learns with them.

Principals can best lead student and staff learning in their schools if district leaders invest in their own and principals' learning by creating a system of principal professional learning. Accordingly, district leaders align the work of principal supervisors with the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards (Council of Chief State School Officers, 2015). To learn how to lead learning organizations, principals need exposure to models of effective leadership, opportunities to collaborate with other principals, and ongoing coaching and support, all of which are addressed in the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards.

While designing models to support the principal's role in leading learning, district leaders also think about models that strengthen their own role — especially that of principal supervisors — in facilitating principal learning.

According to a study conducted by the Council of the Great City Schools (Corcoran et al., 2013), a key attribute of successful districts is that leaders match skilled supervisors to the needs of schools, which may include helping principals meet new expectations for instructional improvement.

Principal supervisors accept that their primary responsibility is facilitating principal learning. To do so, they develop deep understanding of expectations for their performance in the Model Principal Supervisor Professional Standards, the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011), and the cycle of continuous improvement.

Most importantly, effective supervisors hold themselves and their principals accountable for their schools' progress. They host regular conversations with principals about student and staff learning data, analyze that information together, and regularly

modify the work and professional learning plans (Corcoran et al., 2013).

Friendswood (Texas) Independent School District educators were initial members of the Galveston County Learning Leaders project, funded by the Houston Endowment. Although they valued professional learning, district leaders were skeptical at first about the value of collaborative learning among multiple districts in the county.

Instead, they believed they would spend their time writing a district professional learning plan that clarified required courses for all teachers and support staff. They struggled to develop a vision of themselves as learners. After they understood the Standards for Professional Learning, they began to see professional learning in new ways and, through that lens, they could also see themselves as model learners.

They began to engage with commitment and passion: They created multiple learning systems in which all principals and teachers engaged in a cycle of continuous improvement. They developed collaborative professional learning for principals. They built a teacher leadership process that strengthened learning communities in all schools. As district leaders and principals learned together, learning became the norm.

2. Take a systemic approach to learning.

Rebuilding systems can be tough because existing practices are so strongly in place that most district teams find them hard to change. The curriculum design in a school and its schedule, for example, are more often controlled by the bus schedule than the learning agenda. Such deeply embedded systems and structures often keep school leaders from seeing new ways or finding new options.

Yet, as Paul Manna (2015) pointed out, principals have the power to be

"multipliers of effective teaching" (p. 7). In our experience, learning leaders achieve this effect by creating a culture of continuous improvement and valuing systemic — and systematic — professional learning for themselves and others.

Because they understand the link between professional learning and student achievement, they design adult learning based on the Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). And when they engage all teachers in the organization in a cycle of continuous improvement, they make sure that ongoing data analysis, feedback, monitoring, and adjustments add precision to their assessment of the impact of professional learning on practices of the adults in their schools — and help them keep their eyes on the learning in that school and in the district.

For several years, Fort Wayne (Indiana) Community Schools has committed to becoming a learning system. After articulating a clear definition of leadership in the district, the superintendent and leadership team members focused on principal professional learning.

They examined their meetings with principals and transformed all principal meetings with the superintendent into professional learning sessions that expand the essential work of the district. Together, district and school leaders identified school-based curriculum, assessment, and instruction as the central work of school learning teams.

Based on their own learning needs and the curriculum direction of the district, principals in learning communities established a problem of practice to learn how to increase their effectiveness in leading curriculum efforts at their respective schools. Some may increase their understanding of effective mathematics instructional practices while others deepen their own

learning in teaching English language arts.

Since intentionally focusing professional learning on their curriculum goals, principals and instructional coaches report they have strengthened their skills in facilitating teacher teams. They also are deepening their understanding of the standards students are expected to meet.

3. Engage in principal professional learning communities.

Probably the most significant element in principal professional learning is that effective principal supervisors purposefully design and facilitate professional learning communities for all principals (Honig & Rainey, 2014).

These administrators shift their roles to "fundamentally remake their work practices and their relationships with schools to support teaching and learning improvements for all schools" (Honig & Rainey, 2014, p. iv). As communities evolve, a new relationship develops between district and school leaders — one of shared responsibility, collaboration, and support.

Trust flourishes in communities when people work together on authentic problems. As principals engage in their problems of practice, they learn from one another and develop collective responsibility for the success of all schools in the district.

A Clear Creek (Texas) ISD principal told us, "Being in a principal community of practice has connected me more deeply with elementary and intermediate principals. … I have a larger perspective of effective leadership as a result."

Such a sense of collective responsibility levels the playing field for students, regardless of the school they attend, and moves the district toward greater equity.

In Clear Creek ISD, Galveston

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County Learning Leaders members formed principal professional learning communities to address the district strategic plan. As members of the community, district leaders had been studying systems of learning essential for high-performing districts. They began to rethink their own roles in leading and facilitating professional learning and to question their processes for principal learning.

The district leadership team created a system that engaged principals in assessing their own skills in leading learning communities. Drawing on results of the self-assessments, district leaders formed principal professional learning communities across the district. The communities established their own learning goals related to their problems of practice and set their own learning agendas.

Some chose to focus their work with teachers on using ongoing assessment to determine whether students perceived that learning was personalized to them. Others examined new instructional approaches toward personalized learning, a primary focus on the strategic plan. All engaged in completing cycles of continuous improvement.

The district leadership team is now focused on how it will assess the impact of this work on principal learning and student outcomes.

4. **Focus on a problem of practice through a complete cycle of continuous improvement.**
One challenge is focusing the learning community on significant work long enough to determine impact. Principal learning communities may identify problems of practice that emerge from issues in the school that create barriers to adult learning: What are some of the most effective ways to increase the time teachers have together to engage in a cycle of continuous

improvement? In what ways can we best design learning for our mathematics team to increase its effective use of discourse in working with students? What are the best strategies for strengthening the relationship between instructional coaches and teaching teams?

Such issues may be generated from years of a culture that holds low expectations for students or stifles collaborative learning. As principal communities uncover their issues, members focus their professional learning on a common problem of practice that they address with staff members in their respective schools.

Even when they commit to resolving critical problems of practice, district leaders often juggle a continuous launch of initiatives. Leaders in one of our partner districts, for example, launched new English language arts and mathematics curricula, a new learning management system, and new assessment plan; initiated efforts for restorative practices; and addressed a new set of science standards.

When district leaders find themselves churning in permanent white water, they feel they have no time to engage in a cycle of continuous improvement. Yet we know that if participants do not complete the cycle regularly, they are unable to monitor the impact of their work. When they do begin to make changes needed for effective implementation of any initiative, they may abandon the effort, deeming it a failure — all because they never completed a cycle of continuous improvement.

Members of the principal community can keep one another in the cycle by using change management tools to check the focus of the problem of practice; reviewing agreements about the problems of practice — perhaps they commit to completing fewer

cycles; checking that they can access skilled facilitation; and ensuring that they can engage all members equitably and substantively (Hirsh & Crow, 2018). These strategies may help communities reduce stress and restore focus so they can complete a cycle.

5. **Assess impact.**
One of the most challenging aspects of the cycle of continuous improvement is assessing the impact of professional learning: How do we know that what we are learning makes a difference to those we serve? How do we know whether our principals are learning what is essential for them to drive positive shifts in teaching and learning in their schools? How do we know whether teachers' changes in practice positively affect student learning?

Middle school principals in Galveston (Texas) ISD tackled assessment of impact as their problem of practice. They had worked for many years to implement professional learning communities that would increase their effectiveness in teaching mathematics. But they had no responses to questions such as, "Are teachers effectively using the curriculum materials they were developing? Are they engaging in learning communities in ways that support each other through implementation?"

As a group, they decided to create an Innovation Configuration (IC) map to measure what was happening in schools. They adapted Learning Forward's IC map for teachers to the practices they expected to see when teachers were developing, revising, or working with the curriculum in classrooms.

After analyzing their findings, principals began to change how they worked with teachers on math curriculum. They also studied *The Coach's Craft: Powerful Practices to Support School Leaders* (Psencik, 2011)

and strengthened their coaching skills by practicing strategies recommended in the book. They identified coaching as one of the most effective strategies they could use to reflect on what they learned about their teaching teams.

Throughout the coming school year, principals will use the IC maps regularly to assess their growth as leaders of professional learning and teachers' growth in content and instruction. After completing data analysis and interpretation, they will decide on the design of 2019 summer work.

EMERGING LEARNINGS

We have studied how our partner districts and organizational leaders facilitate and support principal learning communities. As they began to view themselves as companion learners with common goals, we saw district leaders shift from top-down to a collegial relationship.

We also identified changed leadership practices that affected their roles in teaching and learning. Now, district leaders listen deeply to each other and principals. They coach more often than they issue directives. They use their time with principals in high-quality professional learning rather than an information briefing. Other key observations include:

- When district leaders and principals learn together, they strengthen leadership and extend coherence throughout the district.
- As district leaders and principals engage substantively in professional learning communities, they develop essential skills and competencies to lead high-performing schools.
- As district leaders and principals learn from one another, they develop trusting relationships, which they leverage to resolve

problems and implement solutions.

- As district and school leaders accept that they form the district's leadership core and thus share responsibility for the success of all learners, they seize the greatest opportunity for achieving the goals they all want to achieve.

ACCELERATE THE LEARNING

Principals have always viewed themselves as learners, and most have sought their own learning experiences. We believe, however, that a district's or central organization's systematic, purposeful approach to principal learning accelerates the learning of all.

As we deepen our understanding of such relationships, we will continue to explore how we can best support learning leaders. We clarify these ideas, models, and systems for learning in a forthcoming book published by Learning Forward, *Becoming Learning Principals,* which discusses a district system encompassing a continuum of principal professional learning and support.

Effective principal professional learning is central to the nature and effectiveness of teacher learning. When principals participate in a learning community and value the shared learning, they experience the power of this work for their teachers. When principals learn, teachers learn. And when teachers learn and improve their instruction, students benefit.

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PROCESS OF DISCOVERY

ARIZONA DISTRICT'S PRINCIPALS EXPERIENCE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL GROWTH
AS A COMMUNITY OF LEARNERS

BY ALLISON GARLAND

After 12 years as a building administrator, I became executive director of school leadership in Littleton Elementary School District #65 in Avondale, Arizona, in July 2015. The district created this position to focus on the professional and personal growth of building leaders while ensuring district initiatives are implemented with fidelity.

My role was to serve as a leadership mentor and liaison between school leaders and the district vision. To do this, I met weekly with the district executive team, and we kept the progress of the schools at the center of every discussion.

THE LEARNING PLAN

My first task was to build trust with the principals. Even though I had been a principal, they needed to get to know me in my new role. They needed to know that we would all work together to achieve a common purpose. I especially wanted them to know that I had confidence in them and that together we could learn whatever we needed to learn to achieve the goals we set for ourselves.

We also needed a common vision of instructional core and a clear pathway to achieve it. We needed to be clear about terms and vocabulary and make sure we had a common vision of instruction. We wanted to be sure that when we conferenced with teaching teams and individual teachers, we were using common language and giving precise and actionable feedback.

In addition, we valued our own professional learning. Though we had a strong plan for how we would implement the instructional core together, we wanted to implement the best possible strategies for designing the learning not only for ourselves but also for others. We wanted to make

> **"A critical first step to implementation was to build relationships and trust with principals, and coaching was key to accomplishing this."**
>
> — *Allison Garland*

systematic decisions about professional learning to ensure our success.

Unaware of what we did not know, we participated in the American Express Principals Path to Leadership project sponsored by the Arizona Department of Education. Learning Forward facilitated the project, called Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, to ensure that we were aligning our learning for others and ourselves with best practices in professional learning.

Learning Leaders for Learning Schools set as its primary goal to increase the effectiveness of principals to lead high-achieving schools by building communities of learners. The three-year process is grounded in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning (Learning Forward, 2011). We committed time and district resources to participate. Through our work with the project, our school leadership community developed a deeper understanding of change and the tools necessary for implementation.

Now, in our second year, we are working on feedback and coaching effectiveness.

We have resources to guide our work: *Becoming a Learning System* (Hirsh, Psencik, & Brown, 2018), *The Coach's Craft* (Psencik, 2011), *The Feedback Process* (Killion, 2015), and many online resources from Learning Forward publications. Most important, we have a coach to host precise and specific conversations about our problem of practice.

IMPLEMENTATION

1. Use coaching to build relationships.

A critical first step to implementation was to build relationships and trust with principals, and coaching was key to accomplishing this. In our district, each executive team member coaches with principals regularly.

I coach individually with each principal weekly, and we meet as a team once a month. Our principals are at different stages in building leadership capacity, and individual coaching allows me to focus on each principal's unique needs. Group meetings offer us time to build our team relationship.

Principals value their coaching sessions, as evidenced in feedback. For example, Eric Atuahene, principal of Quentin STEM Academy, says he finds his coaching sessions to be "current, meaningful, and to have facilitated my growth as a school leader. We meet weekly, allowing for strategic conversations about what is happening in the building, and visit classrooms to have meaningful dialogue about instruction."

Atuahene and his coach also review resources to facilitate his growth. "I am a stronger leader today due to my coaching sessions," he says. Through regular, consistent coaching sessions, the principals' levels of trust increased, and they are more willing to open up about challenges they face. They began to share not only their successes, but

WHAT WE'VE LEARNED ALONG THE WAY

- Shared vision comes through extensive meaningful conversations that help clarify vocabulary and common understandings.

- Tools such as KASAB and logic models give us not only a clearer vision of what we are trying to accomplish, but also a visual pathway to achieve our dreams and aspirations.

- We are stronger together. Collaboration is a district value that guides our work and enables us to accomplish more.

- If we improve the quality of instruction, then we reduce the demand on supervision and discipline, and time spent will pay off in time savings.

- Through our shared experiences such as coaching and collaborating in the walk-through process, we are discovering more about ourselves as leaders and learners and gaining clearer understanding of the attributes of professional learning that transform schools and increase student and staff development.

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THE PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ASSOCIATION

also their barriers to success.

With that information, I began to differentiate the needs of the principals and facilitated a collaborative environment for them to share and support each other in their meetings. From here, we were ready to create our vision and identify the behaviors that define that vision.

2. Create a shared vision.

The second facet of this work was to build a shared vision of our instructional core. To us, the instructional core was fundamental to all children being successful. We wanted to ensure that all students understand the instructional expectations and what it means to be successful in a global community. Focusing on the instructional core is also of great value to us as we work with our community to ensure equitable access to a high-quality, viable curriculum.

In addition, we wanted to ensure that our instructional framework was aligned with best instructional practices. A district committee, whose members include the director of teaching and learning and representatives from each building, researched possible instructional models and selected the gradual release of responsibility. The committee created an implementation timeline and envisioned what professional learning would look and sound like.

As we came to agreement on our vision and developed common language around instruction, we had deep conversations about the changes we needed to see to achieve the vision. As part of guaranteeing a common language and common approach to our instructional framework, our principal team conducted instructional walk-throughs at each school site. We quickly realized a need to identify what high-quality instruction looks

> **ABOUT THE DISTRICT**
>
> Littleton Elementary School District #65 in Avondale, Arizona, was established in 1912. The district serves 6,000 students in seven schools from prekindergarten through 8th grade. The student body is 75% Hispanic, 11% African-American, 9% white, 2% Asian, 1% American Indian, and 2% other; 84% receive free or reduced-price lunch; 13% special education.

and sounds like to have a common vocabulary when providing feedback to staff.

To do this, we used tools from our work with Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, such as the KASAB protocol. KASAB (which stands for knowledge, attitudes, skills, aspiration, and behaviors) is a tool to establish clarity about the intended outcomes to ensure effective planning, implementation, and monitoring of a problem of practice. We had meaningful conversations about what teachers needed to understand in the new instructional model, what skills they needed, and what behaviors we wanted to see in the classroom.

We also discussed key aspects that attitudes played in our success. What attitudes did we need as leaders? What skills did we need? What behaviors would we see in all of us if we really were successful? As we talked, we developed both a common understanding and a shared vision.

THE POWER OF PROTOCOLS AND LEARNING DESIGNS

While creating its vision, the principal team kept in mind the district's vision: "Leaders in learning, caring, and growing." Using a protocol that included the articulation of our

values and purpose, we created this vision: "Inspire. Empower. Impact."

Next we defined our problem of practice: "We are a community of leaders who are charged with the task of inspiring, facilitating, coaching, and providing support to staff to develop and implement a common understanding of high-quality instruction for every child."

From there, we used a logic model, a powerful tool that helped us plan how to solve our problem of practice. The logic model identifies the long-term, intermediate, and short-term goals, the resources needed and the ones already available.

This is a continuous improvement process. We review our KASAB and logic model and adjust as we go.

In our second year, we have implemented a districtwide instructional model and continue to conduct building walk-throughs, but with greater clarity. We use walk-throughs to collect a large amount of implementation data in a short period of time. Our walk-throughs occur monthly with principals, assistant principals, deans, and the director of teaching and learning.

We created a walk-through protocol aligned to our instructional model and continue to work on providing specific, high-quality feedback that will help teachers be more effective.

Through these walk-throughs, we have learned how powerful instructional rounds support district initiatives. After each district walk-through, we analyze the data and set goals for next steps.

For example, during one instructional round, we noticed that most of the academic talk came from teachers, not students. The principals committed to providing feedback to teachers about academic talk and coaching them on how to increase student academic collaboration in their classroom.

Additionally, principals get ideas and support from each other. Often, principals see what other administrators and teachers are implementing, and they bring back those ideas and new learning to their sites.

Karen Grose, principal of Tres Rios Service Academy, says, "The power of walk-throughs has been a huge stress reliever because teachers are able to learn in teams and from their peers on how to improve their practice. Weekly, our staff visits classrooms with a member of the administrative team, and they see firsthand how to implement new strategies and they can use these ideas in their own classrooms."

The principal team spent a significant amount of time building trust and a positive culture early on. We have a common internal commitment to each other, the district, and the school community we serve. We found that our work closely correlated to the established district values of trust, respect, integrity, collaboration and dedication.

I work to empower my principals, and I respect their opinions and expertise. To have a strong connection between the district and our school leaders, relationships are imperative.

We have accomplished so much since we set our goals. Most important, we are progressing because of our commitment to students, staff, and each other. Through our partnership with Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, we have accelerated our work, deepened our understanding of change and professional learning, and sharpened our skills.

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TOOLS

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

Adapted from the second edition of *Becoming a Learning Team* by Stephanie Hirsh and Tracy Crow, this tool offers a process for detailing a learning plan focused on the instructional materials most relevant to the student and adult learning goals established in a team learning cycle. Use this tool to guide the development of a team learning agenda in a cycle of continuous improvement.

Learn more about the book at **www.learningforward.org/bookstore** or call **800-727-7288** to order.

pp. **60-66**

BECOMING a
LEARNING TEAM
A guide to a teacher-led cycle of continuous improvement
SECOND EDITION

Stephanie Hirsh
and
Tracy Crow

With online tools
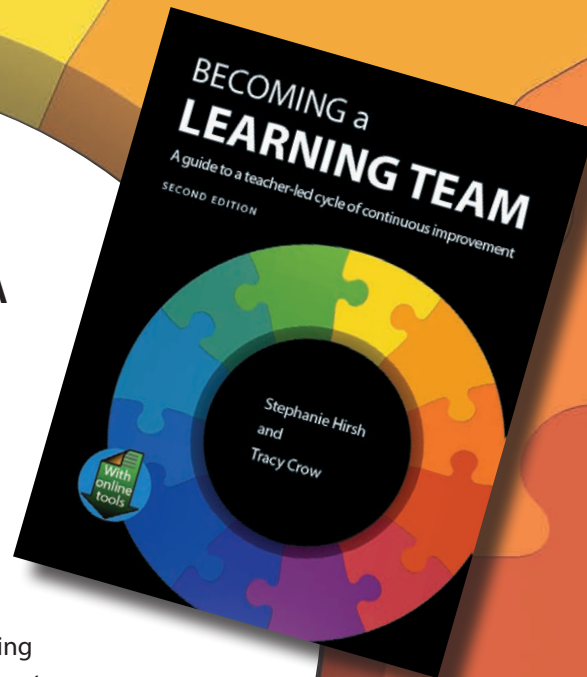
DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

STEPS

1. As a team, review the example student and teacher learning goals. If your team decides it would be helpful, take a moment to recall the difference between the student learning goals, which are written in SMART format, and the teacher learning goals, which are written in KASAB format. *Time: 10 minutes.*

2. Next, look at the learning agenda framework example. Discuss the questions to be answered for each set of goals and the related learning activities that you might design to help respond to such questions. You may examine one goal set in two different team sessions. Or the team might divide into two small groups so that each group can lead the study of a goal. *Time: 20 minutes.*

3. Using the practice framework worksheet on pp. 64-66, set a learning agenda. *Time: 30 minutes.*

To set a learning agenda, consider the following example of a learning agenda framework, which outlines steps and specific questions to address for each step. Presumably by this stage, learners have analyzed data and established learning goals for both educators and students.

For the purposes of this learning agenda example, consider the following student SMART goals and educator KASAB goals for 6th-grade mathematics.

STUDENT AND TEACHER LEARNING GOALS FOR 6TH-GRADE MATHEMATICS
Example student SMART goal
By the end of this unit, all 6th-grade students will demonstrate proficiency in the algorithm for long division, applying their understanding of place value, property of operations, and decimals.
Example educator KASAB goal
Team members will articulate essential understandings of applying place value, properties of operations, and decimals to accurately use the algorithm for long division. They will solve math problems using base-ten diagrams to represent products and quotients of decimals to predict student approaches to the problems and prepare for potential misconceptions. They will engage students in these lessons during the upcoming six weeks, with appropriate adaptation or supplementation as needed to meet SMART goals. Team members will expect active student engagement and learning and will shift or adapt practices based on individual needs.

Source: Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

REVIEW	Questions to address as you design learning agenda	Math goal learning agenda	Your learning agenda notes
Scan entire unit and/or instructional materials; pay careful attention to the appropriate standards, objectives, lessons, assessments related to our student and educator learning goals.	• What is the overall arc of the unit? • Where will the specific student learning goal be addressed? • How well do we understand the content essential to the student and educator learning goals? • How do the assessments appear to align with the goals?	Read relevant units and materials.	
Dig deeply into the unit, lessons, assessments with colleagues.	• How do the models for learning provided in the lessons help students to see/understand how to meet the targeted learning goal(s)? • If one completes the provided assessments, what evidence of student learning for the targeted learning goal(s) would be seen? • Can we complete the teacher and student assignments within each lesson? • What are potential student and teacher challenges and ways to address them? • If we were students, could we show the desired evidence of mastery of targeted learning goal(s) for the provided assessments with only the planned instruction in the unit/lessons?	Create a protocol to guide a discussion to address questions.	
Prioritize specific areas for further study.	• Which elements of the lessons require additional learning and support for students or teachers if we are going to achieve our goals? • What do we need to learn to help students who require tiered support or enrichment? • What do we need to learn to be responsive to our students who have a different cultural fluency than we do?	Explore student struggles with place value, properties of operations and/or decimals to accurately do long division using the algorithm.	

Source: **Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018).** *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

STUDY	Questions to address as you design learning agenda	Math goal learning agenda	Your learning agenda notes
Access expertise.	• Who has expertise in the areas we've identified, within or beyond our team? • What other sources of expertise can we tap? • What learning designs are appropriate for achieving our goals? • What perspectives might be missing as we think about where we gain expertise?	• Ask instructional math coach to review concepts of long division. • Ask a team member with expertise to present a successful lesson(s) using our instructional materials. • Watch four online videos that demonstrate use of place value, properties of operations and decimals with the algorithm for long division. • Investigate concept of growth mindset and implications for our work.	
Reflect on new knowledge.	• Did our learning challenge our understandings or assumptions? • How did our attitudes, assumptions, and aspirations shift as a result? • What new knowledge, skills, and behaviors do we have as a result of our learning?	• Journal individually on our growth mindset investigation. • Devote next team meeting to discussion on new learning and how it has shifted not only knowledge and skills, but also beliefs and aspirations. • Create short demo of powerful examples of how to long division using the algorithm.	
Assess new understanding.	• Do we feel prepared to implement new learning? • Do we feel prepared to differentiate for students based on varying needs and cultures? • How do we perform on student assessments related to the areas studied?	• Work through formative assessments throughout unit. • Take next unit test as a learning team and grade tests. • Create learning challenges for learning team colleagues.	

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

PRACTICE	Questions to address as you design learning agenda	Math goal learning agenda	Your learning agenda notes
Determine where new learning will be applied within unit and lessons and to support enrichment and remediation.	• What will it look like when we teach the unit or lesson with the new knowledge and practices we've gained? • What will we emphasize within the unit lessons to meet our student learning goals? • For those students who do not have prerequisite skills, how can scaffolds and supports help students master the targeted learning goal(s)? • For students who come into the unit already with mastery of the targeted learning goal(s), what enrichment adaptations can support deeper learning? • Are these options available within the instructional materials or do we need to supplement? • In what ways are our planned supports culturally responsive to the students who need them? • How will our shifts in beliefs and aspirations be evident?	Identify enrichment and remediation options within the unit and lessons, including any supplementation or adaptation needed.	
Rehearse modified lessons.	• Which content or lesson segments would we benefit from rehearsing? • What evidence will we collect to support our perspective on the success of the lesson? • How well do our lessons appear to work?	Co-teach two new lessons with learning team and coach at upcoming meeting.	
Refine lessons as necessary before implementation.	• What changes in our lessons seem necessary? • What improvements will we make to respond to the varying needs and cultures of our students?	Improve lessons after rehearsals.	

Source: Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

TOOLS

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

NOW… SET YOUR OWN LEARNING AGENDA USING THIS WORKSHEET

First, take some time to revisit the steps and questions for each step of the practice framework on this worksheet.

Next, write the student and educator learning goals in the worksheet below. You may use learning goals that you already have developed or are in process of developing. Or, you may use the example student and educator learning goals discussed in this tool.

Write the student SMART learning goal here:

Write the educator KASAB learning goal here:

AFTER YOU WRITE your learning goals, see p. 65. Identify your next actions in the third column on the practice learning agenda framework. This emphasis on your learning as educators is what makes this learning cycle unique. Do not overlook your opportunities to learn deeply as you plan your learning agenda. Finally, to assist your planning, the framework includes a fourth column in which you can note the week(s) during which you carry out and complete your learning agenda activities.

Source: Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

LEARNING AGENDA FRAMEWORK

REVIEW	Questions to address as you design learning agenda	Goal learning agenda [Insert activities for designing learning for chosen goal]	Time frame [Dates when you will complete actions on the agenda]
Scan entire unit and/or instructional materials; pay careful attention to the appropriate standards, objectives, lessons, assessments related to our student and educator learning goals.	• What is the overall arc of the unit? • Where will the specific student learning goal be addressed? • How well do we understand the content essential to the student learning goal? • How do the assessments appear to align with the goals?		
Dig deeply into the unit, lessons, assessments with colleagues.	• How do the models for learning provided in the lessons help students to see/ understand how to meet the targeted learning goal(s)? • If one completes the provided assessments, what evidence of student learning for the targeted learning goal(s) would be seen? • Can we complete the teacher and student assignments within each lesson? What are potential student and teacher challenges and ways to address them? • If we were students, could we show the desired evidence of mastery of targeted learning goal(s) for the provided assessments with only the planned instruction in the unit/lessons?		
Prioritize specific areas for further study.	• Which elements of the lessons require additional learning and support for students or teachers if we are going to achieve our goals? • What prerequisite skills are needed by students who do not have those skills to be able to engage in the learning of the unit? • What enrichment adaptations can support deeper learning?		

Source: Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

DESIGN A LEARNING AGENDA

STUDY	Questions to address	Goal learning agenda	Time frame
Access expertise.	• Who has expertise in the areas we've identified, within or beyond our team? • What other sources of expertise can we tap? • What learning designs are appropriate for achieving our goals?		
Reflect on new knowledge.	• Did our learning challenge our understandings or assumptions? • How did our attitudes, assumptions, and aspirations shift as a result? • What new knowledge, skills, and behaviors do we have as a result of our learning?		
Assess new understanding.	• Do we feel prepared to implement new learning? • How do we perform on student assessments related to the areas studied?		

PRACTICE	Questions to address	Goal learning agenda	Time frame
Determine where new learning will be applied within unit and lessons and to support enrichment and remediation.	• What will it look like when we teach the unit or lesson with the new knowledge and practices we've gained? • Are there any adaptations or supplementation needed to the unit lessons to meet our student learning goals? • For those students who do not have prerequisite skills, how can scaffolds and supports help students master the targeted learning goal(s)? • For students who come into the unit already with mastery of the targeted learning goal(s), what enrichment adaptations can support deeper learning? • How will our shifts in beliefs and aspirations be evident?		
Rehearse modified lessons.	• Which content or lesson segments would we benefit from rehearsing? • What do we learn as we practice? • How well do our lessons appear to work?		
Refine lessons as necessary before imple-mentation.	• What changes in our lessons or adaptations seem necessary? • What improvements will we make? • To what degree did the small group of students in the rehearsed lesson demonstrate evidence of learning related to the targeted learning goal?		

Source: Hirsh, S. & Crow, T. (2018). *Becoming a learning team* (2nd ed.). Oxford, OH: Learning Forward.

UPDATES

SUPPORT FOR COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

The Student Success Learning Network, a collaboration of 15 school districts facilitated by Learning Forward, focuses on supporting students in college and career readiness. Here are some of the advantages for school systems collaborating through a continuous improvement process.

- Accountability to the process and work
- Thought partnership to unpack the dilemma
- Generating ideas together
- Hearing what worked
- Safe environment to share what was tried
- Role-alike connections
- New learning

Learn more about the Student Success Learning Network

p. **69**

UPDATES

New editor joins staff of *The Learning Professional*

Suzanne Bouffard has joined Learning Forward as associate director of publications. Her primary responsibility will be to serve as the editor of *The Learning Professional*.

Bouffard has written about education and child development

Suzanne Bouffard

for *The New York Times, The Atlantic, The Daily Beast, U.S. News and World Report, Parents,* and *The Harvard Education Letter.*

Her most recent book is *The Most Important Year: Pre-Kindergarten and the Future of Our Children* (Avery, 2017). Her first book, *Ready, Willing, and Able* (with Mandy Savitz-Romer, Harvard Education Press, 2012) covered challenges and strategies for first generation college-bound youth.

Bouffard has a Ph.D. in developmental psychology from Duke University and a B.A. from Wesleyan University. She was a writer and researcher at the Harvard Graduate School of Education for 10 years.

TITLE IIA FUNDING REMAINS IN BUDGET PROPOSALS

The House Appropriations Subcommittee approved a funding bill with level funding for Title IIA for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) for fiscal year 2019, just a few months after Congress passed a budget for fiscal year 2018 with $2.1 billion in support of Title II.

As the fiscal year 2019 budget process continues, full funding for the program remains in place in the proposed budget. The Senate Appropriations Subcommittee recently approved the fiscal year 2019 Labor, Health and Human Services, Education bill with the same level of funding.

Learning Forward is proud that the advocacy work of members is achieving its goals, and we will continue to amplify the need for this critical funding for professional learning throughout the year.

As part of this process, a group of advocacy insiders committed to building their capacity to advocate effectively at all levels — called the

A-Team — is engaging in a series of calls to hear the latest updates on U.S. federal policy.

WE NEED YOUR EVIDENCE

How do Title IIA funds help?

Learning Forward is asking all members and allies to respond to a brief survey on the learning that Title II funds in local contexts. Members who responded last year are also invited to contribute.

Many of the respondents last year didn't share the outcomes of the work funded by Title II, and Learning Forward needs a robust bank of evidence documenting the importance of Title II investments across the U.S.

Fill out the survey at **www. surveymonkey.com/r/PNSDGFM** and encourage your peers to do the same.

LEARN MORE

Become a member of the A-Team. Sign up at **www.learningforward.org/get-involved/advocacy/advocacy-sign-up.**

See a statement from Learning Forward Executive Director Stephanie Hirsh at **www. learningforward.org/who-we-are/announcements.**

Introducing district memberships

Learning Forward has a new district membership option to encourage systemwide learning. Districts sign up every school in their district to ensure alignment and access across buildings.

The district membership underscores Learning Forward's belief in the importance of getting every educator on board.

District memberships include access to Learning Forward resources and tools; discounts on books, online courses, and conferences; a library of Learning Forward books; complimentary online courses; and private consultations with experts.

For more information, call **800-727-7288** or visit **www.learningforward.org/ district-memberships**.

NETWORK CONNECTS DISTRICTS FOCUSED ON COLLEGE AND CAREER READINESS

The Student Success Learning Network, a collaboration of 15 school districts facilitated by Learning Forward, is focused on supporting students in college and career readiness. Participating districts learn strategies and tactics to effect change on a chosen readiness indicator.

After an initial planning session in September 2017 and through a series of virtual learning and individual system coaching sessions in the fall, teams began to examine their own systems to find the root causes of student learning problems. The network's goal is to achieve improvement both overall and in subgroups in select college and career readiness indicators by 2020 through a continuous improvement process.

The network met at Learning Forward's 2017 Annual Conference in Orlando, Florida, last December, where participants developed testable hypotheses and identified specific measures to track the process and outcomes of a plan-do-study-act rapid improvement cycle.

In mid-May, district teams met in Fort Worth, Texas, to share their progress. They confirmed the value of their collaboration and dedication to address specific student learning challenges within each district through a continuous improvement process.

Network members report and consistently agree that what they learn from the network impacts their practice. The system-to-system accountability and collegial interactions result in collaboratively unpacking dilemmas, generating ideas and possible next steps to resolve similar challenges.

Teams are also investing significant time working within their district team to engage in deep discussions that move the work forward. Both during network sessions and when they return to their districts, teams develop action and implementation plans and provide thought partnership to one another.

Individual and system-to-system interactions will continue through the summer.

Learn more about the Student Success Learning Network at **www. learningforward.org/learning- opportunities/student-success- learning-network.**

2019 THEMES FOR *THE LEARNING PROFESSIONAL*

Learning Forward is seeking manuscripts on the following themes for next year's issues of *The Learning Professional*. Find complete descriptions online at **www. learningforward.org/publications/ jsd/upcoming-themes.**

February 2019
TRANSITIONS AND TURNING POINTS: How professional learning can bolster teaching and learning during student, teacher, leader, and policy transitions.

April 2019
SUPPORTING ENGLISH LEARNERS: Professional learning strategies that help general educators support English learners.

June 2019
LEARNING BETTER BY LEARNING TOGETHER: The role educator and administrator networks play in school improvement and student learning.

August 2019
PERSONALIZED LEARNING: The ways professional learning can support teachers' skills in personalized learning.

October 2019
RESILIENT LEADERS FOR THRIVING SCHOOLS: Supporting school leaders as they address challenges such as competing priorities, burnout, and stress.

December 2019
DEMYSTIFYING COACHING: How to make coaching as accessible and effective as it can be.

ABSTRACTS

FOCUS
WHAT WILL YOU LEARN THIS SUMMER?

The DNA of development:
A new model for school change focuses on adult learning.
By Eleanor Drago-Severson and Jessica Blum-DeStefano

Caring for adults' internal development is one of the most powerful drivers of educational change because when the adults in schools have the personal and organizational support to grow, they can bring their best selves to their students, families, and peers. A new model for developing educator capacity highlights five elements that enhance how we understand, feel about, talk to, and collaborate with one another.

Pivotal moments in teaching:
Zoom in on specific points to create meaningful learning.
By Bradley A. Ermeling

One of the biggest challenges with collaborative planning is balancing the level of detail and scope of content that can be discussed meaningfully in a limited amount of time. A team of high school English teachers in Las Vegas, Nevada, recently began using pivotal teaching segments to focus their collaborative planning meetings and improve student learning. Pivotal segments are those anticipated moments or specific episodes within a lesson where teachers expect students to experience a key learning opportunity central to the lesson goal.

Learn from (simulated) experience:
Computer simulations are a safe way to practice making tough decisions.
By Ken Spero

Finding a more efficient way to help current and aspiring K-12 leaders is crucial, especially for low-achieving, high-poverty schools that face high turnover rates and a shortage of experienced leaders. School leaders lack the ongoing support and development required to maintain and foster sustained commitment. Computer simulations can provide essential practice at making a wide range of decisions facing education leaders, filling gaps in experience with focused, relevant, virtual on-the-job training.

Motivation in motion:
Learning walks benefit teachers and students in a dual-language primary school.
By Margery Ginsberg, Olimpia Bahena, Jessica Kertz, and Iysha Jones

Given the rise in students who speak a language other than English at home and dwindling resources for professional learning in urban public schools, the need for schools to develop in-house systems for teachers to learn continuously from one another is great. This is a particular priority for dual-language schools, given the limited number of fully certified dual-language teachers and the importance of teaching language goals along with content knowledge goals. At Talcott Fine Arts and Museum Academy in Chicago, Illinois, teachers engage in learning walks that encourage instructional improvement conversations focused on intrinsic motivation as the foundation for language learning and academic success.

Growing opportunities:
Collaboration nurtures and supports early learning educators.
By Kaytie Brissenden-Smith, Ana Moreno, Lisa Peloquin, Judy Radiloff, and Jenna Wachtel

How can teachers move from working in isolation within ineffective systems to building thriving, collaborative teaching environments in which they are supported and inspired to work with their colleagues in communities focused on mutual professional growth? The real-life experiences of three communities of early learning professionals demonstrate how educators can create and sustain a culture of continuous professional growth and collaboration that results in access to high-quality education for every student.

IDEAS

Learning to lead:
Districts collaborate to strengthen principal practices.
By Kay Psencik and Frederick Brown

Teachers who learn and work collaboratively need school leaders who can model learning, share leadership for learning, and facilitate cycles of continuous improvement to strengthen teaching and learning. More than instructional leaders, they need learning leaders. Across the country, district leaders are convening principals in professional learning communities to help them develop as learning leaders. These diverse communities share common elements of support focused on supporting and sustaining principals. *This article is sponsored by The Wallace Foundation.*

Process of discovery:
Arizona district's principals experience professional and personal growth as a community of learners.
By Allison Garland

Littleton Elementary School District #65 in Avondale, Arizona, participated in Learning Leaders for Learning Schools, a project whose primary goal is to increase the effectiveness of principals to lead high-achieving schools by building communities of learners. The three-year process is grounded in Learning Forward's Standards for Professional Learning. Through its work with the project, the district's school leadership community developed a deeper understanding of change and the tools necessary for implementation.

VOICES

CALL TO ACTION
Let's embrace what high-quality curriculum can do for all students.
By Stephanie Hirsh

Learning Forward's pivot to high-quality curriculum and team-based professional learning is a direct effort to address teachers' need for guidance.

BEING FORWARD
Louisiana is taking the lead in mentoring new teachers.
By Tom Manning

The Louisiana Department of Education is changing the way it prepares teachers by identifying and supporting mentor teachers in every parish in the state to work with new and aspiring teachers participating in a yearlong residency. Learning Forward is providing that mentor teacher support.

WHAT I'VE LEARNED
Trust-based observations fuel teacher growth.
By Craig Randall

The most powerful tool to improve teaching and learning is the observation process. The trust-based observation is a focused, manageable, and nonevaluative process that emphasizes teacher reflection and growth. At the heart of this approach is building trusting relationships with teachers so they feel safe taking risks in their practice.

COMMUNITY PERSPECTIVE
Circles of gratitude create time and space for learning.
By Audrey Hobbs-Johnson

With their collective focus on student and educator outcomes, this year's Learning Forward Foundation awardees provide powerful examples of professional learning practices that reflect a strong research foundation and will take us from research to practice with models that can provide authentic impact stories.

RESEARCH

RESEARCH REVIEW
The importance of understanding student misconceptions.
By Elizabeth Foster

In a new study, researchers focus on two areas of teacher knowledge that have been understudied: how attuned teachers are to students' mastery levels in the subject they teach, and how well they recognize and understand students' misconceptions about the content they are learning.

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.**

Our summer reading suggestions

For many of us, summer is a great time to take a breath and catch up on our professional learning goals. We asked Learning Forward members, staff, and trustees to share their recommendations for summer reading and listening. Below are some of the books and podcasts we are diving into. Tell us what you think, and add your recommendations on social media.

Drive (audiobook)
by Daniel Pink
— Eric Brooks, senior consultant, Learning Forward

The High-Potential Leader
by Ram Charan with Geri Willigan
— Nikki Mouton, Learning Forward Academy Class of 2017, deputy chief academic officer, Dallas Independent School District, Texas

MindShift (podcast)
— Elizabeth Foster, associate director for standards, research, and strategy, Learning Forward

What Were You Thinking (podcast)
— Suzanne Bouffard, associate director of publications, Learning Forward

The Innovator's Mindset
by George Couros
— Chris Anderson, director of curriculum, instruction and assessment, Sunnyside School District, Washington

The Role of the Father in Child Development
edited by Michael E. Lamb
— Matt Rodriguez, senior web developer, Learning Forward

The Cult of Pedagogy (podcast)
— DeNelle West, former director of professional development, Research for Better Teaching

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THROUGH THE LENS

OF LEARNING FORWARD'S STANDARDS FOR PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

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

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

Learning Communities

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

Leadership

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

Resources

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

Data

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

Learning Designs

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

Implementation

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

Outcomes

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

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

STANDARD	IN ACTION	TO CONSIDER
LEARNING COMMUNITIES	Educators in the article "Growing opportunities: Collaboration nurtures and supports early learning educators" were eager to bring their best practices forward to help students but were new to collaboration (p. 42).	1. When teacher teams first begin to collaborate, what are critical resources and supports to set them up for success? 2. How do mindsets and cultures change once teachers are supported well in collaborating toward common goals?
LEADERSHIP	Principal learning communities offer school leaders the opportunity to collaborate around common problems of practice and demonstrate a district's commitment to developing strong leaders. See "Learning to lead: Districts collaborate to strengthen principal practices" (p. 48).	1. Why is supporting school and system leader learning as critical as supporting teacher learning? 2. Who in a district bears the responsibility for articulating clear expectations for principals, offering principals meaningful feedback, and supporting ongoing opportunities for growth?
LEARNING DESIGNS	The authors of "The DNA of development: A new model for school change focuses on adult learning" discuss why it is so important to focus explicitly on adult learning and why that makes the difference for school improvement. Their model for developing educator capacity looks at five critical elements (p. 22).	1. What role can paying attention to educators' well-being contribute to how to design and support ongoing professional learning? 2. How should learning leaders keep themselves up to date when it comes to understanding and applying learning theories, research, and models?

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

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